Review: Nothing New
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Reviewed work(s):
    Psychological Warfare and Propaganda: Irgun Documentation. by Eli Tavin ; Yonah Alexander
Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2537068
Accessed: 07/01/2010 11:12

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Nothing New


Reviewed by Lenni Brenner

This really is a book that should never have been published. It adds very little to our understanding of the Irgun and its role in the creation of the Israeli state.

There is a rather lengthy historical introduction to Zionism, but it contains nothing factually new, not even about the Irgun, rehashes a few stock lies, as with the fairy tale about Iraqi troops hidden in Deir Yassin, and is utterly devoid of insight. But, perhaps the worst feature of the book is its seventeen prisoners’ speeches form the dock. It is in the genre of highly rhetorical denunciations of the “Nazi-British” as foreign tyrants, and even the most zealous partisan of the Irgun will find the collection boring in the extreme.

Most of the rest of the book consists of communiqués, unfortunately not enough of them from the pre-war Irgun. All of the post-1944 models are from the pen of Begin, which again tends to make for repetition. There are intellectual curios scattered throughout, but only a very few of the Begin era documents are really required reading. Certainly the most important is the “Report of Conference Between Representatives of the UN Special Committee on Palestine and the Commander . . . of the Irgun.” Begin let it all hang out in this 1947 interview: “On the outbreak of the war . . . the Irgun realized that Hitler meant his pronouncement concerning the destruction of the Jews” (p. 216). (A pious liar, their ideological mentor, Vladimir Jabotinsky, wrote The Jewish War Front in 1940, in which nothing about the coming extermination is mentioned.) And, of course, all of Jordan really belongs to the Jews. The future Zionist state would have Arab cabinet ministers. The Jews were really the “de jure majority in the country” (Palestine and Jordan) because the British had kept out those who wanted to come. The future Zionist state would be democratic in the sweet bye and bye, but the country would first have an unelected provisional government which “would last until all of the rightful citizens of Palestine are in the country.” Begin did “not believe in such a phenomenon as independent Arab opposition to Jewish repatriation” (p. 222). It was all “instigated by the British.” Reading this, it is easy enough to see why everyone outside the Irgun, including the vast majority of Zionists, thought of Israel’s future Prime Minister and Nobel Prize winner as a fool and a madman.

There is one rather famous statement of Begin’s, from his speech upon the creation of the Israeli state, in May 1948, that this writer can agree with: “Whoever does not recognize our natural right to our entire homeland, does not recognize our right to any part of it” (p. 245). In other words, if the Zionists aren’t fully entitled to Amman they are not entitled to Tel Aviv. Well now, since most people don’t think Amman is Jewish . . .?