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Reviews

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Less than a week later Ben-Gurion was again facing down what he angrily termed “a political mutiny in the army,” this time from the left. He was determined to bring more ex–British Army/Jewish Brigade officers into key posts. And he was determined too to reduce the influence of Mapam (since January, an amalgam of the Hashomer Hatzair and Ahdut HaAvoda parties) in the army, which was exercised primarily through the Palmach commanders, most of them Ahdut HaAvoda adherents. The two aims dovetailed and succeeded in raising the ire of Yigael Yadin, the (nonpolitical) chief of operations (Chief of Staff Yaakov Dori was ill for most of the war), and of the Mapam-affiliated generals, who now tendered their collective resignation. Ben-Gurion accused Yadin of mutiny. Yadin said he was prepared to serve as a simple soldier but not to take responsibility for decisions that he found unjustifiable. At a cabinet meeting, Ben-Gurion threatened to resign. And he again demanded Galili’s dismissal as the sine qua non for any new arrangement.

A five-man ministerial committee was set up to investigate the charges and countercharges. Yadin testified before it, excoriating Ben-Gurion’s incessant interference in operational matters. He re-

Yadin went around to Ben-Gurion’s home, braved Paula, and put before the Old Man a compromise scheme designed to get on with the war (once the truce ended) without making an immediate string of controversial appointments. Yigal Allon, the Palmachnik accepted by all, was given command of the key Jerusalem front.

The confrontation subsided, but for Ben-Gurion it was just a tactical retreat. The sequel came in October, on the eve of a third round of hostilities against the Egyptians in the Negev. Ben-Gurion issued orders to dismantle the Palmach’s separate command structure, explaining that it was anomalous in an integrated army. Mapam appealed the decision before the executive of the Histadrut, and there the arguments raged for two days. Ben-Gurion accused Mapam of endangering “the integrity of the state.” A Mapam leader warned that the right was plotting to seize power undemocratically, and that by eliminating the Palmach, Ben-Gurion was heightening the risk that this might succeed. This time Ben-Gurion enjoyed his own party’s solid support, and the Mapam appeal was voted down. After the war Ben-Gurion achieved his goal of a fully integrated army by disbanding the separate Palmach brigades.

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Meir Ya’ari, the Mapam–Hashomer Hatzair leader, sat in his kibbutz, Merhavia, and spoke of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He insisted on “ideological collectivism.” He had a rabbinical air about him, and his followers were like disciples. He quoted from Lenin but still managed to sound like a rabbi! Moshe Sneh

‘Ben-Gurion : A Political Life’, Shimon Peres, 2011, p. 125) <https://archive.org/details/bengurionpolitic0000pere/page/134/mode/2up?q=sdas&view=theater>

★
Reichman University

Lauder School of Government
Diplomacy and Strategy

Professor Ehud Sprinzak died on November 8, 2002 at Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel-Aviv, following months of illness.

He was 62. Sprinzak, grandson of Yosef Sprinzak, the first Speaker of Israel's Knesset, leaves a wife, four children, two grandchildren and a mother.

Sprinzak was a world-renowned expert on terror and for his research on Israel's extreme right. He was the Founding Dean of the Lauder School of Government at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel's first private university.

Sprinzak was also Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he taught for thirty years. As Dean at the IDC, Sprinzak worked actively to encourage and train a new young leadership for Israeli society through innovative programming. He was also among the initiators of the annual "Herzliya Conference on the Balance of National Strength and Security." As an expert on Israel's right wing and political violence, Sprinzak advised Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on these issues. At this year's commemoration of the anniversary of Rabin's death, Eitan Haber, Rabin's Chief of Staff, recalled Sprinzak's central role in Rabin's decision-making process.

<https://www.idc.ac.il/en/schools/government/pages/about-shprinzak.aspx>

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jurisdiction of the Israeli government. When the first U.N. cease-fire went into effect on June 11, 1948, Israel and the Arab states agreed not to introduce new arms into their territories. Both sides, of course, violated this agreement, but covertly. However, the Irgun resolved to bring in an arms shipment openly on the *Altalena*. This act could only be viewed as an irresponsible and wanton defiance of government authority, and it had to be vigorously and speedily dealt with.

While I was being briefed by Yitzhak Sadeh, the *Altalena* was anchored off Kfar Vitkin, twenty-three miles north of Tel Aviv, dis-

(The Story of My Life, Moshe Dayan, 1976, p. 95) <https://archive.org/details/moshedayanstoryo00daya/page/94/mode/2up?q=asfasfa&view=theater>

Either these luckless villagers had trusted the Arab soldiers to beat off the attack, or had been prevented from leaving the village with the others when the opportunity was given, before the fighting began, or perhaps had been afraid to go; whatever the reason, they were the innocent victims of a cruel war, and the responsibility for their deaths rests squarely upon the Arab soldiers, whose duty it was—under any rule of war—to evacuate them the moment that they turned Dir Yassin into a fortress, long before the battle for the village began. Total Arab casualties, including soldiers and civilians, were counted after the fighting at two hundred. The Irgun unit, with its limited medical supplies, did what it could to tend its own and the village's wounded, before taking them to hospitals in Jerusalem.

This is the statement of Yunes Ahmad Assad, a prominent inhabitant of Dir Yassin who survived the battle:

"The Jews never intended to hurt the population of the village, but were forced to do so, after they met enemy fire from the population which killed the Irgun commander."

It was published in the Jordanian daily "Al Urdun" of 9 April, 1955. Its only inaccuracy is in respect of the Irgun commander: Assad undoubtedly saw him fall in the attack, but he survived.

That the attackers, even at the cost of losing the surprise effect, and, as is evident at the risk of avoidable casualties, had warned the inhabitants before the attack, is admitted in a pamphlet issued by the Secretariat-General of the Arab League, entitled "Israel's Aggression." On page 10 we find this:

On the night of 9 April, 1948, the peaceful Arab village of Dir Yassin, in the suburbs of Jerusalem, was surprised by loud-speakers calling upon the inhabitants of the village to evacuate it immediately."

In the chapter "Civil War—Never," the "Altalena" affair is related. About twenty years after the tragedy, one of the people closest to Mr. Ben Gurion came to

me and told me, on his own initiative, the following words: "We have arrived at the conclusion that in the Altalena matter Ben Gurion was misled."

In the summer of 1971, the internal debate on dissidence, the "season" and Altalena, broke out, or was renewed. It has, of course, not yet ended. It demonstrated beyond all doubt that there is a contradiction which cannot be bridged between the public statements of Mr. Ben Gurion and Mr. Galili. Mr. Galili writes: "I reported to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, at every stage, both orally and in writing, fully, on the meetings with the heads of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, including the night meeting, the conversation on the morrow, and subsequent meetings."

"The night meeting" is the discussion at Irgun headquarters, on June 14, 1948, in which we relayed to the representatives of the Provisional Government, Mr. Galili and Mr. Eshkol, all the details of the ship, its means, and its arms. That night, four days before the Altalena approached the shores of Eretz Israel, we announced that the arrival of the ship depended on the decision of the government. The next morning, at ten o'clock, Mr. Galili, the authorized representative of the Defence Minister, relayed to me the following announcement: "We have decided that the Altalena is to come, and with all possible speed." Thus was it confirmed for the first time that the Irgun, which had been accused for an entire generation of bringing the Altalena, in order to seize control of the government, had prepared its rebellion with the knowledge, consent, and even the command, of the Provisional Government. . . .

Counter to Mr. Galili, Mr. Ben Gurion, who was then Prime Minister and Defence Minister, reasserts that he knew nothing of the Altalena's arrival until June 19, 1948. What happened then during those four fateful days? In whose name did the authorized representative of the Defence Minister make the positive statement following that night meeting? But if he had been empowered by the Prime Minister to relay to me this decision, for the Altalena to come with all possible

speed, how can Mr. Ben Gurion claim that he heard of the arms ship only four whole day later?

The required replies have not yet been given to these questions. It should be remembered, however, that I could not present the questions themselves when this book was written. The two statements, whose contradiction is obvious to all, had not yet been made. Thus does the truth march on towards its complete vindication and triumph.

On Motzoei Shabat, May 15, 1948, I broadcast, directly for the first time, to the small, courageous, liberated fighting nation. These are some of the words I spoke:

"The homeland is historically and geographically an entity. Whoever fails to recognize our right to the entire homeland, does not recognize our right to any of its territories. We shall never yield our natural and eternal right. We shall bear the vision of a full liberation. We shall bear the vision of ultimate redemption, and we shall bring it into realization. When the day arrives, we shall materialize it. This is an historical rule: a line passing through, or drawn by, someone, as a separation between a Nation's state and a People's country—such an artificial line must disappear."

So it happened between June 5th and June 11th, 1967. Since then, it is our duty, fathers and sons, to see to it that the artificial line which disappeared never returns. We must not yield our natural and eternal right.

M. Begin

1972

Chapter XI

The "Altalena" Affair

To avoid bloody civil war at all costs—this principle, tempered in the sufferings of the "season," we observed years later in the test of blood and fire of the "Altalena."

It is no longer a secret that this famous arms-ship served as the instrument of a sinister plot. When Mr. Ben Gurion, on the rostrum of the first Israel parliament, modestly boasted "I have some part in that ship lying not far away from here," he was interrupted by a question from a member of *Mapai*: "But who was it who urged you to do it?"

Mr. Ben Gurion was silent. His silence was perhaps even more eloquent than any words. The attack on the "Altalena" was prepared in secret and with intent. The boat was destroyed by fire. Dense smoke rolled out of her and enveloped her. We cannot extinguish that fire; but we will seek to dissipate the screen of smoke.

The tragic fact was that the "Altalena" was late in coming. Had this landing-craft arrived off the shores of Eretz Israel immediately on the liquidation of British rule, that is, in the middle of May, 1948, the whole condition of the nation would have been radically changed. We should then have placed at the disposal of the Government and the Army eight or ten battalions, fully equipped with arms and ammunition—in- stead of their customary equipment, unlimited readiness for self-sacrifice and short-ranged Sten-guns. At our first attack we should have captured Ramleh. This Arab town, besieged by the Irgun Zvai Leumi at the request of the Haganah in order to draw away enemy

forces from the Latrun front, was on the point of falling when we had to withdraw. The morale of the inhabitants had been lowered, mainly by the shelling of our 3 inch mortars. Our boys stormed the approaches to the town and in the opening stages captured large parts of it. But lack of arms and ammunition proved fatal. They needed only a few hundred rifles and additional ammunition, but on the Ramleh front that quantity was not available either to us or to the Haganah Command. Three hundred rifles, or six per cent of the number loaded in the hold of the "Altalena" . . .

Had we been able to capture Ramleh at that time—and its conquest depended solely on these additional arms—the united Jewish forces would have broken the Arab front at Latrun and our strategic situation would have been changed fundamentally, its effects being felt as far as Jerusalem, as far as the Old City. With the fall of Ramleh, the fate of Lydda would have been sealed. Thus we should have smashed the enemy on the central front in the first stage of his invasion, instead of only after the first "truce." And the Jewish forces would have been free in the second stage for a full-scale attack on the 'Triangle.' In a word, we should today have held the Western bank of the Jordan—at least.

Fate decreed otherwise. The "Altalena" with her nine hundred soldiers, five thousand rifles, four million rounds of ammunition, three hundred Bren guns, 150 spandaus, five caterpillar-track armoured vehicles, thousands of air-combat bombs, and the rest of her war equipment, was ready to sail not in the middle of May but only in the second week of June. We received first news of her departure from a French port on the London radio. I was shocked. That very day the "truce" had come into force. Whatever our attitude to the truce might be, I explained to my comrades, we were not entitled to bear the responsibility for the possible consequences of a breach. All the Jewish forces were very tired; the enemy had superior armament. This was no longer an underground partisan-political fight. This was a fight in the open field and the consequences of de-

feat might be destruction for our people. We consequently decided first of all to stop the boat. We did not, of course, place absolute credence in the B.B.C. report. Perhaps the boat had not yet sailed and the British Government only wanted to alert the UNO observers? That day I sent a telegram to our headquarters in Paris: "Don't send the boat. Await instructions." Shmuel Katz, in charge in Paris at the time, replied that my telegram had come the day after the boat's departure; that he was no longer in contact with her. He advised us to communicate direct with the "Altalena."

Our first radio message to the "Altalena" was "Keep away. Await instructions!" We did not know whether the boat received the message. Later we learnt that while she was still far from our shores her instruments worked in only one direction: she received our messages but could not reply. Immediately after sending this telegram, late at night, we communicated with the Israel Department of Security and gave them detailed information about the boat and its cargo of munitions. Now—we said to the representatives of the Security Ministry—it is for you to decide whether to permit the boat to come, or divert her. Official propaganda, hiding behind the smokescreen, pretended that the Irgun had brought over the "Altalena" in order to prepare an armed revolt against the Government of Israel.

The decision of the Government—or the Security Ministry—was that the arms-ship of the Irgun must be brought in, and as quickly as possible. The decision was conveyed to me by Israel Galili the day after our late-night conversation at Irgun Headquarters. Anxiety gave way to joy. We were all delighted. The burden of responsibility had been taken off our shoulders. The Government, after all, knew the situation and its requirements. There was apparently no choice. Arms were lacking. In particular, there was a shortage of rifles—yes, ordinary rifles, the basic weapons in the Eretz Israel battles—and there was a shortage of British 303 ammunition, for lack of which a large part of

the Haganah arms was out of action. All these urgent requirements would be brought in the "Altalena."

As for the UNO prohibitions, we would manage somehow. After all, the Government knew. In the circumstances this was no question of morals. Nobody was helping our attacked people; the situation was one of life and death; and we thanked God that the Government understood the situation, weighed what had to be weighed and disregarded what in the circumstances it was forbidden to take into account. At once a code message went out to the "Altalena" where, as we later learnt, it aroused even greater joy. Instead of "Keep Away" it was now "Full steam ahead."

This fact must be re-emphasized, for it is from this point onwards in this sad history that the black smokescreen has been thrown up. The Provisional Government later published sanctimonious statements that while the Irgun had tried to disregard the UNO truce orders, the Government, in observance of international law, was compelled to destroy the arms brought to Eretz Israel in contravention of the truce.

I must therefore repeat: the Provisional Government knew about the arms ship sailing towards our shores against the instructions which had arrived too late. And it was the Government that decided to bring the "Altalena" in during the truce period. Otherwise she would not have come.

After the Government had ordered the boat to be landed without delay, a conference began between the Security Ministry and our Staff concerning the unloading of the arms and their distribution. The Irgun Zvai Leumi was then an open military force recognised by the official institutions. Before the declaration of the State, the Greater Council of the Zionist Organisation had confirmed the agreement for military co-operation between us and the Haganah. When independence was declared on the 14th May, 1948, there was no immediate formation of a unified army. Haganah continued to exist; and the Irgun, whose soldiers were stationed on various fronts and in some sectors were fighting to-

gether with Haganah men, also continued to exist. The well-known journalist, Dr. Azriel Karlibach, at that time published an open letter to me, brimming with enthusiasm and demanding that, now we had beaten the British we should work for establishment of a unified Israel Army. I replied on our radio that several days earlier we had publicly called for the establishment of a unified Army to replace the military organisations. But it depended on the Government, not on us.

When the creation of the Army was announced we continued as a recognised military organisation until the integration of our forces into the Army was completed. In the operational orders of the Front Line and Brigade Commanders, Irgun units appeared as an inseparable part of the Army forces. In liberated Jaffa which, at our request, had been divided into two sectors, one sector was garrisoned by the Irgun. The Prime Minister, Mr. David Ben Gurion, one day visited Jaffa and also inspected Irgun units, who presented arms. I was told that Mr. Ben Gurion, moved at the incident, said to the escort: "I didn't know they had such boys."

Afterwards the Prime Minister sent the following letter to Sergeant Haim, the officer in command of our occupying force in Jaffa:

State of Israel

Provisional Government

22 May, 1948

To the Commander of the Irgun soldiers in Jaffa. Until further instructions you and your men are at the sole orders of the Military Governor of Jaffa, I Chirik.

(signed) David Ben Gurion

Head of the Provisional Government and Minister of Security.

We pointed out to Mr. Ben Gurion's side-de-camp that it was not customary for a Prime Minister to communicate directly with a local officer. We were gratified at the official recognition of "the Irgun Zvai Leumi sol-

diers in Jaffa," but out of concern for the tender growth of our State we wished to uphold the status of the Prime Minister as such.

With his aide and his colleagues we continued to discuss the creation of a unified army. The details of the discussion are related elsewhere. Here it is sufficient to mention that we agreed that the Irgun should bring into the Army complete battalions with their officers. But as the organisation of battalions required time, it was agreed between us that we would set up a temporary Staff of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, approved by the Prime Minister and Minister of Security. By the time the "Altalena" arrived we had organized and integrated several battalions into the Army. Other regiments were still in process of organisation, their men being still dispersed in smaller units on various fronts. Our Staff was thus an official and recognised body, when it was called to discuss with the representatives of the Ministry of Security the unloading of the "Altalena" arms.

We decided jointly on the point on the coast at which the boat should be brought in. This involved a change in the instruction we had given the captain in April. The "Altalena" as she waited for her men, her arms and her instructions, had been plying for some months between European ports and the north coast of Africa. She had been acquired by the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the American League for a Free Palestine, and we had intended bringing her in while the British forces were still ruling—with men or arms or both.

At that time we had decided that she should anchor off Tel Aviv, because by then (the end of 1947) the British forces had left the Tel Aviv-Petah Tikvah area as the first instalment of evacuation. The precise spot we had fixed for landing was Frishman Street. This detail too must be remembered well if the smokescreen of subsequent distortion is to be dissipated.

A Ministry of Security expert proposed that the boat should not come in at Tel Aviv but at Givat Olga or Kfar Vitkin near Nathanya, and so avoid the attention

not have got anywhere near the landing point. On the other hand, even if we assume, purely for the sake of argument, that we had by some miracle got through to the ship in such circumstances, would it have occurred to anybody in his senses—in the face of army resistance—to walk into that narrowest of bottlenecks, a completely isolated beach, without equipment, without provisions, without even water! Evilily disposed people may wish to doubt the truth of what we say; but they cannot deny that the Irgun had some acquaintance with strategy and tactics. Yet this is what they asked people to believe of us: that we of the Irgun Zvai Leumi intended to start an "armed revolt" precisely there, at Kfar Vitkin, where our men would have been cut off from the outset, even if they had been able to get there without the consent of the Army.

Our statement is demonstrably unassailable. I repeat, therefore, that had the Government said one word to cause us to think that they were opposed to the unloading of the arms it would never have entered our minds to unload them in defiance of such opposition. But "somebody had urged somebody to do something clever"—and the Government very carefully did *not* say the word. The Government said: "We shall not help you unload the arms." We shall *not* help. Nothing more.

The Government's refusal to co-operate in unloading the arms was a serious blow. We had neither the lighterage, nor the vehicles, nor the required tackle. Even the number of men we could throw into the task after mobilising nearly every one of those who were available, was too small for the purpose. On the spot we were helped by a number of Palmach men in a boat. Today I have no doubt that they were sent not so much to help as to spy on us. At the time we accepted their help gladly and gratefully, without a shadow of suspicion. Why should we have suspected?

Despite the difficulties, we threw ourselves wholeheartedly into the work. True, the Government had said they would not help us, but in view of their dire need of these arms it seemed logically highly probable that

of U.N.O. observers. Our experts agreed; to them it made no difference at what point on the coast the boat arrived. The essential thing was the unloading of the arms. We, who suspected nothing because we plotted nothing, never imagined there were other motives than those affecting the unloading. So that day a further message went out to the "Altalena": to alter course and proceed to Kfar Vitkin.

The discussion then proceeded on the distribution of the arms. We proposed that one-fifth of the arms should be sent to Jerusalem to the Irgun Zvai Leumi units there, while the rest should be distributed throughout the unified army, among battalions consisting of Irgun men as well as among other battalions. Our proposal was just and justified. There were most serious reasons for it.

said, even in normal circumstances this concern would have been natural and justified. All the more so in the special circumstances, in the very special circumstances in which our Army arose. What we had yearned for in the days of our Sten-guns, the possibility of giving our fighters effective arms, was now to be brought about by the arrival of our arms-ship, the "Altalena." We did not demand its cargo "for ourselves," as the inventors of the "armed revolt" myth alleged. There were no longer any "ourselves" to ask it for. The Irgun had ceased—except in Jerusalem—to be a military force. Our men were in the army, or were fighting together with army units on various fronts while awaiting their organised entry into the Army. All of them were under the command of the Army General Staff. All we demanded was that out of the cargo of arms which we had brought to our country after so much effort and toil, adequate equipment should be given to the former Irgun soldiers now in the Army.

Israel Galili, previously Commander of the Haganah, and at that time Deputy to the Minister of Security, informed me on the telephone that the Ministry had agreed to our proposal about Jerusalem. Twenty per cent of the arms from the "Altalena" were to be allotted to that front. We were overjoyed—and did not attempt to scrutinise the exact wording of his statement. Only much later did it become clear precisely what the real intention behind this "agreement" was. The twenty per cent was to be sent only to Haganah troops in Jerusalem.

We continued for some time to discuss with Galili the question of the distribution of the arms. In one of our many and lengthy conversations I said to him:

"Had the boat come several weeks ago, as we had planned, we of the Irgun would have had all the arms. Wouldn't you agree that our boys ought to come into the Army at least fully-armed and equipped? You yourself demanded that in view of the gravity of the situation all arms and equipment in the possession of the Irgun should be issued to the Irgun boys who were going into the Army. What, then, is the difference? These

I am particularly pleased to be able to meet you in this very centre, named after Menachem Begin, born in Brest on the Bug River as Mieczyslaw Biegun; then in the rank of officer cadet of the Polish Army he came to Israel in 1943 as one of Polish army soldiers under command of general Wladyslaw Anders. And it was here, on this soil at his own request he was dismissed from the service in order to be able to join the struggle for a Jewish state of Israel, whose member of Knesset he was for next ten terms in office, from 1949, the state that he ruled then for six years as prime minister.

(Poles and Jews stood shoulder to shoulder in defence of the Republic of Poland, President.PL January 18, 2017)

<https://www.president.pl/news/poles-and-jews-should-shoulder-in-defence-of-the-republic-of-poland,36311>

At his advanced age and with decades of military research behind him, he doesn’t hesitate even to praise Hitler. “Someone who becomes chancellor of Germany, hate him though you will, is not dumb. Hitler reached the top thanks to brilliant and exceptional achievements until the outbreak of the war. He seized Austria and Czechoslovakia without going to war.”

But even so...

“All right, okay, he was a character of the type who caused the greatest damage to the Jewish people, but when you talk about massacres you have to remember that until 800 years ago everyone carried out massacres. The prophet Samuel removed Saul because he didn’t behead King Agag... The difference is that today technology exists that makes possible industrial massacre. But it wasn’t invented by Hitler. He went to the opera and he liked dogs. The Germans did it cleanly. They didn’t kill with their own hands like the Turks did with the Armenians. From many standpoints, the Turks were more bestial than the Germans. But today we’re in the humanistic age and we don’t do things like that.”

www.haaretz.com The man who jumped off the Altalena, the ship that nearly caused an Israeli civil war

Ofer Aderet



Jun. 17, 2018

The man who jumped off the Altalena, the ship that nearly caused an Israeli civil war - Israel News - Haaretz.com

Yigal Allon’s version

Allon, whose article enraged Feldman, described an entirely different situation, one where the Irgun fighters had taken control of key points in and around Tel Aviv, stirred up the local people and captured positions along the shore. He also witnessed exchanges of fire between IDF soldiers and Irgun cells from the beach and from the ship.

“It quickly became clear to me that without reinforcements for the IDF in Tel Aviv, we would not be able to quell the rebellion,” Allon wrote, adding that he had two alternatives: fire on the ship “and cause heavy losses it its people,” or let them come ashore with their arms, “something that would have led to bitter street battles.”

Ultimately he chose a third alternative: “I asked the General Staff to order the artillery corps to fire a number of shells near the Altalena to instill fear before I gave the ultimatum to surrender.”

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2018-11-09/ty-article-magazine/.premium/the-historian-who-blames-rabin-for-his-own-murder-and-praises-hitler/0000017f-e0bf-d75c-a7ff-fcbf46940000> <https://il.linkedin.com/in/uri-milstein-047660137> (‘The Man Who Jumped Off the Altalena, the Ship That Nearly Caused an Israeli Civil War’, Ha’aretz, Ofer Aderet, June 17, 2018) <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-forgotten-tale-of-the-man-who-jumped-off-the-altalena-1.6177569> Link to the Altalena image from ‘Forward’. Note that the original image presented by Forward was in black-and-white, but I made it sepia. <https://forward.com/culture/205102/irgun-fighter-remembers-the-altalena/>

1948

181

Meeting: P.I. Ershov – M. Sneh

(Tel Aviv, 9 October 1948)

DIARY: AVP RF, F.089, OP.1, P.1, D.3, LL.5–6

Secret

I saw Sneh at his request. He is one of the leaders of the United Mapam Workers' Party, having previously been in command of the Hagana. In conversation Sneh told me that he was leaving in a few days' time for the US as his party's delegate in order to establish closer relations with a certain progressive Zionist group in the US. This group has recently been linked to Wallace's Party¹ and supports his candidacy in the presidential elections. Sneh's task is to organize propaganda in the US, aiming to make the group work more actively in support of Wallace. Sneh, being a foreigner, cannot speak publicly for Wallace, but he will support him through the Zionist group. He thinks he will stay in the US until the presidential elections and may stop off in Paris on his way back.

I mentioned that I had read his article 'The Fateful Hour', published in the newspaper *Al hamishmar*,² in which Sneh warns the government and society about the dangers of concessions and any sort of deal on the Palestine question. I asked him what sort of danger he had in mind and how serious it was. Sneh answered that the main danger was that Britain and the US were always trying to draw Israel into their sphere of influence. With that in view, they were trying to detach the Negev from Israel in order to turn it into a military base. This question had been on their agenda during the entire thirty-year period of British rule in Palestine. All their proposals for the partition of Palestine have envisaged the separation of the Negev. This was evident in Lord Peel's plan in 1937³ and in the Morrison-Grady proposal of 1946;⁴ and, finally, the Americans insisted on it at the session of the General Assembly in 1947.

I asked whether the Americans and British were pursuing only strategic aims in the Negev, and Sneh said that there were important economic as well as strategic motives: 1) the Negev has oil reserves (in Gaza and the southern part of the Dead Sea around Kurnub;⁵ 2) the Dead Sea has very rich reserves of potash, manganese and bromide. It was with this in mind that Churchill, as early as 1922, decided to divide the Dead Sea into two parts, so that the western part would be included in the mandatory territory of Palestine and the eastern part in Transjordan.

379

430 / 1076

196%

Documents on Israeli–Soviet Relations 1941–1953

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127%

Meeting: P.I. Ershov – Y. Riftin and L. Levite

(Tel Aviv, 23 September 1948)

DIARY: AVP RF, F.089, OP.1, P.1, D.3, LL.21–3

Riftin and Levite came to see me at their request. Levite said that the United Workers' Party [Mapam] was playing an important role in the political life of Israel. In the last elections to the Histadrut, it received about 40 per cent of the votes. At least a hundred collective settlements, out of a total of 300 Jewish agricultural colonies, are under its influence. Since many of this party's settlements are located near the frontiers of Israel they bore the main thrust of the Arab forces. Before the formation of the Jewish army, units of the Palmah, which consists mainly of supporters of this party, formed the basis of the Jewish armed forces. At present a large number of the military commanders, including some generals, belong to Mapam. However this is not true of the general staff or other central military departments, where Mapai members predominate.

Riftin said that he had recently returned from America, where he had met Comrade A.A. Gromyko. He believes that the United Workers' Party is the most

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also against international trusteeship without the USSR. The party had major differences with the government on the question of Haifa and Lydda. Shertok had been saying in the State Council that, since Bernadotte's proposals concerned only the port and not the whole town of Haifa, Israel could agree with it. Mapam was saying that giving Transjordan the right to use the port of Haifa would, in practice, mean handing over the port to the British and turning it into a British naval base. The same was true of Lydda. That was why Mapam was insisting that there should be no concessions on this matter.

When I asked which parties or political groups were showing an inclination to give ground, Sneh answered that at present there were three currents of thought in political circles: 1) the right wing of the Mapai Party and the representatives of the *grande bourgeoisie*, whose views were expressed in the government by Finance Minister Kaplan and the Minister of Justice Rosenblueth, and in the press by the newspaper *Haaretz*: These were all inclined to make territorial concessions in order to gain the agreement and support of the US and Britain; 2) the extreme nationalists, revisionists and the IZL, secretly supported by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, who oppose concessions and are trying to reach an agreement with the US to obtain the annexation of part of the Arab territories of Palestine in order to hand them over later as concessions to American capital. Ben-Gurion's view is expressed in the press by the journalist Liebenstein [Livneh] in the newspaper *Davar*: 'What Liebenstein writes, Ben-Gurion thinks, or the other way round' said Sneh; 3) the United Workers' Party and the Communist Party of Israel are against any sort of concessions to, or compromises with, the US and Britain, but in favour of 'a just compromise' with the Arabs, and of the closest possible relations with the USSR and the People's Democracies. The first and second of these groups frequently agree on their general line, but although they have eleven ministries out of thirteen in the government, their strength should not be exaggerated. This government has not been elected by anyone: basically it has usurped power and its ministers are usurpers. It is quite possible that when new elections are held, the 'balance among the parties' will change. The progressive movement in Israel is only just beginning. If the government goes for concessions over the Bernadotte Plan, this will strengthen the opposition parties, that is Mapam and the Israeli Communist Party, which are at present exerting a restraining influence on the government, and which cannot be disregarded. Of course what restrains the government more than anything else in its lurches towards the West is the Soviet Union, which pursues a consistent policy of support for Israel as an independent and sovereign state.

The conversation lasted about an hour. Second secretary Fedorin was present.

Minister of the USSR in Israel

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220%

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125%

and not by the broad masses of the population; a struggle against clericalism, while retaining freedom of conviction; defence of its positions in the army, because 'with the support of the army, the party can be a significant force'; officials who served the British to be dismissed from the civil service.

When I asked what reaction there had been in the party to the Cominform-buro's decision on the Yugoslav Communist Party,² they answered that the resolution had not been discussed, and that they had very little material about this.

In conclusion I commented that the world was now split into a democratic and an imperialist camp, which meant that each party formed its foreign and domestic policies on the basis of these historic circumstances.

Semioshkin, the attaché of the legation, was present during the conversation.

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progressive party in Israel, where it is 'following the path laid down by the Great October Revolution'. At present, the party considers its main task to be winning the war, because only when it has defended its territory from the enemy, will it be possible to build a democratic state.

At first the party favoured the establishment of international trusteeship over Palestine (America, Britain, the USSR), but later gave full support to the United Nations' resolution on partition. It is a staunch supporter of cooperation with the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies, since it sees them as the main international support, which will be needed in order to build a democratic socialist state. It is therefore trying to arrange practical links with the Soviet Union in the hope of receiving some advice. For their part, they offer comprehensive information about Israel and the Arab countries. In addition, it would be desirable for the Soviet Union to give moral support to the United [Workers'] Party.

I asked about the party's attitude to the Bernadotte Plan.¹ Levite answered that the proposal to hand over the Negev to the Arabs had met with determined resistance since it would reduce the scale of immigration to Israel. This was something to which they could never agree in any circumstances since immigration was the cornerstone of Zionism. Moreover, if the Negev were handed over to the Arabs, it would become a British base. As for Jerusalem, the party had supported its internationalization, but had changed its initial position under the influence of events, since 'in the course of the war it was proven that the Christian powers pay no heed to the sacred character of this city'. Furthermore, Abdallah, the agent of British imperialist plans in the Near East, had his own ideas for this city, and a progressive party had to take account of this. In Levite's opinion, the progressive movement in Arab Palestine was so weak that at present it had no practical significance, but Mapam kept in contact with it nevertheless. The only real power was Abdallah, against whom they would have to struggle. The party considered that if decisions unfavourable to Israel were taken, the Jews would have to begin a war themselves in order to defend, in particular, the Negev, by force of arms. The party had nothing against the annexation of Western Galilee to Israel.

Speaking about the forthcoming elections to the Constituent Assembly and the prospects for development of the State of Israel, Riffin told me that their pre-election platform had been approved and consisted of the following: in foreign policy, orientation towards the Soviet Union and the new democracies; strengthening links with the Arab democratic movement. On the issue of Arab refugees, Levite said that the party's position included the following: return of refugees after the war, with the exception of 'warmongers'. In the sphere of domestic policy, a resolute struggle against fascist and terrorist organizations. At present the government was pursuing only the Stern group, while members of other fascist and terrorist groups were still at liberty. Legislation to institute a progressive tax, the burden of which would be borne by the bourgeoisie,

1. See Doc. 156, n. 4.

(DIARY: AVP RF, F.089, OP.1, P.1, D.3, LL.5-6, Secret, Meeting: P.I. Ershov – M. Sneh, Tel Aviv, October 9, 1948. In: "Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1941-1953, Parts 1-2", Israeli Foreign Ministry, Russian Foreign Ministry, Israel State Archives, Russian Federal Archives, p. 381) (DIARY: AVP RF, F.089, OP.1, P.1, D.3, LL.21-3, Meeting: P.I. Ershov – Y. Riffin and L. Levite, Tel Aviv, September 23, 1948. In: "Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1941-1953, Parts 1-2", Israeli Foreign Ministry, Russian Foreign Ministry, Israel State Archives, Russian Federal Archives, pp. 363-365)

دافيد بن-غوريون

سرية {٣} سيرن {نقيب} – قائد سرية، ٤) راف سيرن {رائد} قائد كتية، ٥) سغان ألوف {مقدم} رؤساء أجهزة (الطب، المدفعية، وغيرها)، ٦) ألوف {لواء} – قائد لواء – ٥) رؤساء شعب {قائد جبهة – لواء جبهة)، ٧) روش ماتيه كلالي – راماتكال – راف ألوف {رئيس هيئة الأركان – جنرال}.

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٤٨/٦/١٦، يوم الأربعاء

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يوميات الحرب

١٩٤٧ - ١٩٤٩

522 – إسرائيل [غاليلي] وشكولنيك [إشكول] جلسا أمس مع بايغين [مناحم بيغن] – قائد الإيتسل]. من المفروض أن تصل سفيتهم غدا أوبعد غد، ٤٥٠٠ طن، زورق إنزال، يحضر ٨٠٠ – ٩٠٠ شخص، ٥٠٠٠ بنديقة، ٢٥٠ رشاش برن، ٥ ملايين طلقة، ٥٠ مدفع بازوكا، ١٠ حاملات برن. (٧) يفترض زيفشتاين (٨) أنه يمكن إنزال كل شيء خلال الليل. في رأيي، يجب عدم تعريض ميناء تل أبيب للخطر. (٩) لا ينبغي إعادتهم. يجب إرسالهم إلى شاطئ غير معروف.

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– تم تدمير المغار قرب غديره، وفجّة [قرب بيتك تكفا]، ووبر عدس [قرب مغديثيل]. «يعملون» [على هدم قرى] في مشكّه [قرب رامات هكوفيش] وفي بيت دجن «يعملون» في الحولة [سهل الحولة]، يواصلون [هدم] حواسه قرب حيفا، السميرية قرب عكا، وجعتون (قرب نهاريا)، منشية شكري القوتلي قرب عكا. هدمت دالية الروحا [قرب الدالية]، سيعملون في البطيمات وصبارين [شرقي زحرون يعقوف]. (١٣)

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٤٨/٦/١٥

(٥) في الواقع، مُنح قادة الألوية رتبة سيغان ألوف (مقدم).

٤٨/٦/١٦

(٧) هنا – أول خبر في «اليوميات» عن إبحار السفينة «الطيناء»، وفيها بعد لا يرد ذكرها إلا بصورة متواترة. أنظر بحثا مفصلا في كتابي أ. بيرنر وش. نكديمون، وأقوال د. ب. غ. في هذا الشأن: «دولة»، ص ١٧٩ – ١٩١؛ «نضال»، ص ١٦٩ – ١٧٩.

(٨) ألكسندر زيفشتاين، مدير ميناء تل أبيب.

(٩) لم يشأ د. ب. غ. المخاطرة بأن يُتهم بأنه انتهك الهدنة في الميناء، ناهيك بأنه اكتشف أمر الإبحار، ولم يكن هناك ما يؤكد أن السفينة ستمكن من تفريغ حمليها كله في ليلة واحدة، وسيترتب عليها العودة إلى عرض البحر قبيل الصباح (بيرنر، «الطيناء»، ص ١٠٦؛ نكديمون، «الطيناء»، ص ١٤٢ – ١٤٣).

(١٣) نُفذت أعمال الهدم في قرى متروكة، وفي أحياء عربية في المدن المختلطة.

تحريّر: غريشون ريفلين وإحسان أوران
ترجمته عن العبرية: سامير جابور
مراجعة وتقديم: صبري جريس



مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية

(‘War Diaries, 1947-1949’, David Ben-Gurion, 1947-1949, p. 411. Edited by Gershon Rivlin & Elhanan Orren, Translated to Arabic by: Samir Jabbour)