

Dag Hammarskjold and South Africa

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Beyond a few pages in, say, Brian Urquhart's biography of Dag Hammarskjold (1972), little has been written about Hammarskjold's involvement with South Africa. This paper will draw upon the available material in South Africa to discuss the background to his visit to the country in January 1961, the year after the Sharpeville massacre, the visit itself and the controversies it provoked, as well as its consequences for the way in which the United Nations (UN) dealt both with the South Africa issue itself and with that of South West Africa/Namibia. At the end of 1961 Hammarskjold was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize along with Albert Luthuli, and in the late 1990s South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigated possible South African involvement in Hammarskjold's death. In recent years someone resident outside Cape Town has tried to keep Hammarskjold's legacy alive. There are numerous connections, therefore, between Hammarskjold and South Africa. Fifty years after his death those connections deserve to be analysed as fully as possible. This is what this paper will attempt, though its main focus will be on Hammarskjold and the work of the UN in the early 1960s in relation to apartheid South Africa and its de facto colony between the Orange and Kunene rivers.