

Ben-Gurion's Notorious Quotes: Their Polemical Uses & Abuses

I've been engaged in a long-term e-mail debate with anti-Zionists, associated with David McReynolds, a former leader of the War Resisters' League and a tiny remnant that still calls itself the Socialist Party, USA. Seth Farber, one of the most vociferous (although not quite the nastiest) of my interlocutors, when asked, gave me his "just" solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: for Israel to renounce the Law of Return and for Palestinians to have a full right of return – in other words, for Israel to surrender. (Farber is the author of [Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers: Conversations with Jewish Critics of Israel](#), and is an uncompromising foe of Zionism who regards the late Israel Shahak as a mentor and lionizes the Reform rabbi Elmer Berger, who founded the anti-Zionist American Council on Judaism.)

Another comrade of McReynolds recently supplied a long list of quotations from David Ben-Gurion (which I include following these comments) clearly advocating ethnic cleansing against the Arabs. Posting these quotes was meant as a decisively fatal blow to the moral legitimacy of Israel and Zionism. But the debate must not end there.

Ben-Gurion was Israel's George Washington, and just as we know that Washington and other US founding fathers were slave-holders and that Washington destroyed the towns of the Iroquois, it's hard to find a founding father of any country born in war who did not order ruthless acts. And Ben-Gurion was not of the same political stream as Hashomer Hatzair, Mapam, Ihud and Brit Shalom – Zionists with different ideas.

But when I raised similar facts (and worse) about the man who would have been the Palestinians' George Washington, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem – who was actively allied with Hitler and advocated genocide against the Jews – McReynold's comrades wouldn't hear of it, downplayed his role and called me nasty names. Not all but most of these quotes came after the Arabs had launched their violent efforts to crush the Yishuv in late '47 and then to destroy the State of Israel after its declaration of independence in May '48; it's not surprising that B-G would say some hyperbolic things after the Arabs had irrevocably shown their hand by launching their attacks.

To sum up my reaction:

- 1. The Jews were engaged in a life or death struggle with the Arabs of Palestine, mostly because of the choice of the latter.*
- 2. Selected quotes of one leader are not representative of an entire spectrum of parties and factions that equally saw themselves as "Zionist." (They might not even be so representative of his movement or even of him; they were uttered in times of extreme pressure.)*
- 3. When is the bigotry, intolerance, ignorance and violence of the Arab world going to become PC for the left to examine honestly and completely?*
- 4. How many countries in the world were not born of historical "sin" of some*

sort or other?

5. When are we going to stop talking ancient history?

6. When are we going to stop talking about "Zionism" and start relating to this conflict in human terms? Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians have to see each other as fellow human beings entitled to equal respect, rights and protections. – Ralph Seliger

What did David Ben-Gurion say?

"If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country. It is true God promised it to us, but how could that interest them? Our God is not theirs. There has been Anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing: we have come and we have stolen their country. Why would they accept that?"

David Ben-Gurion (the first Israeli Prime Minister): Quoted by Nahum Goldmann in *Le Paradoxe Juif (The Jewish Paradox)*, pp121.

"Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves ... politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves... The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view we want to take away from them their country. ... Behind the terrorism [by the Arabs] is a movement, which though primitive is not devoid of idealism and self sacrifice."

– David Ben Gurion. Quoted on pp 91-2 of Chomsky's *Fateful Triangle*, which appears in Simha Flapan's "Zionism and the Palestinians" pp 141-2 citing a 1938 speech.

"We must do everything to insure they (the Palestinians) never do return." David Ben-Gurion, in his diary, 18 July 1948, quoted in Michael Bar Zohar's *Ben-Gurion: the Armed Prophet*, Prentice-Hall, 1967, p. 157.

Ben Gurion also warned in 1948: Assuring his fellow Zionists that Palestinians will never come back to their homes: "The old will die and the young will forget."

"We should prepare to go over to the offensive. Our aim is to smash Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, and Syria. The weak point is Lebanon, for the Moslem regime is artificial and easy for us to undermine. We shall establish a Christian state there, and then we will smash the Arab Legion, eliminate Trans-Jordan; Syria will fall to us. We then bomb and move on and take Port Said, Alexandria and Sinai."

David Ben-Gurion May 1948, to the General Staff. From Ben-Gurion, a Biography, by Michael Ben-Zohar, Delacorte, New York 1978.

"If I knew that it was possible to save all the children of Germany by transporting them to England, and only half by transferring them to the Land of Israel, I would choose the latter, for before us lies not only the numbers of these children but the historical reckoning of the people of Israel." Ben-Gurion (Quoted on pp 855-56 in Shabtai Teveth's *Ben-Gurion* in a slightly different translation).

"It's not a matter of maintaining the status quo. We have to create a dynamic state, oriented towards expansion." –Ben Gurion

"Every school child knows that there is no such thing in history as a final arrangement – not with regard to the regime, not with regard to borders, and not with regard to international agreements."

– Ben Gurion, War Diaries, 12/03/1947 following Israel's "acceptance" of the U.N. Partition of 11/29/1947 (Simha Flapan, "Birth of Israel," p.13)

"We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question, What is to be done with the Palestinian population? 'Ben-Gurion waved his hand in a gesture which said ' Drive them out! ' "

Yitzhak Rabin, leaked censored version of Rabin memoirs, published in the New York Times, 23 October 1979.

Partition: "after the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine "

– Ben Gurion, p.22 "The Birth of Israel, 1987" Simha Flapan.

"The acceptance of partition does not commit us to renounce Transjordan. One does not demand from anybody to give up his vision. We shall accept a state in the boundaries fixed today – but the boundaries of Zionist aspirations are the concerns of the Jewish people and no external factor will be able to limit them." P. 53, "The Birth of Israel, 1987" Simha Flapan

October, 1936, during the Jewish Agency Executive meeting Ben-Gurion arguing in favor of transfer as a policy, he said "We are not a state and Britain will not do it for us..." although "there is nothing wrong in the idea."

"If it was permissible to move an Arab from the Galilee to Judea, why it is impossible to move an Arab from Hebron to Transjordan, which is much closer? There are vast expanses of land there and we are over crowded...Even the High Commission agrees to a transfer to Transjordan if we equip the peasants with land and money. If the Peel Commission and the London Government accept, we'll remove the land problem from the agenda."

The Arabs, Ben-Gurion claimed, would not become landless as a result of Zionist land acquisition; they would be transferred to Transjordan.

October 29, 1936 the 21 member of the Jewish Agency Executive endorsed the proposal of a transfer of displaced Arab farmers to Transjordan. Only two of the four non-Zionist members opted to dissent.

Flapan, Zionism and the Palestinians, citing protocols of the Executive meeting, p. 261

12 July 1937, Ben-Gurion entered in his diary: "The compulsory transfer of the Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had, even when we stood on our own feet during the days of the First and Second Temple"

– a Galilee free from Arab population.

Ben-Gurion went so far to write: "We must prepare ourselves to carry out" the

transfer [emphasis in original]

27 July 1937, Ben-Gurion wrote in a letter to his 16 year old son Amos: "We have never wanted to dispossess the Arabs [but] because Britain is giving them part of the country which had been promised to us, it is fair that the Arabs in our state be transferred to the Arab portion"

5 October 1937, Ben-Gurion wrote in a letter to his 16 year old son Amos: "We must expel the Arabs and take their places.... And, if we have to use force-not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places- then we have force at our disposal."

"It is very possible that the Arabs of the neighboring countries will come to their aid against us. But our strength will exceed theirs. Not only because we will be better organized and equipped, but because behind us there stands a still larger force, superior in quantity and quality ...the whole younger generation of Jews from Europe and America."

Ben-Gurion, Zichronot [Memoirs], Vol. 4, p.297-299, p. 330-331.

See also Teveth, Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs, p. 182-189

Ben-Gurion in an address to the central committee of the Histadrut on 30 December 1947:

"In the area allocated to the Jewish State there are not more than 520,000 Jews and about 350,000 non-Jews, mostly Arabs. Together with the Jews of Jerusalem, the total population of the Jewish State at the time of its establishment will be about a million, including almost 40 percent non-Jews. Such a [population] composition does not provide a stable basis for a Jewish State. This [demographic] fact must be viewed in all its clarity and acuteness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be absolute certainty that control will remain in the hands of the Jewish majority.... There can be no stable and strong Jewish State so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent."

On the 6th of February 1948, during a Mapai Party Council, Ben-Gurion responded to a remark from a member of the audience that "we have no land there" [in the hills and mountains west of Jerusalem] by saying: "The war will give us the land. The concepts of "ours" and "not ours" are peace concepts, only, and in war they lose their whole meaning"

(Ben-Gurion, War Diary, Vol. 1, entry dated 6 February 1948. p.211)

Addressing the Mapai Council the following day, Ben-Gurion declared: "From your entry into Jerusalem, through Lifta, Romema... there are no Arabs. One hundred percent Jews. Since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, it has not been so Jewish. In many Arab neighborhoods in the west one sees not a single Arab. I do not assume that this will change... What had happened in Jerusalem... is likely to happen in many parts of the country ...in the six, eight or ten months of the campaign there will certainly be great changes in the composition of the population in the country."

(Ben-Gurion, War Diary, Vol. 1, entry dated 7 February 1948. p. 210-211)

And two months later, Ben-Gurion speaking to the Zionist Actions Committee on 6 April, Ben-Gurion declared: "We will not be able to win the war if we do

not, during the war, populate upper and lower, eastern and western Galilee, the Negev and Jerusalem area...I believe that war will also bring in its wake a great change in the distribution of the Arab population."

[Ben-Gurion, Behilahem Yisrael, Tel Aviv, Mapai Press, 1952, pp. 86-87]

Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary on 12 July 1937: "the compulsory transfer of the Arabs from the valleys of the projected Jewish State... We have to stick to this conclusion the same way we grabbed the Balfour Declaration, more than that, the same way we grabbed at Zionism itself."

(Ben-Gurion, Zichronot [Memoirs], Vol. 4, p. 299)