

B O O K S

William Minter, PORTUGUESE AFRICA AND THE WEST. Monthly Review Press: New York, 1972. 200 pp. \$7.95.

Despite the fact that Portugal has a troop commitment in Africa amounting to more than ten times that of the U.S., in terms of comparative population, at its greatest involvement in Indochina, relatively little is known in the West of these colonial wars. The publication of General Antonio DeSpinola's new book Portugal v Futuro and the subsequent revolt of junior army officers was the first indication to many here that there was any dissatisfaction with those wars in Portugal.

William Minter has written an important new book to fill the gaps of knowledge in the West - first, in defining these wars, and secondly, in pointing out the complicity of the U.S. as well as France, West Germany, Great Britain and Brazil in them. This is not a book that claims to be objectively neutral. It is committed scholarship, as the author says, (preface), "The research for this book began in 1969. The aim was to spell out American complicity in Portugal's colonial wars, to let people know what was going on, and help to make possible mobilization to stop that complicity." The book is dedicated to "the liberation fighters and the peoples of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau," and to those others " . . . who are working within the western countries for solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Southern Africa." Many will fault the book for these admissions, preferring a work that showed scholarly detachment.

However, are scholars ever really neutral on such political topics? There are other books on Portuguese Africa that claim objectivity for themselves, such as David M. Abshire and Michael A. Samuels, Portuguese Africa: A Handbook (Praeger: New York, 1969). According to the authors, their work " . . . has tried to produce the basic facts, avoid the polemics, and describe the realities of the situations, whether pleasant or otherwise. It has not tried to fit itself into any ideology, Portuguese or anti-Portuguese, but strives to describe dispassionately the many human attitudes, ideologies, and predilections that come into play." (p. xii). One of the authors recently helped

to organize a conference on South Africa's role in the Indian Ocean in cooperation with South African government officials for the Navy-connected Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University, and the other serves in the Nixon administration as a State Department appointee. A clear pro-Portuguese bias clearly appears in their work. If, as it seems, scholarly detachment, is very infrequently found, is it not better for the author to clearly reveal his biases at the outset?

Minter describes the nature of Portugal's empire in Africa, adopting Perry Anderson's term "ultra-colonialism." He regards it as a contradiction that while Portugal itself has not entered the modern world, clinging to outmoded political and economic forms, it enlarged its African empire at the same time as other European powers and holds on to it still. However, it seems that exactly because Portugal has not yet modernized and is still itself economically dependent (largely on Great Britain) and politically rigid, that she continues to hold on to her empire. Other European nations shed their African possessions and moved into new relationships with the former colonies based on cultural and economic ties. If Mozambique were to become independent, what Portuguese firms would invest their capital there and train African managers? Where is the African elite that would send its children to Portugal for education and chose Portuguese culture for its life-style? It is precisely because Portugal is not in a position to develop a neo-colonial relationship such as that that has emerged between France and Senegal, or Britain and Kenya, that has kept Portugal desperately clinging to its African possessions. The colonial territories have also kept Portugal from developing trade relations with Western Europe, creating a dependency on a dependency. Without any formal links with the European trading community, fears are great within Portugal about what the loss of empire would bring. Many Portuguese are afraid that the survival of Portugal itself is at stake. The old spectre of being swallowed up by Spain reappears. Portuguese imperialism transcends an economic analysis — identity lies at the heard of continuing Portuguese colonialism. Portugal does not wish to see itself as a poor sardine-fishing nation on the Atlantic. All over the country, there are maps of Europe with Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau super-imposed on them, stating, "Portugal is not the smallest nation in Europe, but rather the largest."

Portugal's desire to retain her colonies in the face of growing world pressures for decolonization led to the fiction of the "overseas Provinces." Portugal refuses to call the African territories colonies, demanding that they be recognized as distant provinces, with no difference between the status of Angola, and the Algarve, for example.* To support their case, the Portuguese are fond of using the examples of Alaska and Hawaii. Minter dismisses this claim, as well as the pseudo-scientific doctrine of "Luso-tropicalism" that is used to support it. Among other things, "Luso-tropicalism" maintains that the Portuguese because of their long history of contact with tropical peoples were uniquely suited of all European nations to create a multi-racial civilization, - after all they were the first European people to desire tans.

Some of what Minter says can be found in other places. His first chapter on "The Shape of Portuguese 'Ultracolonialism'" is largely a restatement of material that appears in Eduardo Mondlane's The Struggle for Mozambique. (Penguin Books, 1969). The uniqueness of his contribution is the documentation on U.S. foreign policy relations with Portugal. Starting with the Truman-Eisenhower years and proceeding to the Nixon administration, his basic point is that the supposed commitment of the U.S. to self-determination of all peoples has been irrelevant to Luso-American relations. His contention is that Africa is and has been a backwater in foreign policy, that U.S. interests in Europe have always come first. American interest in maintaining the Azores base has kept the United States from taking any action in the United Nations that would anger Portugal. His recording of the contradictions in the American position are damning. NATO was established as a network in defense of democracy in 1947, but the Portuguese dictatorship was included out of military necessity. In 1960 the U.S. abstained in the United Nations vote on the Declaration on Colonialism, which passed 90-0. He feels that during the Kennedy and Johnson era greater concern for our world image led the U.S. to some public relations stands: In the U.N. the U.S. occasionally voted support for

* This author had a brush with Portuguese claims for provincial status for its colonies. Flying to Mozambique from Lisbon, I tried to claim the higher domestic weight allowance for baggage. Apparently not up on the status of the provinces, TAP denied the request.

self-determination for Portuguese Africa, but when the resolutions had any teeth, such as arms bans or limitations on foreign investment, the U.S. abstained or voted against them.

Minter finds no basic difference between the U.S. stand toward Portugal from 1945 to the present, only that the Nixon administration is more open about its leanings towards white-dominated Southern Africa. The Nixon administration allowed the sale of two Boeing 707's to Portugal for use in troop transport. In the past, there would have been a disclaimer that they were for civilian use only, or that they were only to be used in Europe.

Minter did a lot of digging to find evidence to support his contentions. He researched Portuguese military journals to illustrate the help American private industry has played in the Portuguese war effort, citing Mobil Oil advertisements: "Not only in the good hours, but also in the bad — a half century of service to the country," against "terrorism." "Mobil has participated with pride in the struggle for the defense of Angola, pledging itself to assure the supply of fuels and lubricants necessary for the Armed Forces and the people." He elaborately details the nature of U.S. military support for Portugal. He cites advertisements placed by a U.S. public relations firm Portugal hired to help its image, playing to racist and anti-communist feelings of white southerners at the same time it was decrying its multi-racialism on other fronts. He notes the support of U.S. House of Representatives Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill, generally known for the liberal stands and constituency, for the Portuguese viewpoint on its African provinces, as a result of lobbying by the public relations firm.

Minter makes the point that the new American policy has been deliberately ambiguous — it supports self-determination, but not necessarily independence, achieved through orderly transition. Coincidentally, this is the position that is gaining favor in Portuguese "liberal" circles. General DeSpinola believes that a military solution to the African conflict is not possible. He wants self-determination for the African provinces in the guise of autonomous areas within a Portuguese commonwealth, — independence without independence. This solution would not be acceptable to the liberation movements in Africa, but it is one that is gaining increasing support in U.S. foreign policy circles and within some facets

of Portuguese society, such as the business and younger army community. For the U.S., it is "cleaner," for it doesn't entail outright support for continuing colonialism, nor does it mean approval of the liberation movements which get their funding largely from Communist sources. For Portugal, it would bring the end to more than a decade of extremely costly wars, and freedom from fear for its own survival.

Minter feels that the liberation forces will not win victory for themselves. He sees the support of Western nations as extremely crucial to the continuance of Portugal in Africa: thus one of his major concerns in exposing that relationship in an effort to erode it. He supports boycotts of U.S. firms that invest in Angola and Mozambique, and sees as helpful the growing awareness of black Americans of the situation in Southern Africa, hopeful that this may embarrass U.S. foreign policy makers into changing their position.

Minter's book presents its position clearly. It is an important work because it collates evidence that is hard to come by on the word and deed of U.S. foreign policy towards Portugal and its African possessions. He foresees the growing popularity of the "neo-colonial" solution that will come increasingly to dominate discussions of Portuguese imperialism.

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