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**History**

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## Review of Russia's Greatest Enemy? Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions, by Charlotte Alston.

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Alston, Charlotte. *Russia's Greatest Enemy? Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions*. International Library of Twentieth Century History, 9. New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. viii + 278 pp. \$74.95. ISBN 1-84511-261-X.

This succinct biography of journalist Harold Williams (1876-1928) pays special attention to his "role as an interpreter of Russia to the British, and of the British to Russia" (p. 7). While Charlotte Alston traces her subject's life chronologically, each of her five chapters concentrates on a particular aspect of his career. Born in New Zealand, Williams embarked for Europe in 1900 to study philology at the University of Berlin. He began dabbling in journalism to pay the bills; it became his life's work, capped by his position as foreign editor at *The Times* in the 1920s. Williams the journalist was less concerned with reporting the facts than with expressing the ideas that meant most to him. Williams's interest in Russia can be traced to an early fascination with Tolstoyan ideas. Settling in Stuttgart as a Russian correspondent for *The Times* in 1903, he soon became the St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*. Originally something of a Christian Socialist, Williams eventually identified with the political beliefs of Russian liberals. His sympathies were reinforced by his relationship with Ariadna Tyrkova, who was closely tied to the Kadets. They remained a couple until the end of his life, although it is uncertain whether they ever formally wed. Williams also collaborated with other Englishmen who wanted to build bridges between their country and Russia's reformers. This group included Bernard Pares, Maurice Baring, and Robert Seton-Watson. Williams wrote several articles for Pares's *Russian Review*. Later, while declining a chair that Pares and Seton-Watson offered him at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, he assisted them in editing the newly launched *Slavonic Review*.

Williams's greatest influence as a journalist developed during his coverage of Russia between 1914 and 1920, when his articles appeared in several British and U.S. newspapers. He extolled the Russian effort in the Great War and, at the same time, propagandized Britain's contributions among the Russian public. Williams applauded the February Revolution, as it appeared to represent the triumph of the constitutional idea. Although increasingly skeptical of the Provisional Government, he condemned the Bolshevik Revolution and, after temporarily leaving Russia in March 1918, became an advocate of armed intervention against the Reds. Returning a year later, he served as the *Times*' correspondent to General Denikin. Some of his subsequent reporting made him look like a White partisan. ("Russia's greatest enemy" is the appellation conferred on him by Maxim Litvinov.) Returning to England in 1920, Williams discovered that his anti-Bolshevik stance had caused his reputation to suffer in a country that had grown tired of armed conflict. Nevertheless, Williams maintained his involvement with Russia through the Russian Refugees Relief Association and by making his house a gathering place for Russian émigrés. He continued propounding an anti-Bolshevik line in his articles, criticizing, for example, the Treaty of Rapallo and Ramsay MacDonald's recognition of Soviet Russia in 1924. Even his fervent support of the Locarno treaties seems to have been prompted in part by his notion that they would counterbalance the Bolshevik threat.

The author hopes to rescue Williams from the obscurity into which he has fallen and which she attributes both to the moderation of his views and to his personal modesty. Her book is crisply written and impressively researched, drawing on manuscript sources from three continents. The detail of the treatment occasionally betrays its origins as a doctoral dissertation, but, with the text coming in under two hundred pages, the work does not wear out its welcome. In addition, the reader is treated to generous helpings of Williams's prose, although Alston refrains from assessing its literary quality. It may not be possible to derive any more than a general sense of Williams's ultimate influence in shaping official and popular attitudes toward the new Soviet state, but Alston achieves her aim of giving a distinguished career its due. Specialists in Soviet history and journalism will want to pay heed.

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