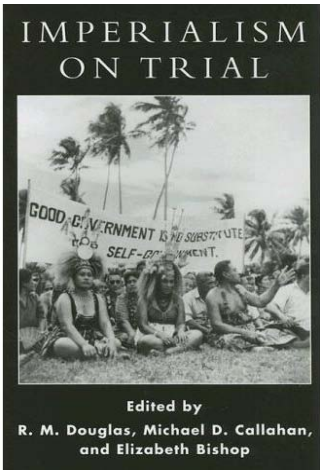

Title: Imperialism on Trial: International Oversight of Colonial Rule in Historical Perspective

Author: (Eds.) R.M. Douglas, Michael D. Callahan and Elizabeth Bishop

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This book consists of a collection of seven papers which discuss the mandates and the trusteeship systems as they emerged and developed under the League of Nations and the United Nations. The analysis focuses on various themes, including: international status of the selected case studies of the mandates and trusteeships and their administration by the mandatory power. The analysis also elaborates upon the various political debates that sprang up vis-à-vis the prevailing imperialist doctrine of the time and how could such doctrine be reconciled with the developments which took place between the two World Wars and their aftermath.

Michael Callahan's chapter entitled "'Mandated Territories Are Not Colonies': Britain, France and Africa in the 1930s" argues that the League of Nations mandates system fused two of the predominant global forces of the 20th century: imperialism and Wilsonian internationalism. The League of Nations internationalized and institutionalized the principle of "trusteeship" and held Britain and France to their pledge to comply not only with the terms of the mandate agreements, but to assume the moral responsibilities of "a sacred trust of civilization." The latter words had both meaning and power in the 1930s particularly for those who were determined to preserve the postwar peace and considered themselves the guardians of the western conceptions of the rule of law and liberal democracy. Further, many believed that the ultimate success of the latter principles depended on an informed public opinion and good faith efforts to carry out those obligations. In the view of Callahan, for those who were in positions of responsibility and leadership in Britain and France, the fate of "civilization" was tied with the ideal of the "sacred trust."

In their chapter titled "A Question of Trust: The Government of India, the League of Nations, and Mohandas Gandhi," Kevin Grant and Lisa Trivedi discuss how India was an anomaly among the 42 founding members of the League of Nations in 1919. It was the only member that was neither an independent sovereign state, nor a dominion within the British Empire. Although India's power in the League was limited by British imperial interests, its membership constituted Britain's public commitment to India's eventual self-governance and to its dominion status within the Empire. Mohandas Gandhi did not perceive India's membership in the League as a

significant step in the direction of self-government. Like the Khilafat movement in India, Gandhi opposed the redistribution of the Ottoman Empire's Arabian territories to western powers as this undermined the Caliph. Gandhi saw the League as a tool of capitalists and of Christian expansionism. This notwithstanding, Gandhi took up the same ethical language with which the League had justified the mandates system as a "trusteeship" but giving it his touch. Gandhi advocated trusteeship as a national project of economic and social reform, breaking from the "sacred trust" of one nation over another. In rejecting the trusteeship offered by the League, Gandhi criticized the violence and materialism of the West and condemned the failure of the West to support the self-determination of foreign, predominantly non-Christian peoples. Although Gandhi devoted little time to the League after the mid-1920s, he subsequently developed his theory of trusteeship into an ethic of self-liberation for other colonial nations subjugated by imperial or mandatory powers. This was not an ethic premised upon the tutoring of colonial wards for self-government, but rather upon creating a national community through interdependence. Indeed, soon after India's independence, Gandhi expressed his hope that trusteeship would prove to be 'a gift from India to the world.'

In her chapter "Economic Imperialism in the Palestine Mandate," Elizabeth Bishop focuses upon the economic consequences of the establishment of the Palestine mandate. She seeks to raise seminal questions about the material basis for regional and nation-state identities. Bishop seeks to demonstrate that the creation of the Palestine mandate, involving as it did the imposition of a series of artificial political boundaries, had deeply disruptive economic consequences for an area that prior to the Great War was already fully integrated into a wider regional network of production, distribution and exchange. Mandatory power disenfranchised Palestinians economically, compromising the potential for political independence that was the League of Nations' ultimate goal for the territory. Whatever benefits may have flowed from the international oversight gained by the achievement of mandatory status were outweighed by the mandate's responsibility for economic dislocation.

Haruo Tohmatsu's chapter "Japan's Retention of the South Seas Mandate, 1922-1947" examines the mandates administered by Japan, known as the South Seas Mandated Territory – SSM. From the legal perspective, the SSM case illuminated three major unresolved issues in the mandate system: (1) the relation between League membership and qualification to act as a mandatory power; (2) the question of sovereignty over the mandated territories; and (3) the non-militarization of the mandated territories. These difficulties arose when Japan announced its withdrawal from the League but remained determined to retain the mandate. As to the first point, it was generally acknowledged that a mandatory did not need to be a League member. Precedent existed to the effect that the League had once offered a mandate for Armenia to the United States. As to the second point, legal authorities could not reach a unanimous conclusion as regards the location of sovereignty over the mandated territory. The favored response was that sovereignty lay with the Principal Allied and Associated Powers as it accommodated the needs of all parties concerned. As to the third point, among the merits and defects that the SSM case revealed, the most noteworthy was the restriction of military use of the mandated territories. Internationally accepted administration of the territories, coupled with the principle of demilitarization, was intended to reduce sources of tension between the Powers. The SSM did not in the end live up to this standard, becoming an object of strategic calculations between the US and Japan on the one hand, and Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Germany, on the other.

In "Black Powerlessness in a Liberal Era: The NAACP, Anti-Colonialism, and the United Nations Organization, 1942-1945," Daniel W. Aldridge III focuses on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) wartime efforts to convince two liberal Democratic administrations to take a firmer stand against colonialism which had produced meagre results. Serving as a consulting organization at the United Nations Conference on International Organization, the NAACP had achieved a certain degree of mainstream legitimacy. However, the NAACP remained powerless to exercise a decisive influence on American actions in San Francisco. Aldridge III does not share the view that black voting power could have induced American political leaders to heed the NAACP's advice on colonial issues. African Americans in the 1940s were growing in importance as a political interest group, but the Republican Party generally ignored

them. The Democratic Party was still dependent upon a powerful southern wing, and their perspective on foreign relations had not yet attained mainstream credibility. Hence, blacks could make little headway. US government leaders during the war had to keep together a sometimes contentious alliance with the world's leading colonial states. Washington's "appeasement" of western European colonial powers, nevertheless, was not consistent with its own anti-colonial heritage and alienated nationalists from developing countries in a way that did not serve the United States' long-term interests. In that sense, NAACP leaders had more vision and foresight than many US foreign policy-makers.

Gordon W. Morrell's chapter "A Higher Stage of Imperialism? The Big Three, the UN Trusteeship Council, and the Early Cold War" discusses the UN trusteeship system which, like its League of Nations predecessor, was an implied critique of imperialism that sought to provide an alternative framework within which the strong states might yet exercise their responsibilities toward the weak. It was a voluntary system rooted in international law and created by international cooperation. Like the mandates system, the trusteeship model recognized the difference between colonies and trust territories and obliged that administering authorities allow the international community some supervisory role. Those states still charged with the duties of a mandatory power chose to participate in another "great experiment" and worked to create a structure they hoped would improve upon the record of the League. In less than two decades, the Trusteeship Council would see its workload almost eliminated as most of the trusteeship agreements were terminated and new independent states created. From the vantage point of those nationalists who, in the early 1960s, celebrated the demise of formal empires and the virtual elimination of the trusteeship system, this conclusion might well have force, though many of them had fought to collapse the distinction between colony and trust territory and limit the duration of the "sacred trust." This was certainly the perspective of the Soviets and those in the "anti-colonial bloc" that used the Trusteeship Council as another forum to challenge the West and expand the fronts of the Cold War. From the perspective of those officials and politicians who sought to give real force to notions of human development, albeit along western lines, the rush to political independence invited the instability, violence, and poverty that continues to challenge the slender resources of many post-colonial states, former trust territories, and their peoples. Some 40 years after these momentous changes, the global community still searches for a practical answer to the problem of how the rich and powerful might yet serve the weak and poor without resort to final control.

In his chapter titled "An Offer They Couldn't Refuse: The British Left, Colonies, and International Trusteeship, 1940-1951," R. M. Douglas shows that the British Labor Party's change of front largely predated the establishment of the United Nations, and in fact had only a tangential relationship to the efficiency, or otherwise, of the machinery established to oversee the development and welfare of non-self-governing territories. British democratic socialists' attitude concerning international accountability after 1945 underwent a fundamental change as a result of the cataclysmic events of the Second World War. This experience had brought about a striking transformation in the British left's understanding of the meaning of Empire. In the view of key Labor policy-makers and opinion-formers, Britain had undergone – by virtue of her epic defence of human liberty – a "cleansing liberation" that served to absolve her of a multitude of past political and imperial sins. By the end of the war, Labor activists had come to regard the Empire-Commonwealth no longer as an embarrassment for which Britons needed to apologize, but rather a model for others to follow. From this perspective, "international accountability" no longer represented an impartial standard against which colonial governance was to be measured. Instead it was itself to be judged according to whether it facilitated or impeded the "progressive" values of British colonial practice.