

British
Parliamentary
Debates on the
Armenian
Genocide,
1915-1918

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and
Eric Aveybury

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British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide 1915–1918

Eric Avebury (foreword)
Ara Sarafian (comp., ed. and intro.)

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Foreword

This book is a compilation of references to the Armenian Genocide in both Houses of Parliament during and immediately after the Great War of 1914-18, together with some of the materials on which Members based their assessments. It shows that Parliament was active then, not only in drawing attention to the Genocide, but in correctly identifying it as 'absolutely premeditated and systematic'. Today, there is a great deal of additional evidence in the public domain, from the archives of the central powers and the Ottomans, and from hundreds of poignant letters and diaries of survivors and independent witnesses, confirming that initial verdict.

The debates assumed that the survivors of the Genocide would be restored to their lands under international protection, with the United States mentioned as the likely trustee power. Not to allow the Armenians to govern themselves in the areas where they were the major element before the war would 'put a premium on massacre', as Aneurin Williams said. Tragically, the commitment evaporated, just as the promises made to refugees ethnically cleansed in Bosnia have been forgotten even sooner in our own time.

Another note would be familiar to a modern audience: the Genocide was part of a policy which, according to Viscount Bryce, had been entertained for some time, but the Ottoman authorities 'hesitated to put it into practice until they thought the favourable moment had come'. As with Hitler's attempts to exterminate the Jews, there had been earlier massacres and lesser violations of human rights, but the final solution had to await the cover of a world war.

Nor could anybody reading the evidence escape the conclusion that there is another parallel with the Holocaust. As Goldhagen writes in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, ordinary Germans were persuaded to participate actively in the murder, torture and rape of Jews because they had been thoroughly indoctrinated with the notion that Jews were evil and a threat to the German state. The Nazis added the gas chambers, but they still had the death marches, in which Jewish victims were deprived of basic human needs, given no medical attention, and