

Ben-Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry

1948–1963

Ariel L. Feldestein

Ben-Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry

Ben-Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry examines David Ben-Gurion's influence on the relationship between the State of Israel, the Zionist Organization and American Jewry between 1948 and 1963.

This volume is divided into three parts in accordance with Ben-Gurion's terms as Prime Minister of Israel: Part I is concerned with the establishment and consolidation of the state from 1948 to 1953; Part II looks at the period from 1953 to 1955 when Ben-Gurion resigned from the premiership; and finally Part III discusses his second term in office from 1955 to 1963. Issues covered include:

- The relationship between the State of Israel and Zionist and non-Zionist Organizations
- The shaping and aims of the Independence Bonds campaign
- Ben-Gurion and USA
- The Sinai Campaign from the perspective of rallying American Jewry
- Ben-Gurion's ideology and his policy with regard to the question of "Who is a Jew"
- The capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann
- The relationship between the State of Israel and the Zionist Organization and American Jewish Committee.

Ben-Gurion, Zionism and American Jewry provides a fascinating insight into Israeli history and development during the period of Ben-Gurion's leadership. As such this book will be of great interest to scholars of Middle East studies, Jewish studies, Israel studies, and ethnicity and nationalism.

Ariel L. Feldstein is the Director of Academic Administration at Sapir College, Israel. His field of expertise is Zionist ideology, the Zionist Movement, and relations between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. His recent publications include: *Gordian Knot—David Ben-Gurion, The Zionist Organization and American Jewry 1948–1963*, Tel-Aviv 2003 (Hebrew); Hagidu "ken" Lazaken. Dialogue with the pioneering spirit, Tel-Aviv 2005 (Hebrew).

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First published 2006
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s
collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

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Translation: Riva Rubin

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writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-96120-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-37240-2 (Print Edition)
ISBN13: 978-0-415-37240-4

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Preface

The main aim of this book is to examine David Ben-Gurion's influence on the nascent relationship between the young State of Israel, American Jewry, and the Zionist Organization. This examination necessitates an assessment of the character and modes of operation of the man who was Israel's prime minister (from the establishment of the state until December 1953 and from November 1955 until June 1963) and minister of defense (from the establishment of the state until December 1953 and from February 1955 until June 1963), the man who was central in shaping Israeli policy in the first two decades of statehood. By dint of his personality, prestige, and the positions he held, he left his mark on the institutionalization of Israel's political structures and substance. Therefore, the research focused on two tangential lines: clarification of Ben-Gurion's relevant ideological stances and analysis of major issues germane to the relationships under discussion.

Various researches discuss Ben-Gurion's ruling concept and the fact that he took for granted that he would determine the standard, obligatory principles of political conduct as the basis for a uniform state framework, thereby limiting the operations of the voluntary political organizations and sectors dating from the Yishuv [Jewish settlement in Palestine] period.¹ In this context, the fields under review included the disbanding of underground organizations and the establishment of the Israel Defense Force (IDF); the establishment of a state education system to replace the various streams; the establishment of state systems for employment and health care and the depoliticization of public services. This research attempts, on the one hand, to examine whether Ben-Gurion's concept of statehood influenced Israel's relationship with American Jewry and the Zionist Organization and, on the other hand, to assess the importance of this relationship in the concept of statehood.

Several studies of Ben-Gurion's leadership are based on the assumption that his main strength lay in the political implementation sphere as demonstrated by his talent for organization, his erection of a power structure and its skillful use in the political mobilization of opportune situations to further the Zionist aims favored by him. There are those who claim that Ben-Gurion's political method was essentially pragmatic. That is, he adapted his policies to the circumstances of a changing reality and directed them to exploit opportunities, even at the expense of ideological principles. As Israel Kolatt put it: "Any attempt to create a Ben-Gurion doctrine, that is, a methodical, well-stated ideological position guiding the deeds of the leader statesman, is doomed to failure. Ben-Gurion's strength is not