
NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

STUART RAMSAY TOMPKINS, 1886–1977

Dr. Stuart Ramsay Tompkins, a native of Ontario, Canada, died on October 11, 1977. He was a key member of the Department of History at the University of Oklahoma from 1932 until 1956. His higher education reflects the breadth of interest that marked his academic career: at the University of Toronto he majored in classical studies; at the University of Alberta he specialized in education; and he received his doctorate in history from the University of Chicago in 1931.

For a quiet man he led an eventful life. During the First World War he saw front-line action for three years, including the famous Canadian stand at Vimy Ridge. His interest in Russia was stimulated by a term of service in Vladivostok (1918–19) and a natural aptitude for foreign languages. His training in Alberta resulted in his appointment as superintendent of schools for the Yukon Territory (1924–28) where he developed an interest in Alaska.

Stuart Tompkins's range of historical interests was wide indeed. It included the medieval plow, the Varangians in Russian history, Russian and American Alaska, Sergei Witte's financial policy, and the xenophobic Russian Biblical Society.

Professor Tompkins's textbook, *Russia Through the Ages* (1940), and his monographs on Russian intellectual life represented an effort to emphasize the element of continuity in Russian civilization, so badly distorted in the Western mind by the revolutions of 1917. Statist autocracy, and revolutionary reaction to it, were his chief focuses of attention. In *The Russian Mind* (1953) he traced the development of Russian intellectual life in order to explain differences of outlook and approach—of value priorities—from those accepted in the West. He clearly delineated fundamental values from the ephemeral as the Russian mind reacted to Western influences. In *The Russian Intelligentsia* (1957) he examined the radical *raznochintsy* as an aspect of his broad propositions. He saw the *raznochintsy* as truly Russian in their promotion of elitist organization and rule and in their demand for the utmost conformity to dogmatic ideas and policies while at the same time professing the broadest ideals encompassed in the concept of civil liberties. His *Triumph of Bolshevism* (1967) concentrated on the victorious segment of the extremist intelligentsia. Tompkins considered them—like their earlier and contemporary *narodnik* activist counterparts—a desperate faction warring against tsarism and for an ideal society in an atmosphere of chronic crisis. In this perspective they developed elitist, tightly controlled, conspiratorial organizations and a fundamental current of amorality in their political character and operations. Thus, Lenin's single-minded purpose to establish a Communist dictatorship of the proletariat, together with the absence of a strong, moderate tradition of compromise in the Russian political scene, facilitated the realization of his goals.

Promyshlennik and Sourdough, Professor Tompkins's lively study of the Russian and American frontier in Alaska, was basically an extension of his study of the expansion of Russia across Eurasia. In the book he offered vivid portraits of characters familiar to the American frontier—hard drinking, adventurous, aggressive types who opened the far Northwest for human exploitation and settlement, but who had a minimum of regard for the interests of the aborigines.

An introspective, gentle, studious scholar with a philosophical bent, we owe Stuart Tompkins something of a debt as a pioneer in English-language studies of the broad expanse of Russian life and thought.

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