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South West Africa and the United Nations: An International Mandate in Dispute by
Solomon Slonim

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historian who expects to do archival work should own and can, for not the least of its attractive features is its modest price. West Africanists may prefer to own a mini-edition which was especially spun off for another series,³ but in the long run the present volume seems of better value, and perhaps in time it will be updated.⁴

If my assessment of this compilation seems uncharacteristically enthusiastic, it is because I have had the opportunity to put it to practical use and I have appreciated the labor saved and the insights gained. What better measure of the value and success of a work of this type can there be?

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Editor's Note: This work, originally scheduled for review in 1971, was one of several listed in volume VII, number 3 (1974) of the *International Journal of African Historical Studies* as having been assigned to a scholar who then failed either to produce a comment or return the book. Mr. Henige is not the person who originally reneged on his obligation to Oxford University Press and this journal.

SOUTH WEST AFRICA AND THE UNITED NATIONS: AN INTERNATIONAL MANDATE IN DISPUTE. By Solomon Slonim. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1973. Pp. xix, 409. \$13.50.

Few issues have taxed the United Nations longer than the question of South Africa's administration of South West Africa (or Namibia, the name given the territory by the General Assembly in 1968). As early as 1946 the General Assembly was asked to agree to a proposal of the Union government that South Africa incorporate the territory, which it had administered as a League of Nations Class C Mandate since 1920. The General Assembly refused, and more than a quarter century later the question of the territory's ultimate status (and even current status) is still in question. Moreover, while both the General Assembly and recently the Security Council have considered the case, the International Court of Justice has given the issue by far the most attention; to 1973 the international court has been asked to issue pronouncements on

³Noel Matthews, *Materials for West African History in the Archives of the United Kingdom*, Guide to Materials for West African History No. 5 (London, 1973).

⁴In the meantime, one can consult the annual *List of Accessions to Repositories* issued by the Historical Manuscripts Commission in London.

South West Africa no less than six times. The record of the "dispute" cited in the title of the present work is thus both long and, in the nature of legal argument and opinion, involved and technical, and until now it has been difficult to obtain a satisfactory picture of the whole of it. This Solomon Slonim has provided.

Slonim's approach is admirably direct and clear. There is no problem of conceptual apparatus, statistical technique, or legal language. The work is divided into five parts which follow the dispute chronologically through successive stages—the trusteeship struggle, attempts to implement the advisory opinion of 1950, efforts to obtain a binding court judgment, and so on—to the most recent decisions of the United Nations to revoke the mandate. Six appendices set forth the most important legal documents, and there is a lengthy bibliography. Slonim's sources are in almost all cases published materials, and the most important of these are official publications of the United Nations, especially reports of the International Court of Justice. Indeed, if there is a weakness in this account it is that Slonim seldom ventures behind the recorded public and official statements and submissions of the several parties to this dispute. This arena is consistently limited to the organs of the United Nations in their open, public, and recorded activities.

There is little editorializing in the work, which is remarkable in a contemporary treatise dealing with this part of the world. Slonim allows the record to speak for itself, especially in the early parts of the book. In truth, some of this early discussion has a musty quality to it, so removed from the present day are many of the issues with which it is concerned. This is compensated for in the second half of the book. Here the issues are more current and Slonim allows himself greater editorial freedom. A splendid concluding chapter provides both a compelling summary of the whole and also some hard-headed, intelligent observations on the strategies that have been followed by South Africa's adversaries in this matter.

These observations are in the main critical, although not with the purpose of defending South Africa's interests but from the standpoint of the need to protect the integrity of the United Nations and the force of international law. In particular he is critical of moves in the United Nations since 1966 to terminate the mandate unilaterally and eject South Africa from South West Africa, finding them hollow and therefore destructive of the credibility of the United Nations. For while superficially the record of United Nations actions on South West Africa since 1946 exhibits an escalation of opposition to South Africa's continued administration of the territory, the political realities that underlie these steps have changed little. In particular, neither Great Britain nor the United States has been prepared to use force to dislodge South Africa from South West Africa, yet in the absence of this willingness, the "near unanimity with which the Assembly called for South African

withdrawal” (p. 319) has practically meant nothing. At the moment of the court’s 1966 judgment it seemed that a “binding” decision regarding South West Africa might be at hand. In the event, the court instead withdrew from the South West Africa scene. Slonim’s lengthy account of this critical decision and the factors that lay behind it is easily the most interesting and valuable section of the total work.

Slonim thus concludes that far from “getting somewhere” on the question of South West Africa, the United Nations has in fact reached a “dead end” (p. 328). If the U.N. is to escape from this dead end, Slonim suggests that it will be over the road of negotiations with South Africa, “real diplomacy—which up to now has been given short shrift in the South West Africa case” (p. 364).

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