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**Charlotte Alston.** *Russia's Greatest Enemy? Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions.* London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. 278 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84511-261-5.

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**Partisan Journalism at Its Peak: Harold Williams on Early Twentieth-Century Russia**

The title of Charlotte Alston's book is catchy but does not reflect its content. Alston has written a biography of a man who went from up-country minister in 1890s New Zealand to *Times* foreign editor in 1920s London. She has not only rescued Harold Williams from obscurity but has profiled many of his colleagues, the famous and forgotten. The information on the latter group and a bibliography rich in manuscript sources, newspaper archives, and Williams's letters make the volume valuable for journalism researchers. It does not always serve other historians as well, failing, for example, to situate Williams in his British milieu after 1918 as effectively as in his Russian one before.

Alston's Williams is an anomaly. Like many Victorian journalists, he moved to journalism from another arena and then anguished about the move for years. Born in 1876 in a British Empire at its apogee, Williams was also typical in deciding to relocate to England. But unlike many whose journalistic jobs took them back and forth across the seas, Williams never went home to New Zealand. He was unusual in other ways. He was a linguist (mastering over fifty languages and dialects) who earned a doctorate in philology at a German university and a reporter, the "essence" of whose "journalism was argument" (p. 198).

How this son of the Southern Cross became a major foe of Bolshevism takes up much of a text that combines narrative and analysis, sometimes by sacrificing chronology. The first chapter tracks the youth who followed his father into the Methodist ministry while captivated by the ideas of Russian author Leo Tolstoy–ideas that included pacifism and vegetarianism. Appointed to a big but intellectually limited and physically isolated circuit, Williams found friends among Christian Socialists whom he helped to produce a limited-circulation newspaper. In 1900, overwhelmed by duties and unsure of his calling, he departed for Europe to study languages.

After a brief sojourn in London, Williams settled in Germany. The chapter titled "Journalism, 1900-1914" traces his foreign correspondence when he was least polemical. Struggling to complete his dissertation, he survived by freelancing for New Zealand newspapers, Berlin's *German Times*, and an "obscure women's magazine" (p. 38). By 1903 he was in Stuttgart translat-

ing and editing information from Russian publications for the London *Times*. There he met his wife, Ariadna Tyrkova, a leader in the Kadets who emerges as a pivotal figure in the book. According to Alston, Tyrkova convinced him that journalism, about which he was still ambivalent, was worthwhile if done for a good cause.

When the *Times* closed the Stuttgart office, the *Manchester Guardian* recruited Williams. Because of his connections through Tyrkova to Russian liberal and literary circles, he was posted to St. Petersburg. There he joined more senior men, among them E. J. Dillon and Henry Nevinson, just as the 1905 Revolution occurred. Williams provided dispatches about Bloody Sunday, but the *Guardian* preferred his descriptions of reform/revolutionary movements. Concurrently, he had a professional crisis when Tolstoy questioned the merits of a press career. But Williams stayed with journalism. From 1905 to 1908, freelancing for the *Guardian* from his Russian base, he discussed subjects from the Duma to eastern Europe.

In 1908 Williams joined the *Morning Post* as St. Petersburg correspondent. The *Post* wanted short factual summaries, not his *Guardian* essays, but shared his enthusiasm for closer links between Britain and Russia after their 1907 rapprochement. Williams was aware that an alliance with despotism had its downside, so he was no advocate for tsarist governance. His critiques of official policy and Tyrkova's activities may have prompted a 1911 police raid of their apartment. Shortly after, the *Post* sent him to Constantinople where he spotlighted the Young Turks. A year later he resigned from the paper and freelanced for British and Russian gazettes until the *Daily Chronicle* in 1914 made him its St. Petersburg representative. This position was a major opportunity because Williams's byline was often on the front page, the *Chronicle* had a syndicate deal with the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Times*, and he was ideally located for gathering World War I news.

Subsequent to this examination of Williams's journalism, Alston shifts gears, devoting two chapters to his interest in Anglo-Russia relations from 1907 to 1921. Her justification for this backward/forward motion is her aim to show how Williams and his associates were instrumental in reframing British public opinion about Russia. Some material belongs in the prior chapter, such as Williams' co-editing of the *Russian Review* (1912-14) and collaborating with novelist H. G. Wells and scholar Bernard Pares to promote constitutional monarchy in Russia. These activities account for Williams's wartime behavior. Although he covered the conflict for the *Chronicle*, his priority was Anglo-Russian "mutual relations, rather than objective reporting" (p. 96). He assisted the Anglo-Russian bureau, a "British propaganda organization" in St. Petersburg (p. 99) by persuading Russian editors to print pro-British prose in their papers (1916-17). By 1917 he was acting as liaison between the British ambassador and the Kadets.

Just as telegraphy was spreading the British message to the Russian provincial press, the March 1917 revolution erupted. Williams thereafter abandoned any semblance of impartiality. He initially endorsed the departure of Nicholas II, then denounced the Bolsheviks. After their coup in late 1917, he returned to England in March 1918. In London he was the spokesperson for Russian Ã©migrÃ©s. He preached the faith in the *Telegraph*, Robert Seton-Watson's *New Europe*, and the *New York Times* in addition to the *Chronicle*. A change of its editors resulted in his columns being labeled personal opinion and his assignment first to Geneva, where he went briefly, and then to Vienna, where he did not go. Instead, he left the paper. Thereafter, he vilified the Bolsheviks in magazines and reviews before covering, for the *Chronicle* and the London *Times*, the Whites in the Russian civil war. Alston explains how his sympathy for them discredited him as a journalist. Recalled from the front in 1920, he spent that year and the first half of 1921 scribbling for magazines and co-authoring a novel with Tyrkova.

In summer 1921 the *Times* hired him as a leader-writer, one of several penning its editorials. Within a year he was foreign editor, which he remained until he died in 1928. Alston quotes one of his letters that is an enlightening abstract of a journalist's daily routine and singles out correspondents with whom he worked. She suggests that they and Williams had a major role in setting policy, but this thesis seems problematic given that Geoffrey Dawson was at the paper's helm. Alston's evidence does indicate that Williams played a key part in the tone of submissions by convincing his men to write with the lighter touch readers wanted. Although he sought balance in most overseas stories, he maintained close ties with the Russian community in London and co-edited the *Slavonic Review*. By 1925 he had a new cause, supporting the Locarno arrangements. After his death, the *Times* named no foreign editor. Apparently he was irreplaceable, an extraordinary testimonial in the competitive world of the mass press.

Alston's investigation and others, such as Angela V. John's *War, Journalism and the Shaping of the Twentieth*

*Century* (2006), confirm that the universe of British journalism has many people who deserve scholarly memorials.

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