

## David Ben-Gurion *Battle for Authority* Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question: Why did Ben-Gurion want to 'conquer Zionism' and what did that mean in practice?**

### Materials:

- Battle for Authority PowerPoint
- *Battle for Authority* Video
- Copies of *Documents A-L*.

### Plan of Instruction:

*The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.*

1. Pass out Documents A-L.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
  - Slide: The Mission: *In 1918, the small Jewish Labor movement in Palestine is divided into warring factions. Ben-Gurion, then serving in the Jewish Legion, sees that labor is wasting its energy on inter-party feuding instead of focusing its efforts on building up the country. Ben-Gurion believes that it's the Jewish worker's destiny to take the lead in establishing the Jewish state. He meets a like-minded colleague in Berl Katznelson, one of the spiritual leaders of Labor Zionism. As historian Shabtai Teveth notes: "He undertook a task that could justifiably be called a mission impossible: imposing a single authority on the Jewish people – to close their ranks and guide them along a single national course."*
  - Slide: Ahdut Ha-Avodah: *With Katznelson's help, Ben-Gurion merges his group Poalei Tzion with another socialist group to form Ahdut Ha-Avodah in 1919. But Ben-Gurion is only partially successful in his unification effort. The largest workers group, Hapoel HaTzair, refuses to join and remains independent.*
  - Slide: Talent for Administration: *Ben-Gurion takes charge of Achdut Ha-Avodah's administration. He shows talent for running day-to-day operations, organization, problem solving and negotiations -- in contrast to his colleagues who prefer endless deliberations. They're happy to leave him in charge. One of the Achdut Ha'avodah's leaders, Yitzhak Tabenkin, even insists that Ben-Gurion be handed complete control of the secretariat.*

- Slide: Histadrut: *Partly because HaPoel Hatzair refuses to merge into a political party, the Histadrut (organization) is formed in 1920. It's not a political party but a non-political trade union whose purpose is to organize workers and help absorb new immigrants. The Histadrut at the time of its founding numbers 4,433 members. At its inception it has a Labor Center which helps immigrants into the work force, a Sick Fund, an Agricultural Center, and food co-ops. The Histadrut will grow to conclude a construction company, a bank, schools, even communal restaurants called Workers' Kitchens.*
- Slide: Labor Army: *Ben-Gurion is out of the country when the Histadrut is formed and doesn't join right away. He continues to lead Achdut Ha'Avodah. However, Ben-Gurion runs into problems when he argues that Achdut Ha'Avodah should organize a military-like Labor Army and form a commune – in which workers would hand over all their salaries and property for more efficient distribution by the leadership. Ben-Gurion suggests that as Achdut membership grows and they become a great percentage of the new Histadrut, then that organization will be turned into a still bigger commune, until finally the commune includes all of Palestine Jewry. Ben-Gurion's colleagues find his ideas too extreme and reject them. Ben-Gurion quits in protest, a pattern he will follow throughout his life. Each time he either comes back on his own or is begged to return. Those who work with him believe he is indispensable. As one historian says, "With his peerless pragmatism, hypnotic intensity and sheer drive, he convinced his colleagues that, whatever their differences, they needed him."*
- Slide: Histadrut Boss: *On November 8th, 1921, the Histadrut elects Ben-Gurion to its leadership. For fifteen years, until he becomes chairman of the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut is his main area of activity. Although the Histadrut numbers a mere one in sixteen of the Jewish population, Ben-Gurion sees it as the tool to build a single authority. He declares: "My plan is the dictatorship of the Jewish worker in all the national affairs of the Jewish people." Under Ben-Gurion's leadership, the Histadrut grows to permeate every aspect of the worker's life. One writer visiting Palestine notes: "Members of the Histadrut grew food in their own settlements, marketed the produce collectively by their own marketing organization, invested their profits in their own banks, and went to their own doctors, and ran their own schools."*
- Slide: Achilles Heel: *Despite a growing membership, the Histadrut's biggest problem is its lack of funds. While the Histadrut's component institutions, such as the Sick Fund, which collects membership dues, the food co-ops and Banks see profits, there is no direct source of income for*

- the Histadrut's governing body. The Histadrut also suffers from the lack of financial ability of either Ben-Gurion or David Zakay, the Histadrut's Treasurer. The Histadrut Executive Committee is constantly fighting off creditors. It must rely on funds from abroad, mainly the World Zionist Organization, which collects funds in the Diaspora and distributes them among different groups in Palestine.*
- *Slide: Bourgeois Immigrants: The Histadrut's financial woes become acute in the mid-1920s when anti-Jewish decrees in Poland send waves of middle class Jews to Palestine. At first, they bring economic prosperity with the result that, at the 14th and 15th Zionist Congresses, priority is given to city development over the Histadrut's agricultural projects. But when a severe economic crisis hits in 1926 and 1927, the boom skids to a halt. Twice as many Jews leave Palestine as enter, many of them the recent immigrants.*
  - *Slide: Mapai: External pressures, including the scare of having their funding cut, forces the labor parties together. Hapoel Ha-Tzair, which refused to unite with the others in 1919, in 1930 is ready to merge with Achdut Haavoda. The new unified Labor party is Mapai, a Hebrew acronym for Palestine Workers' Party. Ben-Gurion is its head. As a historian notes, "From then on it was Mapai that led the Yishuv through the mandatory period, and that eventually became the largest single party in Zionist Congresses. ... More than any other, this would be the group that would shape the ideology and the institutions of the Yishuv, and later of the State of Israel itself."*
  - *Slide: Conquering Zionism: With a unified labor movement behind him, Ben-Gurion turns his sights on his next goal: Conquering world Zionism. His first goal is for his faction to win big in the 1933 elections to the Eighteenth Zionist Congress. Ben-Gurion tells the Mapai Central Committee: "There is a danger that the elections will seem an everyday matter to us, but we must understand that this time it is a bloody game, and we must approach the elections as a war that will decide our fate."*
  - *Slide: The Rival: Standing between Ben-Gurion and victory is a rival political party that also seeks to take over the Zionist movement. This is the Revisionist movement led by the charismatic Vladimir Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky's party emphasizes military training and a Zionism which more aggressively proclaims its rights. It wants to turn around, or 'revise', Zionist policy which it sees as weak in the face of a British policy rapidly turning anti-Zionist. The Revisionists are up-and-coming having taken 21 percent of the vote in 1931 at the 17<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress. Hostility between Labor and Revisionists is so high it sometimes spills into violence.*

- Slide: Ben Gurion vs. Jabotinsky: *Both Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky focus their efforts on Poland, where the Revisionists have the advantage. Ben-Gurion goes on a 108-day campaign tour. Labor and the Revisionists attack each other with growing acrimony as the election campaign drags on. Jabotinsky is painted as the enemy of labor for criticizing the Histadrut which he calls “a gross cancer in the body of the Yishuv, growing ever more malignant.” Ben-Gurion in turn calls Jabotinsky “Vladimir Hitler” and declares: “We must be on guard lest chauvinism inflame us. Like a putrid weed drawing sustenance from a befouled source, revisionism is liable to mushroom and spread in the Yishuv.”*
- Slide: Arlosoroff Murder: *In the middle of the election campaign, on June 16, 1933, Chaim Arlosoroff, a labor leader, is murdered on a Tel Aviv beach. He has just completed a deal with Nazi Germany to let German Jews leave with their capital and settle in Palestine. The Revisionists condemned the deal. This presumably gives them a motive for wanting to kill Arlosoroff. Three revisionists are accused, it will later turn out falsely.*
- Slide: Revisionists Blamed: *Ben-Gurion exploits the murder to brand all revisionists as guilty. The vote for the Zionist Congress is held in July 1933, a month after the killing. The propaganda has had its effect. Labor comes out the big winner with 44 percent of the vote while the Revisionists drop to 16 percent. In August, at the 18th Zionist Congress, Ben-Gurion is elected to a central position in the Zionist Executive.*
- Slide: Bridging a Divide: *But when clashes between revisionists and Histadrut members continue in Palestine, Ben-Gurion decides that the conflict is harmful to the Jewish community. Unity is called for with the rise of Hitler. He meets with Jabotinsky in London. Surprisingly, the two establish an immediate rapport. They broker several agreements.*
- Slide: A Dream Dissolves: *But when Ben-Gurion brings the agreements to his colleagues for ratification, they reject them. As a historian notes, “Ben-Gurion was his own victim, undone by the hard line he had formerly taken against Jabotinsky and his movement. While he was capable of a sudden about-face, most of his fellow party and Histadrut members were not.” Ben-Gurion’s hopes for a united Zionist movement vanish as Jabotinsky and his revisionist party split off. A historian writes, “Ben-Gurion’s dream of creating an all-inclusive Zionist consensus evaporated. In 1935 Jabotinsky and his movement founded their New Zionist Organization. ... Thus rose two distinct and opposed Zionist entities, the organized Yishuv and the “dissidents,” the New Zionist Organization ... From then on Zionism would speak and act with two voices, in two opposite directions.”*

3. Play video: *Battle for Authority*

Introduce inquiry question: Why did Ben-Gurion want to ‘conquer Zionism’ and what did that mean in practice?

4. Whole class discussion:

- Sometimes the murder of a single individual can have a profound impact on world affairs — for example the murder of Archduke Ferdinand leading to World War I. What were the circumstances that made the Arlosoroff murder such a key event in Zionist history?
- What do you think are the positives and negatives in Ben-Gurion’s character and judgment?
- Ben-Gurion warned his Mapai colleagues that the elections would be different: “a war of life and death.” What do you think he meant by that?
- Why did Ben-Gurion put such an emphasis on unity and authority?

5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

**Document A: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

The first step was to unify, to get rid of the many small parties that bedeviled the Yishuv and create one major framework for all Eretz-Israeli workers. Ben-Gurion felt this was the only way to recruit and group together all available human resources, which otherwise would be wasted by interparty quarrels, and direct them to the nation-building task that was so close at hand.

***Vocabulary***

Yishuv: a term referring to the Jewish community in the land of Israel.

Eretz-Israel: Hebrew for ‘land of Israel.’

*Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 133-134.*

**Document B: “*Ben-Gurion: A Biography*”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)**

[Ben-Gurion] met his first challenge when he presented the unification proposal to his own party, Poalei Zion, at a conference in February 1919. His task was not easy, for he was still a minor leader and anti-dogmatic in his socialist views. However, he possessed the gift of hurling himself into the fray with all his fiery temperament. The conference decided, by a majority vote, to support the unification proposal; but a Hapoel Hatzair conference convened at the same time now opposed the idea. Refusing to accept that verdict, Berl Katznelson and Ben-Gurion now convened a “general conference of all the workers of the Land of Israel”. The eighty-one delegates adopted the unification plan formulated by Berl and decided on a name for their new organization: Ahdut ha-Avodah (“Labor Unity”). One of the important resolutions adopted at the conference demanded “international guarantees for the establishment of a free Jewish state in the Land of Israel that would strive for the creation of a Jewish majority in the country under the auspices of a representative of the League of Nations”.

The establishment of Ahdut ha-Avodah was only a partial victory, or a step on the way to victory. At that time, the Zionist labor movements were a minority within the world Zionist movement, and the Palestinian workers were only a minority within that minority. Berl Katznelson and Ben-Gurion nurtured far-reaching aspirations: they wanted to unite the Palestinian workers into a cohesive body that would direct Zionist activity in Palestine, as well as determine the policies of the world Zionist movement. For this purpose, it was essential to unite all the workers in Palestine into a single organization. Ahdut ha-Avodah had the potential to become such a body. But when it became clear that the members of Hapoel Hatzair were not joining the new union, it was necessary to try and establish yet another general organization – above parties – that would unite all the workers in the country. By December 1920 that had been accomplished with the founding of the General Federation of the Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel, known to this day as the Histadrut. Ben-Gurion, however, did not enjoy the good fortune of being among those who formulated the federation’s basic principles.

At that time, he was abroad again, and it was from afar that he followed the establishment of the workers' organization that was of such importance to him.

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 41-42.

**Document C: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

David Ben-Gurion worked and slept at Achdut ha-Avodah’s temporary office on Nahalat Binyamin Street in Tel Aviv, where he served on both the nine-member executive committee and its three-member secretariat, in which only he and Shmuel Yavnieli were active. There was, however, little doubt in the minds of the members as to which of the two was the stronger man. Yavnieli was a zealous keeper of the association’s ethics and ideology, leaving the management entirely in Ben-Gurion’s hands, in practice, if not in theory. Within a short time his colleagues came to believe that nothing could be accomplished without Ben-Gurion.

In the executive committee he translated words into action. Berl Katznelson, Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Itzhak Tabenkin, and the rest of his colleagues were men of spirit to whom endless deliberations were not only a great delight, but an end in themselves. They must have been greatly relieved to realize how ready and willing Ben-Gurion was to take charge of Achdut ha-Avodah’s administration and the running of its day-to-day business. He quickly acquired a reputation for organization, negotiation, and policymaking and became responsible for almost any problem that bedeviled the executive. Rapport with the Poale Zion in Europe and the United States – Ben-Gurion; resumption of negotiations with Ha-Poel ha-Tzair on the issue of the union – Ben Gurion; the creation of new cooperative and the settlement of newly released soldiers – Ben-Gurion; relations with the British Labour Party – “Ben-Gurion will have to go to London.”

He was so delighted with his increased activity and so adept at solving problems that in February 1920 his colleagues proposed that Ben-Gurion alone be in charge of the secretariat. Tabenkin, in particular, was adamant about it. It was some time before this came to pass, but in practice it was accepted that the partnership of Ben-Gurion and Katznelson actually ran Achdut ha-Avodah, with Ben-Gurion in charge of practical matters, Katznelson, spiritual ones.

*Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 142-144.*

**Document D: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

In May [1922] the postmaster general, whose letters had gone unanswered, served notice that if the HEC [Histadrut Executive Committee] cable address fees were not paid within ten days, the address would be invalidated. At times like these Zakay turned to acquaintances for charity, that is, personal loans for a week or two. But since the HEC couldn't hold up its end of these bargains either, he finally had to ask a savings society for an interest-free loan of fifteen Egyptian pounds, committing himself to return it on demand in an explicit promise. “This time [the money will be repaid precisely on time] as the law strictly requires.” The press of creditors disrupted normal work not only at the secretariat, but also at the adjoining Office of Public Works, which implored the HEC to settle its accounts, because “the collectors show up daily, both inside and out of the offices, demanding payment with threats, in voices fit to wake the dead ... and they keep us from working.”

One reason behind the constant proliferation of creditors was simply that the authorized signatories of the HEC, Ben-Gurion and Zakay, who were charged with running its finances, had neither the vaguest knowledge of financial matters nor the slightest inclination to acquire it. Theoretically, Zakay alone was in charge of the treasury, but in practice Ben-Gurion also made deposits and withdrawals. ...

A more basic reason for the HEC's perpetual lack of funds was the method the Histadrut had devised to finance the HEC budget. Whereas its constituent institutions had money coming in – the labor councils and the Sick Fund collected membership dues; Ha-Mashbir, the Office of the Public Works, and Bank ha-Poalim made profits on their operations – the HEC had no direct income. The institutions were supposed to pay “participation fees” to the HEC, but this arrangement resulted in endless bargaining and haggling between the HEC, which referred to them as obligations, and the institution directors, who were against paying them.

*Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 204-205.*

**Document E: “Ben-Gurion: A Biography”, Michael Bar-Zohar (1977)**

At the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Zionist Congresses, it was resolved to give priority to urban development over rural settlement and immigrants possessing means of their own over penniless pioneers. Palestine was to be developed on a business-like, profit basis. In the light of the new trend, which the labor movement quickly dubbed “profit Zionism”, the secretary of the Histadrut [Ben-Gurion] proclaimed:

*...If there is any fantasy that lacks foundation or charm, it is the empty notion that by means of the pursuit of profit, it will be possible to accomplish this unprofitable undertaking – to assemble a dispersed people, with no roots in labor, and to get it absorbed into a desolated, impoverished land. ...*

Ben-Gurion’s pessimistic predictions did not take long to materialize. After two years of prosperity, a severe economic crisis erupted in Palestine, striking first of all the businesses of the new immigrants. In 1926 building stopped, many businesses went bankrupt, and there was severe unemployment throughout the country. The middle-class immigrants, who lacked strong Zionist motivation, began to leave Palestine *en masse*. In 1927, twice as many Jews left Palestine than immigrated to the country. “The middle class came – and failed,” wrote Ben-Gurion. “It had to fail, because it wished to continue in Palestine the same means by which Jews gained their livelihood in the Diaspora; it did not comprehend that Palestine is not like Poland.”

There was, however, a more pragmatic political conclusion to be drawn from this episode. Ben-Gurion was now convinced that the leaders of the Zionist movement “advocate the Zionist idea but are remote from ... the realization of Zionism, except for donating money – more or less – without comprehending that money alone will not build a new land or a new state.” In view of the “decay” affecting Zionism and the feelings of frustration and bitterness entertained by the leaders of the Palestine labor movement, Ben-Gurion thought up a new daring and ambitious plan: to instigate a revolution within the

world Zionist movement and bring it into line with the pioneering path. For this purpose, it was essential for the Palestinian workers and their supporters in the Jewish world to gain the upper hand. With that, he set for himself the next objective: conquest of the Zionist movement.

**Vocabulary**

En masse: in a group; all together.

Source: *Ben-Gurion: A Biography*, Michael Bar-Zohar, Adama Books, New York, 1977, p. 53-54.

**Document F: “A History of Israel”, Howard M. Sachar  
(1976)**

As it developed, labor unification was a political no less than an economic achievement. The federation had little alternative but to operate on two levels, for by 1929 a new series of Arab riots and the growing coolness of the mandatory regime revealed the urgent need for Jewish political consolidation within the Yishuv. The leaders of Achdut HaAvodah, Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi, and of HaPoel HaZair, Yosef Sprinzak and Chaim (Victor) Arlosoroff, sensed that the issues uniting the two labor factions were more important than those dividing them. In January 1930, therefore, the membership of both groups voted approval for a merger. The ensuing united party was known thenceforth as Mapai (Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel), the Land of Israel Workers' party. In large measure the guiding spirit of the new body was Berl Katznelson, an authentic giant of the Palestine labor movement. A ruggedly built, tousle-headed man, a veteran of the Second Aliyah, Katznelson founded the newspaper *Davar* in 1925 as the organ of the Histadrut and remained its editor until his death in 1944. From the mid-1920s, the entire cultural program and doctrinal orientation of Jewish labor strongly reflected his influence. It was chiefly Katznelson's genius that steered Mapai away from the traditional theorizing complexities of Zionist politics and concentrated instead on pragmatic gains for Jewish workingmen and the Jewish National Home.

By 1933, as a result, this judicious blend of nationalist idealism and Socialist gradualism ensured Mapai control not only of the Histadrut (the reservoir of its strength in all future years), but also of the National Assembly and of the Jewish Agency's political department. From then on it was Mapai that led the Yishuv through the mandatory period, and that eventually became the largest single party in Zionist Congresses. The international situation favored Labor Zionism, as well, for the economic crisis of the 1930s popularized leftist causes everywhere. It is of interest, moreover, that despite the larger numbers and the more intensive radicalism of the Third Aliyah, the Yishuv's vast labor apparatus remained essentially in the hands of the prewar Second Aliyah: of such experienced veterans as Katznelson, Ben-Gurion, Ben-Zvi, Sprinzak, David Remez, and

Yitzchak Tabenkin, most of them born in the 1880s. More than any other, this would be the group that would shape the ideology and the institutions of the Yishuv, and later of the State of Israel itself.

*Source: A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, Howard M. Sachar, Alfred A. Knopf, 2007 (First published 1976), p. 159.*

**Document G: “Ben Gurion: Prophet of Fire”, Dan Kurzman (1996)**

His new Mapai Party would have to conquer the whole Zionist movement and then, with himself at the helm, no Zionist would dare challenge destiny.

Thus, on September 27, 1930, in Berlin, Ben-Gurion rose and hammered his gavel to open the founding conference of the World Congress of Labor *Eretz Yisrael*. This would be the workers’ answer to the W.Z.O. [World Zionist Organization], which for so long had feared and fought labor power in Palestine. Since stealing the reins from the bourgeois W.Z.O. seemed impossible, Ben-Gurion’s new organization would have to devour it. But his Mapai colleagues did not think it could. Wasn’t it strictly Ben-Gurion’s personal toy? Who would accept him as the leader of world Zionism – this scruffy little man who hated diplomacy? Besides, they had not forgotten his “irresponsible” call for a revolt against the British. No, they would not give up their seats in the Zionist Executive and join his maverick group. Ben-Gurion grumpily accepted the decision. Somehow he would scratch his way to the Zionist summit and topple Chaim Weizmann from his perch. ...

The Seventeenth Zionist Congress, convening in Basel in July 1931, would decide. Worker unity in Palestine had cleared the way for a great victory by labor, which had won 29 percent of the delegates and for the first time emerged as the largest single group in the Congress. Ben-Gurion was as delighted as he was surprised. Labor might, after all, soon dominate the W.Z.O. Could he then more easily thrust to power inside this organization than outside it? This possibility intrigued him as he considered the opposition.

First there was Weizmann. Ben-Gurion had long thought he should retire from the presidency, noting once in his diary that the man was “ridiculous and wretched.” Still, he saw merit in the view of other Mapai leaders who argued that Weizmann was “the best of the bourgeoisie.” The man, after all, supported the “conquest of labor,” even if he synthesized the party’s “practical” Zionism with his own “political” brand. The real danger to labor, they stressed, was Vladimir

Jabotinsky, whose right-wing Revisionist Party had gained a highly respectable 21 percent of the delegates and could be the wave of the future. So now Ben-Gurion played with a new tactic: Let Weizmann hold on to the presidency until Labor could crush Jabotinsky and surge to the top in the next Congress two years later.

Jabotinsky, in any case, had to be stopped, in Ben-Gurion's view. He was fanatical, unrealistic, antisocialist. Besides, he had occasionally been more visionary than Ben-Gurion, backing, for example, the formation of a British-led Jewish Legion in World War I, while Ben-Gurion still plumped for Turkey. He was, moreover, a noted poet, playwright, philosopher and linguist, a powerful speaker and a magnetic personality despite his mild professorial appearance, with high forehead, tight thin lips, stubby nose, and eyes that probed through round black-rimmed glasses. He was, to Ben-Gurion, a man to be feared – and envied. ...

Ben-Gurion, somewhat paradoxically, admired Jabotinsky with the disturbing ardor of a warrior finding something of himself in the soul of the enemy. For Jabotinsky too was single-minded, decisive, utterly unshakable in his convictions. Ben-Gurion, however, had only scorn for his foe's tactical thinking. Jabotinsky had been a powerful member of the Zionist Executive in the early 1920s but, hoping to force a showdown with the British, he resigned so he could organize a hard-line party. This party seemed doomed to remain a black-sheep minority in the Zionist movement, while Jabotinsky himself had been banned from Palestine as a troublemaker and was living in London. No, not pragmatic at all. Yet now, to Ben-Gurion's surprise and chagrin, Jabotinsky stood as the central threat to his quest for world Zionist domination.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: Prophet of Fire, Dan Kurzman, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983, , p. 175-178.*

**Document H: “Lone Wolf”, Shmuel Katz (1996)**

*[Excerpt from article titled “Warning” by Vladimir Jabotinsky which appeared in newspaper Doar HaYom Jan. 28, 1929]*

There has been created in the body of our community an organ which has been inflated seven times its natural size and weight. ...

Not by savings from his earnings, not by the pitiful Histadrut tax has this workers’ body built its “national home” in the heart of our National Home. The blindness and the stupidity of the Zionist Organization have poured down on its head a rain of gold and, as though overnight, they have made of it what workers of the Western countries have not been able to achieve in fifty years of development. ... In this abundance of gifts the Jewish worker, as an individual, has remained poverty-stricken, without assurance for his future...

But the party luxuries, palaces, the institutions, the offices, the crazy multiplication of branches of the organization, the artificial power in this sham organization, the intoxication which is the curse of all artificial power – all these have had their effect, and now there stands before us a worker, a flower in the garden of national regeneration ... like a stalk which has grown in over-fertilized ground.

The best of Israel’s blood? Perhaps; but not the best of its morality, and this is more important.

*Source: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p. 1107-1108.*

**Document I: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

[*Ben-Gurion to the Mapai Central Committee Meeting, March 15, 1933*]

We face a war of life and death. This time we must regard our preparations for the Congress as the central issue, vital to the entire movement. There is a danger that the elections will seem an everyday matter to us, but we must understand that this time it is a bloody game, and we must approach the elections as a war that will decide our fate. We can win this war and become the majority at the Congress.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 413-414.*

**Document J: “Ben Gurion: Father of Modern Israel”,  
Anita Shapira (2014)**

Ben-Gurion set himself the objective of achieving a labor movement majority at the next Zionist Congress, to be held in Prague in the fall of 1933. In a party discussion, the majority expressed doubts about whether this was possible. The Zionist middle class was leery of the young leftist party that had rapidly developed into a real force. When the Zionist Executive for 1931 was installed, highly respected newspapers both inside and outside Palestine expressed doubts about the ability of a workers' representative to serve on the executive body of the Zionist Organization in a role resembling that of a foreign minister. At the time, Mapai's most prominent representative was Chaim Arlosoroff, a brilliant young German-educated intellectual and former member of Hapoel Hatzair. He took over the political department of the Jewish Agency Executive. (The Jewish Agency had been established in 1929 to broaden the scope of the Zionist movement by including very wealthy Jews. This did not work out, and the Jewish Agency Executive soon became practically identical with the Zionist Executive.) Arlosoroff had managed to surprise everyone by establishing good communications and relations of trust with the British high commissioner in Jerusalem, more successfully than any of his predecessors in the political department. Despite this success, when Ben-Gurion proposed taking over the Zionist movement in Eastern Europe, his colleagues in the leadership remained doubtful. But they did not stop him. Once Ben-Gurion had decided to execute a mission, it would have been easier to stop a raging bull.

Ben-Gurion approached his objective with the thoroughness of a party functionary who knows that the secret of electoral success lies in organization. In April 1933 he went to Poland, the primary stage for high drama in the upcoming elections for the Zionist Congress. In previous elections, 67,000 in Palestine had paid the shekel (Zionist Organization dues), whereas in Poland there were some 250,000 members. The Revisionists were in the ascendancy there. ...

In the 1931 elections, less than a quarter million voters had cast ballots, but in 1933 more than half a million voted. When the count was concluded, Ben-Gurion could feel satisfied with his efforts.

Although the labor movement did not gain fifty percent of the vote, it got forty-four percent, making it the swing party in the Zionist Organization.

On 16 June 1933, with the election at its height, Chaim Arlosoroff was shot and killed on a beach in Tel Aviv. He had just returned from negotiations with the German government on a transfer agreement that would enable German Jews to take their capital out of the country and settle in Palestine. To the Revisionists, who were trying to organize a worldwide boycott of Germany, Arlosoroff's act was akin to treason, as their paper, *Hazit Ha'am*, said on the day before the murder. It is therefore not surprising that Betarists were suspected of the murder. A new wave of tension and violence erupted both in the Yishuv and in Poland, and again later during the trial of the three who were arrested. Two of them were cleared, and the third, Avraham Stavsky, was convicted, but his sentence was overturned on appeal.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel, Anita Shapira, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2014, p. 78-79.*

### Document K: “*Lone Wolf*”, Shmuel Katz (1996)

The campaign against the Revisionist Party, and specifically against Jabotinsky, was opened within hours of Arlosoroff’s death. Mr. Ben-Gurion’s telegram of condolence from Poland, where he was electioneering for the Eighteenth Congress, contained a transparent hint; and immediately after that, the Labor Party press flung wide the gates of denunciation of the Revisionist Party as the “inciters of Stavsky.” The Jewish press throughout the world, with few exceptions, primed by the authoritative declaration by national leaders, at once treated the charges as proof. For many weeks, a pall of horror and revulsion hung over the Jewish communities throughout the world. Most people, following the lead of the newspapers, seemed to accept without a moment’s reflection what the Labor leaders (presumably responsible people) had declared as a fact. The barrage of abuse continued day after day both in Palestine and in the greatest Diaspora country – Poland – where Ben-Gurion directed article after article, replete with untruths religiously supplied by the correspondent of *Haint* from Palestine, and with all the rumors that were being circulated in Palestine, reviling the Revisionists as “fascists,” “Hitlerites,” and inciters to murder.

In his articles, Ben-Gurion made no secret of the fact that his concern was not with the question of justice in Palestine. He quite uninhibitedly declared that the object of all his attacks on Jabotinsky was to achieve victory in the elections and to destroy the Revisionist Party. He was, he wrote at one point, “less interested in whether Stavsky is the murderer or not, than in Jabotinsky.” Stavsky was, he wrote, “an active Revisionist, a loyal pupil of his master, standing under the supreme and exclusive orders of Vladimir Jabotinsky, as *Rosh Betar*.” This was indeed Ben-Gurion’s overriding purpose. The fact of the juxtaposition of the congress elections with the murder of Arlosoroff merely gave him what seemed a golden chance to achieve his ambition of breaking the Revisionists.

*Source: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p. 1364.*

**Document L: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948”, Shabtai Teveth (1987)**

Between October 10 and November 11, 1934, Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky held twelve meetings in London; the talks conducted in the Zionist office, in which Ben-Gurion also took part, were merely a smokescreen for the other, truly important ones. They opened in [Pinhas] Rutenberg’s hotel, in a cold and official manner. When Ben-Gurion entered Rutenberg’s room at 6:00 p.m., he found Jabotinsky already there. “I greeted him without shaking hands,” Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary and later in a letter to Mapai. “He stood, offered his hand, and asked, ‘Don’t you want to shake my hand?’” Ben-Gurion mumbled something in astonishment and proffered his hand. They addressed each other throughout as “Sir,” but gradually, in the course of the talk – which lasted, said Ben-Gurion, until midnight – “the formal barrier fell.” Moreover, in reviewing the principal issues of the Zionist world they found themselves in accord more often than not. ... their likemindedness on so many important issues sparked a hope in each that they could overcome their differences and reach a full understanding. ...

At their second meeting Jabotinsky accepted Ben-Gurion’s federation plan as a solution to the Arab question. This undoubtedly encouraged readiness in Ben-Gurion to move toward his conferee on other issues. ...

Two more meetings – one in Rutenberg’s office and the other in Ben-Gurion’s hotel – prepared the ground for the fifth, decisive meeting. It continued for fifteen and a half hours, from 4:00 p.m., October 26, to 7:30 a.m., October 27, and during it both Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky signed the nonviolence pact (agreement A) and the labor accord (agreement B). With regard to a discipline accord (agreement C) on the relations between the Zionist Organization and the revisionist movement, they prepared only an outline; final editing was put off since at this stage Ben-Gurion wished to consult with his colleagues in the Zionist Executive. ...

He worked always to establish authority, first in the party and Histadrut, then in the Zionist Organization. Both the negotiations he conducted to broaden the coalition after the 1933 Zionist Congress

and his London agreements has as their goal what he called the institution of discipline – in other words, authority. And just as he had once tried to make a ministry, or an executive, out of the HEC collegium, so he now had it in mind to fashion a sort of government out of the Zionist coalition in preparation for the day when it would become a potential government of the Jewish people in all the lands of their dispersion.

But if Ben-Gurion thought that peace within and peace without were attainable and that he was only a step away from laying the foundations of Federal Palestine and a full Zionist consensus, reality proved him dead wrong. ...

The day after he returned to Palestine, at a Central Committee meeting on November 20, Ben-Gurion saw for himself the consternation over the negotiations and the fury over their signature. His total disregard of an explicit prohibition hurt his colleagues much more than he had expected. ...

Ben-Gurion was his own victim, undone by the hard line he had formerly taken against Jabotinsky and his movement. While he was capable of a sudden about-face, most of his fellow party and Histadrut members were not. ...

All that Ben-Gurion had sought to prevent by means of the London agreements came about. Their rejection was the determining factor in Zionism's fateful factionalizing and ongoing internal strife. The Revisionist National Workers' Organization, which would have been dissolved had the little agreement led to the big agreement, grew stronger. In 1935 Jabotinsky and his movement founded their New Zionist Organization. In the wake of this development the Haganah, too, split, and what was at first the Haganah B, with an undefined revisionist tendency, developed into the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization), or just Irgun, under the leadership of the Revisionist Party. Thus rose two distinct and opposed Zionist entities: the organized Yishuv, comprising the Zionist Organization, the Haganah, and the Histadrut, and the "dissidents," the New Zionist Organization, the Irgun, and the National Workers' Organization.

From then on Zionism would speak and act with two voices, in two opposite directions.

Thus, too, Ben-Gurion's dream of creating an all-inclusive Zionist consensus evaporated.

*Source: Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 481-493.*

**Guiding Questions**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why does Ben-Gurion want to unify labor Zionists?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is the Histadrut?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why did Ben-Gurion's agreement with Jabotinsky fail?

In the space below answer the following: *Why did Ben-Gurion want to 'conquer Zionism' and what did that mean in practice?*