

BATTLING THE STATUS QUO:  
THE DISCOURSE OF THE BRITISH UNION  
OF FASCISTS,  
1932-1940

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

On the first of February, 1933, a resident of London's North End may have stopped in the morning chill to talk to a young man wearing a black fencing shirt and grey trousers.<sup>1</sup> "For only one penny," the young man exclaimed, "you can read the first issue of the *Blackshirt*." The paper's title, printed in bold black lettering, aligned with a lightning bolt on the left and the Italian fasces on the right, covered the top of the page.<sup>2</sup> In the center stood the towering figure of Sir Oswald Mosley, with his mouth open, pointing to the headline of his particular article: "Drastic Action or Disaster."<sup>3</sup>

The *Blackshirt*, along with *Action* and *Fascist Week*, were the products of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) Press.<sup>4</sup> The BUF, under the leadership of Sir Oswald Mosley, established a press division of their corporation in order to disseminate its ideas throughout Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> The means of producing and distributing these papers was not excessively complicated. Usually, a fascist wrote the article, and the editor, through selection of articles and through editing, controlled the discourse therein. After the editor

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<sup>1</sup> "The Men Who Sold you This," *Blackshirt*, June 24, 1933, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: British Union of Fascists Press, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* "Drastic Action or Disaster," *Blackshirt*, February 1, 1933, 1.

<sup>4</sup> These papers are accessible at <http://www.britishonlinearchives.co.uk/>.

<sup>5</sup> "BUF Governing and Financial Documents," September 1936, 12-30.

formatted the paper, it went to the BUF's own printing press in London for publication. Young adults, wearing a BUF uniform, sold these papers at rallies and on street corners.<sup>6</sup>

There were several reasons why the BUF produced these papers. First, this was an effective means of pushing fascist doctrine and fascist propaganda out into the public sphere. BUF leaders designed these newspapers to be recruiting tools. Second, these newspapers provided continuity in ideology and continuity in policy for BUF leadership nationwide. Finally, they were a means to reinforce the beliefs of BUF members.

While working to infiltrate the BUF, an agent of the MI5, Sir Vernon Kell, found the propaganda produced by the BUF Press to be "extremely clever."<sup>7</sup> *Action*, the *Blackshirt*, and *Fascist Week* were just that. Through use of simple, but nuanced, language, British fascists wrote propaganda that spoke to the conservative desire for order and cultural rejuvenation while encouraging socialists through calls for a planned economy. Several themes, such as a new order, victimization, and us versus them claims frequently occur over the eight year period of the BUF Press's publications.<sup>8</sup> These themes drew upon and created fears of societal collapse to justify the need for fascism to save Britain.

Several historians have made use of these publications, as well as Lord H. Harmsworth Rothermere's tabloid, the *Daily Mail*,<sup>9</sup> as primary research material in their

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<sup>6</sup> *Blackshirt*, June 24, 1933, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Andrew quoting Sir Andrew Kell from "Kell to Scott (Home Office), 1 Aug. 1934, enclosing report no.2 on the BUF," in Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm: the Authorized History of MI5* (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 2009), 191.

<sup>8</sup> Found at <http://www.britishonlinearchives.co.uk/> last accessed April 17, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Rothermere was the proprietor of the *Daily Mail* and the head of the Ministry of Munitions after 1916. It was at the Ministry of Munitions that Rothermere encountered Mosley, who also served in the Ministry of Munitions as a government negotiator with industrial business owners. Rothermere was politically conservative, and he briefly flirted with fascism when the BUF started gaining popularity in 1932; see Stephen Dorril, *Black Shirt: Sir Oswald Mosley & British Fascism* (New York, Penguin Books, 2007), 31-32

studies of British fascism. The historians who derive most of their analyses from these fascist publications do not discuss these newspapers in great detail. As the academic debate to interpret Mosley's British Union of Fascists shifts from the actions of leaders to the culture of fascism, there is room to analyze fascist publications in terms of the worldview they purport.

From the early sixties to today historians have described British fascism in two forms: British fascism as a whole, which includes analyses of several fascist groups in a single narrative; and fascism in terms of a particular organization or person. Until the turn of the century, the academic debate regarding Mosley's BUF revolved around which particular moment was the turning point that changed the BUF from potential political contender to a radical and anti-Semitic organization. Other scholars of the last three decades have questioned the legitimacy of British fascism as a valid political movement in British society. The most recent historical trend has focused on social groups in fascist culture.

Colin Cross was the first to compose an academic history that regarded British Fascism as a diverse political movement. Cross emphasized prominent BUF members, such as William Joyce, the infamous "Lord Ha Ha," and Sir Oswald Mosley. Also, Cross pointed to the Olympia Rally as the event that popularized British Fascists as violent thugs in British opinion.<sup>10</sup> Correspondingly, the popular image of Mosley shifted from that of a viable, charismatic political leader to an image of a political thug. Shortly after the Olympia Rally, Lord Rothermere could not convince Mosley to drop "fascism" from the BUF name and to ally his party with the Conservatives. Cross contends that Mosley's

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<sup>10</sup> The Olympia Rally had an attendance of approximately 12,000 people, many of whom were not Blackshirts. The resulting violence, spurred by anti-fascist agitators, made the newspapers, see "Sir O. Mosley at Olympia: Interruptions and Ejections," *Times*, June 8, 1934, 14.

failure to ally with Conservatives caused Rothermere to withdraw his support from the BUF.<sup>11</sup>

Gisela C. Lebzelter challenged the claims made in Cross's *the Fascists in Britain* that Mosley pursued anti-Semitism in order to revive dwindling membership after the violence of the Olympia Rally. Lebzelter suggested that anti-Semitism existed in BUF propaganda as the movement grew from 1931 to 1934, which was prior to the Olympia Rally. She claims the BUF had not suddenly adopted anti-Semitism. But she agrees with Cross that the major turning point in the party's fortunes came when Lord Rothermere left the party. Mosley's desire to engage in anti-Semitism and Nazi-like propaganda techniques had been kept in check by Lord Rothermere until his exit.<sup>12</sup>

Before the death of Sir Oswald Mosley in 1980, Robert Skidelsky produced a biography of Mosley in 1975.<sup>13</sup> Outside of Mosley's autobiography, this academic work was the first to focus on Mosley's personal experience in developing the BUF.<sup>14</sup> Other scholars scolded Skidelsky for his uncritical stance of the controversial political figure. Critics of the biography claim Skidelsky should have outright condemned Mosley, because Mosley was a fascist. Skidelsky recognized that counter-fascist disruptions of BUF rallies led to moments of stress that had erupted in violence. But, in his view, the BUF was not simply a group of thugs. Instead, it was the opponents of fascism that drew BUF members into violence. Several historians disagreed with Skidelsky. These

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<sup>11</sup> Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961).

<sup>12</sup> Gisela C. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England: 1918-1939* (New York: Holmes & Meyer Publishing, 1978), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1968).



historians pointed to the Olympia Rally and the BUF treatment of Jews as evidence of low-brow behaviors in which fascists voluntarily participated.<sup>15</sup>

Richard Thurlow produced two books in the 1980s on British Fascism. The second of these works, *Fascism in Britain*, made use of recently released intelligence material from the United Kingdom's Home Office. Thurlow claims these MI5 sources were limited in veracity because each bureaucracy in the British Government had not fully disclose all its files; however, the intelligence reports did provide a better understanding of the "impact of [the] BUF on British Society." These files included objective membership numbers and reports of organizational effectiveness. Thurlow gave a negative critique of Mosley. In Thurlow's opinion, Mosley was an ineffective organizer who was too ambitious with his stated goals.<sup>16</sup>

Julie V. Gottlieb contributed to the historiography of British fascism through her study of fascist women. Historians had largely ignored female fascists until *Feminine Fascism* was published in 2003. One notable exception is the discussion of Oswald's two wives: Cynthia Mosley and Dianna Mitford; however, including wives of fascist leaders did not provide the cultural significance women held in the BUF. Gottlieb argued that women in several fascist movements were not simply pawns of their male counterparts. They effective, emotional orators and propagandists who were essential to the survival of their respective parties.<sup>17</sup>

Gottlieb also contributed a study of the culture of violence within British fascist groups. She suggests that there was a violent aesthetic derived from the hyper-masculine

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Skidelsky, "Reflections on Mosley and British Fascism," in *British Fascism*, ed. Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1980) 78-98. This chapter is Skidelsky's response to criticisms by other scholars.

<sup>16</sup> Richard C. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 135-137.

<sup>17</sup> Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

behavior among the male members of the BUF. Mosley structured the organization to counteract the seeming feminization of early twentieth-century British society. Through explanations of several aesthetic rituals,<sup>18</sup> Gottlieb argued that the BUF were "impotent in the face of cultural resistance"; therefore, representation of the us versus them and victimization themes was not limited to the propaganda produced by the BUF Press. Such world views found their way into day to day activities of the fascists. Furthermore, Gottlieb suggested that the very act of donning a black shirt uniform, and participating in a club that took pride in its masculinity, brought BUF membership to feel justified in violently defending their beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

There is large quantity of writing regarding a political movement that had little success in Britain. Recently, authors writing about British fascism have had to deal with the question of why the current studies of fascism in Britain are not sufficient. There are a couple reasons why reinterpretation is still valuable. First, while historians seek objectivity, they also consistently reinterpret cause and effect through the subjective lens of their current political persuasions. As the generation who lived during World War II passes on, historians can distance themselves from the politicization that former members of the BUF struggled with for decades after the war. The popular negative feelings toward fascism following the war limited the quantity of primary source material available to historians. Some ex-fascists sought to hide their former affiliations rather than face public scrutiny. As a result, they would not release their private writings into

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Gottlieb describes the chants BUF members would engage in at meetings.

<sup>19</sup> Julie V. Gottlieb, "Britain's New Fascist Men: the Anesthetization of Brutality in British Fascist Propaganda," in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Julie V. Gottlieb and Thomas P. Linehan (New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2004), 83-99.

the public sphere.<sup>20</sup> Second, ultra-nationalist groups in Britain are not dead.

Understanding the methods of propaganda and logical arguments fascists used to pull individuals towards their political movement is still relevant in today's Western liberal societies.

More specifically, a study of the discourse in fascist newspapers illuminates the beliefs of those who contributed to the papers and, to a lesser extent, it expresses the values of the readers. As the historiography shifts from the major events the BUF participated in to the culture of fascism, what the average member believed and did becomes paramount. Furthermore, discussion of British fascist propaganda allows historians to synthesize the complexities of the BUF culture in a coherent whole, and then these historians can apply that synthesis to the study of the theory of fascism.

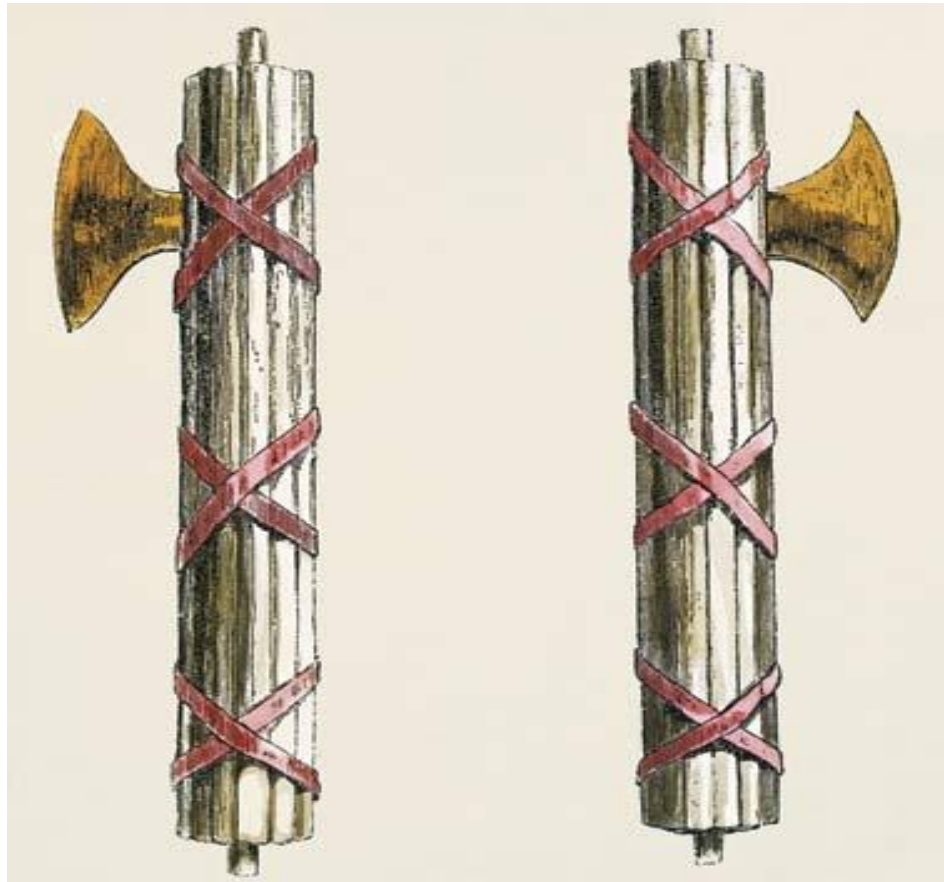
### British Fascism's Historical and Intellectual Origins

The term "fascism," the English equivalent of the Italian "fascismo," etymologically derived from the ancient Roman fasces and the late nineteenth-century radical Italian fascio political groups. Bodyguards of ancient Roman magistrates carried a bundle of twigs with an axe bound to them called "fasces." They used these tools to defend and protect their employer. The symbol came to represent power and unity. Each stick, individually, was weak, but binding the sticks together made them strong. Western cultures have kept this symbol, occasionally displaying it in architecture, for centuries. By the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth-century, Italian revolutionaries adopted this symbol with the creation of revolutionary political groups, the fascii. As a young man,

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Pugh, "Britain and its Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. R.J.B. Bosworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 492.

Mussolini took part in one of these fascii groups, developing the concept of "fascismo" as he consolidated power.<sup>21</sup> Mosley adopted Il Duce's political philosophy, and, along with it, the symbolic fasces.



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Figure 1. An example of the fasces

Ideologically, fascists did not adhere to the classical liberal arguments of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fascists despised individual liberty and the codified negative rights that protected the individual from the impositions of government. British, German, and Italian fascists argued that their political philosophy was an alternative to classical liberalism. There is a clear distinction between the two philosophies to the

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<sup>21</sup>John Whittam, *Fascist Italy* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Found at <http://kids.britannica.com/eb/art-89866/The-fasces-of-ancient-Rome-consisted-of-a-bundle-of>, last accessed August 17, 2012.

authority of the government. Fascist governments, to varying degrees, curtailed individual liberties and seized property they felt was pertinent to the future of the state. Philosophically, they justified such action through articulation of a greater good possessed by the interest of the state over the individual.<sup>23</sup>

There are intellectual roots of fascism found in the romantic and the nationalist movements of the nineteenth-century. Romanticized nationalism encompassed two primary philosophies that most fascists embraced: aestheticism and racism. Aesthetics were very important to fascists for the purposes of projecting strength and unity at rallies, in symbols, and on uniforms. The BUF would attempt to emulate the choreography of Italian and National Socialist rallies through gratuitous displays of British and fascist heraldry, and through cheering crowds, dramatic speeches, and uniformity of dress. These rallies were displays of masculinity, order, and power to invoke romanticized nationalist sentiment.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, fascists continued the nineteenth-century trend of conceptualizing the state around a specific ethnic group. These "imagined communities" resulted in romantic popular myths among their peoples. Often these myths described a protagonist "race" which would guarantee freedom and liberty. The antagonists of these myths were the strange or the uncivilized. Typically, these were aesthetically displeasing peoples of darker skin color or differing facial features; therefore, there is an aesthetic quality in

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<sup>23</sup> See Dorril, *Black Shirt*, 31-32, for a brief explanation of Mosley's experience with nationalized industry during World War I; see also Sir Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: British Union of Fascists Press, 1932), 83-101, for an explanation of when it is necessary for the state to seize industry; see also Goetz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan, 2007), for an example of fascist state control in practice.

<sup>24</sup> Youtube.com has several videos of BUF rallies., See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPB1jy4vmFA>, last accessed May 17, 2012; see also Julie V. Gottlieb, "Britain's New Fascist Men," in *the Culture of Fascism: Visions from the Far Right in Britain*, 90-97.

nationalist movements as many people found beauty in certain human features, which they associated with a specific race. It did not matter if an ethnic group coexisted and amalgamated with the dominant group for centuries. The dominant group viewed these minorities as strange, ugly, uncivilized peoples who did not follow prescribed social norms.<sup>25</sup>

Racism, however, was not part of a purely romantic movement. A pseudo anthropological science regarding race, specifically concerning the characteristics inherent in a specific race, emerged before the turn of the eighteenth century. This discipline was "race theory." Several scientists postulated theories about the shape and size of people and those people's relation to their environment. Some of these theories are simply astounding. Christoph Meiners espoused the theory of polygenism, a claim that whites were the descendents of Adam and Eve. Blacks, therefore, emerged from some non-Biblical event.<sup>26</sup> But these pseudo-scientific religious ideas had less impact on fascism than did the theory of natural selection.

As racism and nationalism intertwined in the Nineteenth century, an eclectic group of social theories appeared which we refer to today as "social Darwinism." Ultimately, social Darwinism, eugenics, and national racial myths had a greater impact on the National Socialists than it did on the BUF. Both Mussolini's and Mosley's conception of fascism allotted some possibility for miscegenation because the result was a broader gene pool for the nation to make use of. The nation state, in Mosley's view, would not be threatened by mixed breed individuals, because the character of the state held innate characteristics that had developed over several centuries. The Social

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<sup>25</sup> George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York, Howard Fertig, 1978), x-xxx.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 17-34.

Darwinist conception of "survival of the fittest," therefore, was relevant to the BUF, but it did not take on the "pure blood" Aryan conceptions that were so important to Adolf Hitler's Nazi philosophy.<sup>27</sup>

Another major intellectual trend to influence fascism was Marxist-socialism. Economically, fascists sought control of markets and the means of production through the corporate state. This outlook on economics resulted in a movement away from free market economics to governmental regulation. Specifically, a fascist government would intervene in, or take control of, private industry to protect an industry from foreign competition and to ensure the industry provided a level of social standards, such as minimum wages, for its workers. Such an economic philosophy derived from George Sorel's revision of Marxism, called syndicalism, which influenced Benito Mussolini.<sup>28</sup>

A point of continuity among fascists is the belief in corporatism; however, implementation of the corporate state by fascist governments varied in method. Mosley sought to establish syndicalism through the "national corporations." These corporations were to represent the "employers, workers, and consumers." The fascist government, through use of government bureaucracy, such as "commodity boards," would use policy to moderate disputes between the three groups.<sup>29</sup> For example, if citizens believed the price of steel goods to be too expensive, they could petition the fascist government to set price controls, or trade with other nations, with the intent of reducing the consumer price. The government could subsidize wheat production, with a stipulation to appease the trade

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Thurlow, "The Developing British Fascist Interpretation of Race, Culture and Evolution" in *The Culture of Fascism*, 67; see also Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Houghton Mifflin Books, 1999), Vol. 1 Ch. XI.

<sup>28</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *the Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 37-92, 196.

<sup>29</sup> "Corporate State," *Action*, January 6, 1938, 9; see also Mosley, *the Greater Britain*, 98.

unions that producers would have to pay their employees certain wages. Fascists expected employers and trade unions to comply with the decision of the state for the greater good of the nation. This was the ideal of the corporate state.

A form of syndicalism, national syndicalism, was one form of corporatism that emerged among several groups of fascists, including the British fascists.<sup>30</sup> The British and the Nazis adapted their policies to their conception of Keynesian economics, specifically they believed government stimulus of the private sectors through deficit spending could overcome recessions, but the Italians did not. Fascists referred to their corporatist perspective as an economic "third force." The resulting systems were not capitalist, but a new order of socialism built upon the fears and tensions of the early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup>

If the intellectual origins of fascism seem paradoxical, given its economically leftist leaning, and its jingoist, hyper-conservative social position, it is because of the several trends fascists incorporated into the fascist economic, political, and social worldview. No single author or philosophy created the eclectic fascist political philosophy. As a result, the left to right political spectrum is insufficient to define fascism. We must consider the authoritarian nature of fascism along with its conservative and liberal leanings.<sup>32</sup>

To complicate matters further, fascists of different regions did not adopt the same philosophy. As Mussolini learned after the 1934 Fascist International in Montreux, universal fascism was little more than a dream.<sup>33</sup> Even within a particular state, such as

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<sup>30</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *Fascist Ideology*, 3-5; see also Oswald Mosley, *the Greater Britain*, 26-35.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 7-9; see also Martin Pugh, "Britain and its Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 491.

<sup>32</sup> Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> John Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, 1.



the United Kingdom, several competing forms of fascism vied for political influence during the inter-war period. British fascists jumped between fascist organizations, citing political ideology as justification for their new affiliations. The central political themes, such as racism, of one fascist group were not a pre-requisite for espousing a fascist ideology. Instead, specific groups, such as the Nazis, adopted nineteenth-century racial theories into their conception of fascism. Mosley made public statements that his form of fascism would result in a classless society, but most fascists sought to reorganize society in to what they believed was an organic hierarchy. These fascists desired a feudal-like social hierarchy within their particular state, which several authors writing for the BUF Press supported.

Furthermore, most elements of a particular fascist political philosophy were not unique to fascism, and an ax bound to a bundle of twigs does not describe a political movement. Totalitarianism existed in Stalin's U.S.S.R., jingoism was prevalent in several Western nations, depression-era Britain and the United States adopted several social welfare policies. It was the cultural regeneration myths that were common among fascists that had unique elements for each particular fascist group. For example, the Nazi concept of "Lebensraum" was a type of nationalism that had unique cultural and racial elements.<sup>34</sup>

Much of the academic debate on fascism is about deducing the common traits among self-titled fascist groups in order to define what makes a political group distinctly "fascist." Roger Griffin compiled a list of these principle traits, often negative descriptions of what fascism is not. The traits included: "regeneration of the national

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 3-4; see also Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War*, ed. Bettina Bien Greaves (Indianapolis IN: Liberty Fund Inc, 1974), 1-2.

community through... rejection of liberalism... [and] conservatism;" "charismatic politics";<sup>35</sup> populism, anti-rational, socialist, and totalitarian.<sup>36</sup>

Griffin was not the only scholar to claim that the concept of fascism is difficult to define. George L. Mosse claimed that to understand fascism we must view fascism "as its followers saw it, to attempt to understand fascism on its own terms." These followers were numerous, and they came from many different cultures. Therefore, Fascism is best understood in the context of a particular group of people, at a particular time, who used the label of fascist in their efforts to reform their economy, their government, and their society. From a synthesis of these cultures, the scholar can establish a "general theory."<sup>37</sup>

It was the "radical right" of the early twentieth-century Conservative Party that provided the political base for fascism in Britain. As believers in the Social Darwinist worldview, the radical right both feared and respected the growing military might of Imperial Germany. British industrial production was not the equivalent of American and German industrial production. After the horrors of World War I, some of the radical right adopted the idea the state needs to ensure a powerful industry to arm and supply the nation's military. In order to accomplish this goal, they sought to unite the country under nationalist values. These radical right followers later became the first British fascists.<sup>38</sup>

Rotha Lintorn Orthman established the first English "fascist" group in 1923. Her British Fascisti (BF) was more of a conservative reaction to the Labour Party's increasing

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<sup>35</sup> Griffin makes an effort to define what "charismatic politics" are. He claims that fascism takes the form of a popular mass movement gaining support through emotional appeal. The result of this is a secular religion.

<sup>36</sup> Griffin, *Fascism*, 4-7; see also Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980) 5-6; Payne also claimed that fascists maintain "a party army;" essentially, fascism is militaristic.

<sup>37</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), x.

<sup>38</sup> Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 8-13; see also David Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 11.

communication with socialist political groups than it was a party dedicated to developing a fascist political philosophy. Critics attacked the BF because the name "Fascisti" showed Italian roots in a party that so fervently claimed British nationalism. Orthman had indeed adopted the name from her Italian counterparts, but she had not fully adopted their ideology. Initially, members of the BF had feared the loss of private property, so they did little to promote fascism as a "third force." Brigadier-General Blakeney changed the organization's name to "British Fascists Ltd" in 1926, and it wasn't until the early 1930s that the BF espoused the corporatist state as the most effective method of economics in governance.<sup>39</sup>

The BF was not very successful. Shortly after its formation, the BF found a good base of membership from middle-class conservatives who were disillusioned and frustrated by World War I. Orthman's mother gave the young conservative 50,000 pounds to establish the BF. Membership dues, and other donations, kept the organization alive thereafter. Several women found roles in leadership, but they had less authority than their male counterparts in the Grand Council. The rest of the organization took a paramilitary structure by dividing members into regiments. BF leadership adopted aesthetics similar to that of Italian fascists in dress, in public speaking, and in symbols. Ultimately, BF leaders were not able to keep members as competing conservative movements siphoned away membership. The Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and Mosley's New Party, later the BUF, drew much of Orthman's leadership away from the BF.<sup>40</sup> Some consideration was given to merging with the BUF, thereby dissolving the

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<sup>39</sup> Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 51-54; see also Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 11-15.

<sup>40</sup> It was from the BF that Mosley found one of his prominent propagandists, Alexander Raven Thomson; see Dorrill, *Black Shirt*, 205.

BF, but Orthman objected. By 1934, with only 300 members, the party suffered bankruptcy. Orthman died a year later.<sup>41</sup>

Arnold Leese was a member of the BF who desired a less moderate fascist party. He left the BF in 1926 and helped create the Fascist League, which later became the Imperial Fascist League in 1928. Much like the BF, the IFL had few members and poor finances. But Leese developed and defined a stronger fascist political philosophy than had Orthman. Initially, this philosophy borrowed heavily from Mussolini's form of fascism, but by 1930 Leese espoused Nazi-like anti-Semitism through a doctrine of Nordic racial superiority. The IFL adopted a black shirt uniform and they exchanged the fasces imposed over the Union Jack for a swastika imposed over the union jack. Their organization also possessed "a paramilitary style and a hierarchical organizational structure." The leadership groomed their most active and capable members to be the future ruling class of Britain. The party survived the government's attempt to prohibit the use of political uniforms in 1937, but the IFL dissolved after the enacting of Defense Regulation 18b in 1940.<sup>42</sup>

The third significant fascist party in Britain was the BUF. Mosley was an aspiring politician with a promising political future when he won the Harrow seat in Parliament as a Conservative in 1918. Disputes with Conservatives over repression in Ireland, and his interest in socialism, caused Mosley to associate with the newly formed Labour Party. Mosley openly embraced Labour by "crossing the aisle" during a meeting of Parliament in 1924. Opinions of Mosley expressed by members of Labour leadership ranged from suspicion to open praise. Through regular practice, Mosley possessed a

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<sup>41</sup> Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 51-57; see also Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 11-15.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-1939: Parties, Ideology, and Culture* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 71-79.

strong oratory skill, controlling body movements to emphasize his words. As a result, several Labour MPs found Mosley's exaggerated speeches to be simply an act, which undermined the weight of the convictions he espoused publically; however, Mosley did have a real passion for political issues. For instance, Mosley desired to stifle rising unemployment through measures he believed had broad political appeal. A following developed around Mosley's personality and vision, which carried him to victory in the 1926 parliamentary election.<sup>43</sup>

As the Great Depression took hold in Britain, Mosley's frustration with the Labour Party over tackling the unemployment issue led him, and several Labour members, to form the New Party. Mosley had an interest in a planned and heavily regulated British economy, so the New Party developed a fascist philosophy of corporatism as a foundational economic principle. Much like the later BUF, the New Party was a movement of youthful politicians seeking to overthrow the status quo.<sup>44</sup>

An emergency parliamentary election was held in 1931. Mosley and all other incumbent members of the New Party lost their seats. This defeat undermined Mosley's ability to influence mainstream politics in the near future, so he turned towards Mussolini's fascist model to revitalize his career. The Italian fascists reciprocated by supporting Mosley, and Mussolini invited the young politician to Italy. The New Party continued to bring in unemployed and frustrated youth with its hyper-masculine culture. Political rallies became boxing matches as communist supporters sparred with Mosley's followers. These bouts did little to change the fact the New Party was on the outside

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<sup>43</sup> Dorril, *Black Shirt*, 81-138; see also BBC, Jonathan Cake, Hugh Bonneville, Emma Davies, *Mosley: The Complete Series*, DVD, directed by John Alexander, edited version at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbwOlmtFiTM>, last accessed April 15, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 162-188.

looking in. No political fringe group could break the two party stronghold of Parliament that came out of the 1931 elections. But Mosley was not willing to concede. Instead, he abandoned the New Party to bring a purely fascist political movement to Britain.<sup>45</sup>

Mosley succinctly explained his frustration with the status quo in his biography:

When we were faced with the great betrayal of the war generation I worked for eleven years in parliament both in the old parties and in independence, to right the wrongs of the men who were promised "the land fit for heroes" and were given the slums and unemployment. Finally, when every other means had been exhausted, came the explosion of fascism.<sup>46</sup>

On the first of October 1932, the British Union of Fascists formally came into existence with 32 founding members. They adopted the Squadristi's black shirt as the official BUF uniform, which Mosley fashioned after his old fencing shirt. Mosley composed a political manifesto, *The Greater Britain*, to serve as the organization's political bible. With an organized party structure in place, additional funding from the Italians, and a political doctrine to draw upon, the BUF needed to spread their worldview to the English. The BUF launched its press division in 1932.

In the following section, I will analyze the discourse published by the BUF Press to show common, recurring themes. These themes express the BUF worldview, and they will elucidate the militaristic character of the organization. Chapter 2 considers Mosley's negative portrayal of the British political elite as decadent and incompetent. By contrast, BUF writers portrayed fascists as young, virile individuals who are organizing to fight the status quo. Chapter 3 describes the connection between fascist antagonism against communists and the development of anti-Semitism within the BUF. Chapter 4 details the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 189-215.

<sup>46</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, preface.

rhetorical strategies that Mosley used to integrate disparate economic, ethnic, and religious groups into the BUF.

### Style and Structure

Mosley began to describe the fascist worldview in the first printing of the *Blackshirt* in February 1933. Over the course of the *Blackshirt's* seven years in publication, the paper changed from being a means of advertising fascist political philosophies to potential recruits, to a means by which the BUF could reinforce the party line among members.<sup>47</sup> Considering how many BUF members simply paid their dues and purchased publications from the BUF Press, often with little interaction within the movement, these publications were possibly the most effective means of communication with British fascists that Mosley possessed.<sup>48</sup>

There were a few regular contributing authors to *Action*, *Fascist Week*, and the *Blackshirt*.<sup>49</sup> William Joyce was one such contributor. In July 1936, Joyce had the second page of *Action* reserved for his weekly column, "The World, The Flesh, and Financial Democracy." Prior to that, Joyce had composed a weekly column for *Action* titled, "Searchlight over Britain." The editor of *Action* at the time, John Beckett, seemingly gave Joyce leeway to use inflammatory rhetoric. Joyce frequently made anti-

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<sup>47</sup> By 1934, BUF Press publications no longer provided articles detailing what Mosley's fascism was. Instead, authors provided policy analyses in relation to current events. See <http://www.britishonlinearchives.co.uk/metadata.popup.php?pid=125-bla>; Last accessed on April 17, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Maxwell Knight, who provided BUF contacts to the British Government, claimed the BUF had nearly 40,000 members; however Andrews claims an investigation found that, "a majority... probably did no more than pay subscriptions and purchase [*the*] *Blackshirt*..." See Christopher Andrews, *Defend the Realm*, 191. Another effective means of communication were large-scale rallies. Mosley traveled England, Ireland, and Scotland where he spoke at a series of rallies in 1934, the most prominent of which was the Olympia Rally. The *Blackshirt* provided a front-page article for these events.

<sup>49</sup> The *Blackshirt* incorporated *Fascist Week* after the latter's short life ended in May 1934.

Semitic remarks in his column, which often drifted from topic to topic so he could attack more than one group or person.

Other contributors to these three aforementioned papers, such as Jorian Jenks, a World War I veteran who wrote under the pen-name "Vergilius," and J.F.C. Fuller, a veteran of both World War I and the Boer War, were less flagrant in their anti-Semitic rhetoric; however, they still engaged in attacking the perceived "Jewish international banking conspiracy."<sup>50</sup> There were a few female contributors, as well. One notable name was that of Baroness Ella van Heemstra, a Dutch aristocrat and mother of Audrey Hepburn. Heemstra wrote for the BUF Press's *Woman Fascist* and the *Blackshirt*. She also participated in Mosley's Women's Division, where she organized "Propaganda Patrol Squads" to sell BUF Press publications.<sup>51</sup>

There were several editors for different publications of the BUF Press, but Bill Leaper, an editor for the *Blackshirt*, is notable because he was one of the few Jewish members of the BUF. Another notable editor was John Becket, an M.P. Mosley befriended after his shift to the Labour Party. Francis Hawkins, who organized the Olympia Rally, served as the Chairman for the BUF Trust Ltd. in the final years of the BUF's existence. This trust oversaw finances for *Action* and the *Blackshirt*.<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, the editors held authority over what they published, but that filter did not exclude opinions from individuals outside of the BUF or its membership. Many of the editorials in the *Blackshirt* do not have an individual's name attached to them.

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<sup>50</sup> Mosley surrounded himself with World War I veterans. Much of the BUF leadership included former pilots Mosley knew during the war, or they were veterans of the war.

<sup>51</sup> Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 99; see also "Birmingham's Beginning: Early Members' Hard Work is Rewarded," *Blackshirt*, March 2, 1934, 1.

<sup>52</sup> [www.oswaldmosley.com](http://www.oswaldmosley.com), accessed April 9, 2012; see also <http://www.oswaldmosley.net/mosleys-men-and-women.php>, accessed Apr. 16th, 2012; see also "BUF Governing and Financial Documents," found at [www.britishonlinearchives.com](http://www.britishonlinearchives.com), last accessed April 23, 2012.



Instead, there is the occasional pseudonym, such as "Lucifer," or no name is listed at all. Even without these names, it is reasonable to assume BUF leaders composed several editorials for the *Blackshirt* because there is continuity in the language used for the purposes of propagating Mosley's conception of fascism. When Mosley composed an article, the vast majority of the time it was a front-page headline. Also, the only constrictions on the length of the article was the size of the paper. Less prestigious contributors received much less space, and published editorials written by non-BUF members were less than a few hundred words.

In the August 5, 1933 issue of the *Blackshirt*, the editor published a complaint stating that "contributions... are far too long [and] many of them are purely destructive in nature." The editor was attempting to stifle articles submitted with ad-hominem attacks. Most likely, the *Blackshirt's* editor sought to avoid libel lawsuits from agitated politicians. As a result of negative responses to articles containing such attacks, the editor refused to publish several submissions.<sup>53</sup> Most of the articles that made it to publication did not name an author, so it is likely there was significant contribution from regular members and the lower echelons of leadership. If there were not contributions from regular members, and articles were only written by BUF leader, then the editor would not have need to tell people to stop submitting long and libelous articles.

The BUF press used its publications to inspire a grassroots feeling for fascism. BUF members sold *Action* and the *Blackshirt* at rallies and on street corners. Leaders introduced a reward for the sale of *Action* in the form of the "Action Press Uniform." The salesman had to be active five nights of the week and he also had to meet the requisite

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<sup>53</sup> "Contributors Please Note," *Blackshirt*, August 5, 1933.

sales quota.<sup>54</sup> An individual purchasing the newspaper would buy directly from a peer and would, possibly, read an article written by a peer. The language of these articles promoted the BUF as a club. BUF Leaders reinforced an image of equality among peers by claiming Fascism would bring about a classless society of equals. Fascists claimed nationalized industry would allow government to level the playing field for society.<sup>55</sup>

Conversely, it is reasonable to argue that there was a clear hierarchy of leadership within this pseudo-military organization. Mosley positioned himself as the benevolent dictator. Praise and reward, such as the "Action Press Uniform," were given to members who contributed the most. Furthermore, the discourse of a classless society of peers was dishonest. British fascists desired and praised the defunct guild system of British feudalism. They believed that the caste division in feudalism was a moral and natural way to structure society.<sup>56</sup>

Providing attainable rewards for members required their energies and input in a common goal, which thereby ingrained active members into the party. Furthermore, a significant source of funding for the publications of the BUF Press derived from the sales of papers. The BUF leaders therefore had to ensure that published material would not cause cognitive dissonance among its readers.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, given that members at the base had input at multiple stages of their production and sale of BUF Press newspapers, through sales, purchases, and writing in a niche market, it is reasonable to conclude that

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<sup>54</sup> Mosley, *My Life*, 303; See also "BUF Governing and Financial Documents," September, 1936, 4; see also "Special Prizes for 'Blackshirt' Sellers," *Blackshirt*, October 11, 1935, 1; the Action Press Uniform was distinct from other BUF uniforms. Even the normal uniforms were composed of different materials. Some were wool, some were silk. Furthermore, wearing the black shirt was a privilege. See Phillip M. Coupland, "The Black Shirt in Britain: the Meanings and Functions of Political Uniform" in *The Culture of Fascism*, 100-115.

<sup>55</sup> Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 83-98, accessed at <http://www.oswaldmosley.com/free-ebooks.htm> on January 22, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> "Fascism and the Roman Catholics: No Interference in a Fascist State," *Blackshirt*, January 5, 1934, 3.

<sup>57</sup> "BUF Governing and Financial Documents."

statements in *Action* and the *Blackshirt* provides a limited reflection of the beliefs held by the reader.

Over the course of eight years, the BUF press developed from printed articles regarding economics and politics to the inclusion of pop culture, after the creation of *Action* in 1936. *Action* continued the role of providing current events reporting. The *Blackshirt*, however, shifted its focus to labor movements. These were not dramatic changes, considering that much of the previous rhetoric remained. Several recurring columns appeared, such as "Shot and Shell," "I Accuse--!" and "Spotlight Over Britain," for several years, which gave the papers a consistent feel from issue to issue. Changes resulted when sales dipped or the BUF wanted to shift a paper's rhetorical emphasis from one issue to another. *Action* floundered within a year of its release, losing several hundred pounds every week. Lord Nuffield's financial support of *Action*, along with the possible secret contributions from Mussolini, kept the newspaper alive until the publication became self-sustaining.<sup>58</sup>

Even as the focus and discourse within these papers changed and developed there were three prominent themes which spanned the life time of the publication: conspiracy, conflict, and victimization. The inverse to these negative themes was that of the fascist fight to save tradition in a new society. Fascist writers would apply these themes to a given topic through simple but nuanced rhetoric which the reader could synthesize and repeat with ease. BUF propagandists intended that the average *Blackshirt* would base their worldview on this discourse.

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<sup>58</sup> Dorril, *Blackshirt*, 191; see also Mosley, *My Life*, 282; see also "BUF Governing and Financial Documents."

The language used to describe fascism is straightforward, but it is important to consider that fascist writers typically juxtaposed the positive rhetorical frame with a negative conception of an out-group. Thus, conflict themes are prevalent in the BUF worldview. Words such as "hope" and "action" occur frequently in articles discussing the future and fascism. Fascism is "loyal" and "a stalwart defender" of Britain when described in ideological terms.<sup>59</sup> In discussions of policy, fascism was the "iron reality," which incites the imagination to images of heavy industry and strength.

Not only did BUF Press newspapers use simple phrases to create emotional and logical ties to fascism, the language was also consistent with Mosley's speeches and published works. That is not to say there is an absence of diversity in opinion over the eight year course of BUF publications, but that Mosley's words were integral to BUF propaganda. As a result, Mosley positioned himself as the man with a vision of the British fascist utopia. BUF writers venerated Mosley, while Mosley's articles made him accessible.

These newspapers did not hold to the same journalistic principles adhered to by the BBC and Reuters. The objective of the latter news agencies was to publish articles that were unbiased portrayals of an event. Such articles had to provide multiple perspectives in order to convey a complete picture of the events described. Certainly the BBC and Reuters could not always achieve this ideal, but they actively sought to maintain such standards.<sup>60</sup>

The vast majority of articles found in the BUF Press presented the news with no regard to objectivity in reporting. Many went so far as to present the story through use of

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<sup>59</sup> "Fascism and the King: We are Loyal!" *Blackshirt*, July 8, 1933, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Graham Storey, *Reuters: the Story of a Century of News Gathering* (New York: Ferrero Press, 2007), 1-18.

ad hominem attacks. In ways similar to modern talk radio in the United States, there is urgency to the discourse. This discourse ranges from outrage at the actions of government officials or at some private entity, to predictions of societal collapse. If a fascist, be it a Blackshirt or a fascist leader of a foreign country, did something illegal or immoral, the BUF Press either spun the action to justify it or the BUF Press simply ignored it.<sup>61</sup>

A newspaper's reputation had an impact on its sales. BUF Press publications were not mainstream sources. Individuals who supported fascism were the primary consumers of these newspapers. Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* was not of the same journalistic quality of the *Times*; however, it was a prominent news source that supported the BUF. Rothermere's public support, along with the push for recruitment in 1934, brought the BUF from an "estimated 17,000 members... to 50,000." But with the withdrawal of Rothermere's support in the fall following the 1934 Olympia rally, the majority of those members left.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, the goal of the BUF Press was to attract the reader to the British fascist political perspective. They accomplished this by obscuring and skewing the facts to make a political statement. These newspapers, therefore, were political propaganda. Frequently, this propaganda took the form of apocalyptic rhetoric used to incite emotion. Sometimes, the author used populist rhetoric. For example, BUF authors claimed that fascists were the guarantors of free speech, and they made this claim whenever

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<sup>61</sup> Not surprisingly, there is little mention of Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia/Abyssinia in the BUF Press.

<sup>62</sup> James Loughlin, "Northern Ireland and British Fascism in the Inter-War Years," in *Irish Historical Studies*, (Vol. 29, No. 116, Nov. 1995, 546).

authorities or opposing political groups disrupted meetings and rallies.<sup>63</sup> Occasionally, writers sought to contribute a logical argument based upon fact, but they were almost never objective; therefore, since many articles presented a sensationalist version of the facts, articles in *Action* and the *Blackshirt* were often at the low level of journalism found in a tabloid.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "Mr. Ward Price Exposes Communists: Conservative M.P.s Severely Rebuked, No 'Reds' Seriously Hurt," *Blackshirt*, June 15, 1934, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Traditionally, the difference between a newspaper versus a tabloid is formatting. *Action*, *Blackshirt*, and *Fascist Week* were printed on the traditional 11" x 20" long sized paper, with four columns typically found in publications like the *Times*.

## CHAPTER II

### The "Old Gang"

Mosley's objective was to bring a "third force" into mainstream British politics. Part of his strategy was to portray fascism as the superior alternative to the Labour and to the Conservative Parties. To show fascism's superiority, Mosley was deprecating toward non-fascist politicians. Mosley used a pejorative phrase, the "Old Gang," to belittle powerful bankers, politicians, and members of the press who did not support him. Authors published in the *Blackshirt* frequently, and negatively, make use of the phrase "Old Gang governments." The nuance of this phrase was twofold: first, BUF members were primarily under the age of fifty. Mosley used the BUF's image of youthful masculinity to promote the party as a virile alternative to decrepit politicians; second, the "Old Gang" discourse associated the status quo with World War I and the Great Depression. Mosley's strategy promoted the need for a new philosophy as the "old" leadership had brought western civilization to the brink of destruction.

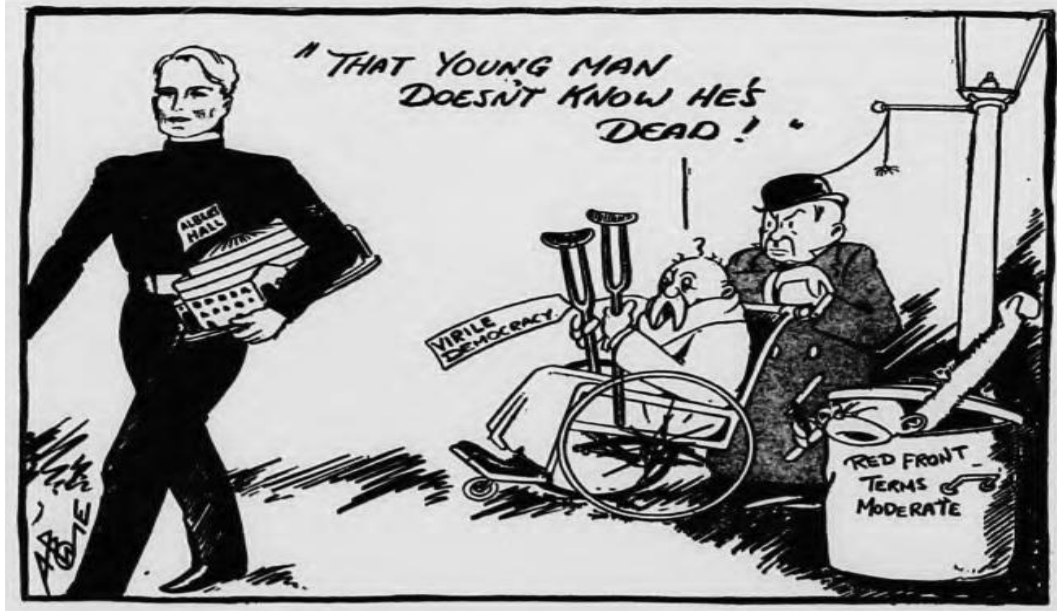


Figure 2. The Fascist and the "Old Gang."

The term "Old Gang" also invoked imagery of the pre-industrial and the obsolete, whereas fascist authors portrayed fascism as a modern, scientific way to structure a society. An "American" writing in support of fascism claimed that rapid industrialization had "rendered all existing social and economic mechanism[s] obsolete and futile." This article reflected the technocracy movement that was gaining popularity among fascists in 1932.<sup>66</sup> Mosley supported the idea that engineers and scientists could control a society's economic resources. Through the combined efforts of private industry and state, specifically the corporate state, fascist economists could restructure society to eliminate high unemployment, international economic competition, and the decadence of the middle class. Mosley claimed that this solution was a modern, scientific, and rational means to fit modern needs.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Action*, March 19, 1936, 2.

<sup>66</sup> "Wage Cutting is Suicidal," *Blackshirt*, February 1, 1933, 2.

<sup>67</sup> "Technocracy Seen by Fascism" *Blackshirt*, February 1, 1933, 1; See also Mosley, *The Greater Britain*; the idea that members of a society can deduce, through experimentation, a way to order society for the greatest good was necessary for the fascist utopia. Through the heavily bureaucratized corporate state, a



Fascist authors expanded on the belief that the status quo failed to harness industry by describing the standard of living in Britain. BUF writers specifically targeted increasing unemployment and lower wages in Britain. The strategy of the BUF Press was to juxtapose the negative results of Labour policy during the depression with the expected, positive outcomes of fascist economic policy. For example, "fascism [could fight] against all reductions in wages and salaries," while "the Labour Government... sought to harass and bully those unemployed."<sup>68</sup>

The BUF wanted to install protectionist economic policies, both domestically and abroad, intended to protect the employer and employee. As a result, Mosley believed that unemployment, a serious issue in a country suffering from the Great Depression, would no longer be an issue. The corporate state would also impose regulations on businesses, which one *Blackshirt* author believed would prevent worker accidents and improve on poor working conditions.<sup>69</sup>

Fascist writers often wrote overt ad-hominem attacks against the status quo. For example, in the headline article of the June 16, 1933 issue of the *Blackshirt*, "Labour Blunders to Revolution: the Old Cow Goes Mad," an anonymous author made several attempts to associate the Labour Party with a grazing cow. The intent is to portray Labour leaders as hypocrites, who are benefitting from the work of others. Also, the author referred to Labour as "cowardly and effeminate." One member of the Labour Party

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fascist government could experiment to chose who could be economically prosperous in order to restructure society to be moral. An example of the way fascists could separate a group economically and socially occurred in the early years of the Nazi government. Through nationalization of banks, and other industries, the Nazi's anti-Semitic policies made people afraid to do business with Jews. Essentially, the fascists in Germany politicized economic interaction with Jews, causing the Jewish people to further become an out-group in German society.

<sup>68</sup> "Wage Cutting is Suicidal," *Blackshirt*, February 1, 1933, 2; See also "Fascists Will Clear the Slums in Three Years: Mobilizing the Building Industry," *Fascist Week*, January 5, 1934, 5.

<sup>69</sup> "Fascism is Revolution: With the Consent of the People," *Blackshirt*, July 5, 1935.

who the author refers to was the Solicitor-General, Sir Stafford Cripps. The author juxtaposed Cripps's salary of 8,000 pounds with an unemployment figure to show the "great betrayal" of the Labour government at a time of economic crisis. The author repeatedly mentioned revolution, specifically in the context of Labour Party membership. He concluded Labour leaders cannot effectively lead this revolution as, "[their] only concrete proposal [was] to advocate the Emergency Powers Act on lines which are directly copied from... Sir O. Mosley."<sup>70</sup>

Propaganda claiming that ineffectual, backward leaders were failing Britain most likely resonated with several British. World War I decimated a generation. The onset of the Great Depression caused industrial areas in northern Britain to suffer economically. The cost of living for all British rose with the price of coal. Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald called for an expansion of trade and opening of new markets in 1930, but he ignored the plans set forth by Mosley on how to accomplish these goals. Instead, after a year of increased unemployment, Macdonald's government took action in 1931 to adopt deficit spending, which resulted in inflation. Most likely, Mosley's words resonated with British who were frustrated by the depression, and so it was during Macdonald's term that BUF membership reached its greatest.<sup>71</sup>

The British Press was another group of conspirators who worked with the "Old Gang." Fascist authors portrayed many members of the press as puppets of the establishment. Mosley frequently referred to popular news agencies as the "yellow press," implying that these papers were illegitimate, sensationalized sources for the news. The

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<sup>70</sup> "Labour Blunders to Revolution: the Old Cow Goes Mad," *Blackshirt*, June 16, 1933, 1.

<sup>71</sup> There are disputes as to exactly how many people were members of the BUF from 1932 to the summer of 1934, but estimates range from 40,000 to 50,000; see Martin Pugh, "Britain and its Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 495; see also "The New Year: Messages of Party Leaders," *Times*, January 1, 1930.

phrase "yellow press" has origins in the late nineteenth century, and, was easily recognizable to Britons reading Mosley's article. A BUF author, under the pseudonym "Ajax," referred to the establishment press as "pornographic." Such language was common in describing the ideas of those opposed to fascism without addressing their opposing arguments directly.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, fascist writers associated mainstream news sources with the "Old Gang" to invoke the imagination of conspiracy against the BUF.<sup>73</sup> Degrading non-fascist media promoted the BUF Press as the reliable source for fascists.<sup>74</sup> The fascist could indulge in published material that would not result in cognitive dissonance.

During 1939 the BUF expanded upon its position that conspirators within Britain's mainstream press, specifically the BBC and the *Times*, sought to deny Mosley a voice. By this time, the BBC had transitioned to radio as its major media outlet for news.<sup>75</sup> The BBC denied Mosley the opportunity to participate in a "series of political broadcasts," which the author of the February 25, 1939, headlining article in *Action* claimed was the result of a force within the government directing the BBC. This author pointed to parliamentary member Earl Winteron, who "belonged... to the Jewish moneylenders," as a possible source of censorship. The author attempted to twist the lack of coverage of the BUF in the mainstream press as promoting the "glamour" of the BUF. How? The British have seen Mosley parading with, and speaking before, his Blackshirts. They had the opportunity to hear Mosely's his message. Denying the voice of this

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<sup>72</sup> Ajax, "Fascism Warns the Press," *Blackshirt*, July 22, 1933, 1, column 3.

<sup>73</sup> "Fascist Progress in Holland," *Blackshirt*, September 2, 1933, 3.

<sup>74</sup> The result of Bernard Goldberg's book, *Bias*, is that modern conservative commentators, mostly heard on talk radio, frequently attack what they refer to as "mainstream media" for being too liberal. In turn, some journalists openly embraced their liberal political perspective, and these attacked conservative commentators for those commentators' bias.

<sup>75</sup> Storey, *Reuters*, 3.

movement in other publications served only reaffirmed the BUF's will to battle the status quo. The author's argument is practically nonsensical. It was an attempt to show the strength of the BUF, but it instead expressed the weakness the BUF had with its image in popular media.<sup>76</sup>

The British, especially members of the press, heavily valued a separation between media and the state. The BBC was in a difficult situation due to their desire for objectivity in journalism even though they received funding from the state.<sup>77</sup> The BUF press tried to exploit fears of a state controlled press that attacked the individual's right to speech. Such concerns were hypocritical since fascist policies included state control of the press. But they are an example of the BUF's frequent attempts to play the victim.

Surprisingly, BUF writers did not include Christian churches in their assault on the "Old Gang." Given that the English government had established the Anglican Church, and that British politicians typically held Christian beliefs, a fascist attack on the status quo could reasonably include the church. But the bulk of the BUF's political propaganda concerned economics and politics. Mosley even ignored the issue of religion in his manifesto on fascism, *The Greater Britain*. When contributors to *Action* and the *Blackshirt* did make an assault against Christians, they overwhelmingly targeted specific preachers or specific groups who openly criticized fascism.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately, the concept of the "Old Gang" was general enough that fascist writers could apply it anywhere. Fascist authors could use the phrase to show conspiracy between the government and bankers, between the government and industrialists, and

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<sup>76</sup> "Hidden Force in B.B.C.: Why Does not Mosley Broadcast?" *Action*, March 4, 1939, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Storey, *Reuters*, 9-17.

<sup>78</sup> "Fascism and the Industrial Christian Fellowship," *Action*, August 13, 1936, 7; this article is one of several attempts by fascist supporters to respond to comments made by religious authorities; see also William Joyce, "The World, the Flesh, and Financial Democracy," *Action*, January 2, 1937, 2.

between government and the press. Fascist authors juxtaposed decrepit government officials with the youth and revolution of fascism. They drew cartoons of the "Old Gang" as a sinking ship, bringing the world down with it. Only fascism could save Britain from the murky waters beneath.<sup>79</sup> It justified extreme political measures to cast off tired policies and policy makers. It was the fundamental means for fascists to create an "us versus them" worldview to prejudice political opponents.

### The Peaceful Warmonger

Modern Britain, according to BUF authors, was an increasingly cowardly, decadent, and "feminine" country. Fascists claimed that this social degradation was the result of a growing middle class culture in an industrial society. The reasoning for the correlation between the middle class and social decline was that the middle class emphasized hedonistic pleasures, while they deemphasized the virtues of duty, self sacrifice, and strength. Fascists believed the loss of these values was causing Britain to become an effeminate society.<sup>80</sup>

In turn, World War I veterans who became fascists projected a military-like masculinity in rejection of decadence. Their discourse portrayed fascists as moral warriors who fought to save society from within and from without. The younger BUF members, who did not have wartime experience, found purpose and strength in putting on the black shirt uniform to emulate the masculinity of the senior members. Many of these youth showed their dedication and strength by fighting on street corners and at rallies.

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<sup>79</sup> "Help - Save Me!" *Blackshirt*, Dec 2, 1933, 4.

<sup>80</sup> See Gottlieb, "Britain's New Fascist Men," in *The Culture of Fascism* for more detail on the social conflict between femininity and masculinity.

The result of this "Spartan model" was a structured organizational hierarchy and a military aesthetic that many British perceived as militant.<sup>81</sup>

Fascists projected their sense of masculinity onto international issues as well. Over the course of Mosley's political career, he had several encounters with Winston Churchill. Both men expressed concern prior to World War II that the British military was woefully unprepared for another major military conflict.<sup>82</sup> Britain, in Mosley's view, must always be ready, both economically and socially, for war. World War I, in the opinions of several prominent politicians, had been the "war to end all wars." The exhaustive nature of a mechanized war of attrition had brought several nations to pursue non-violent measures, such as appeasement, as protection from future military conflicts.

For the British fascists, failure to prepare for war was the result of effeminate, weak willed politicians; however, fascist authors wrote that war was the result of a conspiracy among capitalist bankers of the entrenched elite. Mosley reiterated on several occasions that the BUF did not seek to engage in violence at home or abroad, but that the BUF and Britain should prepare for an instance when force becomes necessary. In essence, Mosley wanted Britain prepared for hostilities, but not to engage in hostilities on another entity's behalf.<sup>83</sup>

Regardless of Mosley's claims, BUF leaders fought the image of being militant warmongers. An anonymous writer in the June 1, 1933, edition of the *Blackshirt* went so far as to defend worldwide fascist leaders as "patient and practical architects of peace."

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> For Churchill's speech regarding the need for a stronger military See Winston Churchill, "Speech on the Munich Crisis," in *Readings in Western Civilization 9: Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. John W. Boyer and Jan Goldstein (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1987), 299-307; for Mosley's perspective, see Oswald Mosley, "War or Peace: the Line-Up in Europe," in *Action*, February 21, 1936, 9.

<sup>83</sup> "Britain First in the Air," *Blackshirt*, June 24, 1933, 1; see also *Action*, September 16, 1939, 1; see also "Finance Attacks Wages: Workers to Pay for War," *Action*, January 4, 1940, 1.

This author portrayed Hitler as a "moderate" and "pacific" [sic] who prevented the extremes of jingoism from bringing Britain and Germany to war. In hindsight, the previous description seems ridiculous. It was not the last time BUF writers defended Hitler and Mussolini. What is important is that the focus of the author's defense is on non-British fascists, which suggests that the "war monger" perception of foreign fascists was popular and that it was reflecting negatively on the BUF. Non-fascist sources directly and indirectly linked Mosley's fascism to Hitler and Mussolini, and this framework continued to haunt Mosley long after the BUF had dissolved. Mosley tried to counter this perspective by dropping the name "fascist" from the BUF title, simply becoming the "British Union" in 1936. But the masculine image, and thuggish behavior, members of the BUF projected helped political opponents frame the BUF as warmongers.<sup>84</sup>

As the possibility of war loomed over Europe, the BUF printed several articles promoting peace. The impending war was, according to an anonymous BUF writer, a result of the actions of international bankers.<sup>85</sup> When the United Kingdom engaged in hostilities against Germany, the headline article in *Action* criticized Neville Chamberlain for defending Poland before sending military forces to defend British citizens in China. The line "Britons fight for Britain only" was a political stance repeated by BUF authors. Also, these writers pursued populist rhetoric by calling for a popular vote on whether to engage in war.<sup>86</sup> The message of peace was successful in engaging the British. It spoke

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<sup>84</sup> See Mosley interviewed by William F. Buckley, Jr. on March 25, 1972, accessed at <http://www.oswaldmosley.com/william-f-buckley-interview.htm> on November 27, 2010.

<sup>85</sup> "Demonstrate for Peace Before it is Too Late," *Action*, July 15, 1939, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Oswald Mosley, "Our Peace Policy: 'Britain First,'" *Action*, September 16, 1939, 1; see also "More War? To 'Destroy Stalinism,'" *Action*, September 23, 1939, 1; see also "Sir Oswald Mosley on Peace: Four-Point Programme," *Times*, July 17, 1939, 14.

to a generation fearful another world war. BUF membership increased to its second highest amount of approximately 36,000 people.<sup>87</sup> BUF leaders continued the jingoist, anti-status quo message of peace until their incarceration in 1940.

It is seemingly contradictory for an organization dedicated to promoting militancy to advocate peace, but BUF authors did not back down from their masculine image. Mosley claimed that if King George called upon a Blackshirt to fight, they would do so in service of their country. Philosophically, duty was more important than any objection to a war. Of course, not all members followed the official line. Mosley had to be cautious, otherwise the authorities and the media would label his party as subversives.<sup>88</sup>

Mosley captured a changing spirit in British politics through use of the concept of the "Old Gang" and by advocating peace. During the Victorian Era, the British generally admired the privileged who succeeded in gaining political recognition. But the loss of so many family and friends during World War I brought a bitter taste to politics. Many British justifiably claimed that the calamity of the Great War derived from the failure of politicians. Spurts of inflation and the onset of the Great Depression only furthered cynical sentiments. Many British wanted leaders who would end such turmoil. While more people voted during the inter-war period, primarily due to women's suffrage, than had before World War I, politics was less important in daily life. Many intelligent and talented people focused their energies outside of politics, which limited the quantity of talent that parties had available.<sup>89</sup> Use of the "Old Gang" phrase served to channel cynicism while attempting to inspire the individual to engage in politics.

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<sup>87</sup> Martin Pugh, "Britain and its Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 496.

<sup>88</sup> "Nazi Propaganda In England." *Times* 2 November 1939, 4.

<sup>89</sup> R.K. Webb, *Modern England: From the 18th Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1994), 553-555.



## CHAPTER III

### Anti-Semitism and Victimization

There are several instances in BUF publications of the victimization theme correlating with anti-Semitism. In the May 16, 1933 issue of the *Blackshirt*, on the bottom of page three, there are two photos depicting an injured man and an injured woman. The captions adjacent to these pictures provide few details about these victims. One caption states that communists accosted the woman in the picture. It is perplexing this was not a front-page article, but within a paper saturated with claims of victimization, these type of photos simply reinforce, even if irrationally or indirectly, front-page claims made by the fascist authors.<sup>90</sup>

The May 16 *Blackshirt* also contained an editorial responding to claims, from an unnamed author, of BUF anti-Semitism. Following the same rhetorical line of Mosley's articles on communism and Jews, the author labeled Jews who disagreed with fascism as communists. These fascist authors portrayed communists as influencing, or even controlling, the Jews in England. Such irrational, and paranoid, generalizations are the very epitome of racism, but Mosley denied claims of anti-Semitism. Instead, it was common for a BUF member to justify violence against Jews because these Jews were

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<sup>90</sup> "Innocent Victim of Red Violence," and "Injured Blackshirt Leaving the Court," *Blackshirt*, May 16, 1933, 3.

"pursuing an anti-British policy."<sup>91</sup> There is no consideration given to the Jew who would openly defend himself from the BUF because of the underlying anti-Semitic beliefs held by the members of the organization. Instead, the author of the May 16 article reinforced the party's official stance of denial by claiming that "...the Jewish press itself has now made clear that our organization is not anti-Semitic."<sup>92</sup> No mention is given as to what exactly constituted the "Jewish press."

Why did the BUF leadership make such efforts to justify their antagonism towards Jews and cast off the label of anti-semitism? One answer is that the us versus them framework had an unpopular cultural and racial bent which political opponents of the BUF then exploited. The rhetoric presented by the anti-fascists was strong enough to demonize the BUF, which, to an uncertain degree, limited potential recruits. Only those people who could accept the labels of anti-Semite and a thug would join. Journalists could easily demonize Mosley's party with claims that the BUF were radicals, and, therefore, they were treasonous to the crown.<sup>93</sup> This served to push the BUF further away from what was politically acceptable. Also, it was politically expedient for the BUF to separate itself from the "war monger" and the anti-Semitic frameworks that the British press applied to the Nazi Party in Germany.<sup>94</sup> Mosley recognized he could not break the two party system through emphasis on anti-Semitism while being labeled a

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<sup>91</sup> For an example of attacks against Jews see: Dorril, *Blackshirt*, 224; see also *Times*, Oct. 25, 1932, for Mosley's statements to the press regarding Jews working with communists to attack fascism.

<sup>92</sup> "Editorial" *Blackshirt*, May 16, 2; see also *Blackshirt*, February 1, 1933, 4.

<sup>93</sup> "Court of Appeal: Sir Oswald Mosley's Action: Interlocutory Appeals Adjourned, *Mosley v. Daily News, Limited*," *Times*, Nov. 30, 1933, 4.

<sup>94</sup> "Fascism and the Future: Sir O. Mosley's Debate with Mr. Maxton," *Times*, Feb. 25, 1933, 7; the statements made to the press by Mr. James Maxton express the rhetorical stance of the opposition, linking Mosley to Germany and Italy under the label "gangster."

Nazi. Unfortunately for Mosley, partially due media attacks against the BUF, the party developed stronger anti-Semitic tendencies with each passing year.

We should not construe growing anti-Semitism in the BUF as possessing purely external causation. Some of the British fascist leaders openly claimed hatred of Jews, but the BUF initially made efforts not to institute intolerance into their official party line. So Mosley could honestly argue the BUF was not, initially, an organization that openly promoted anti-Semitism. But keep in mind the May 16th pictures of the aforementioned pictures of injured Britons. The *Blackshirt* propagates images of external enemies through repeated assertions of victimization without directly blaming a racial group. The reader, however, would associate the Jewish people with the threat of communism, and thereby victimization, if that reader believed the *Blackshirt's* rhetoric.<sup>95</sup> Such flawed logic could invoke an emotional response that developed or furthered prejudice against Jews.

For example, the victimization theme repeatedly occurred in fascist reporting of the Spanish Civil War. In the article, "the World, the Flesh, and Financial Democracy," published in the August 20th, 1936 edition of *Action*, William Joyce continued the *Action's* rhetorical trend of victimization by attacking the Spanish communists for their persecution of the Catholic Church. But Joyce added another layer to this simple framework in his article. He criticizes "politicians, publicists, and propagandists" for ignoring the persecution of Christianity and claims they instead focus "the whole of their sympathy... for the Jew." Joyce is alluding to media coverage, by more popular newspapers, of persecution of Jews in Germany. To illustrate the point, the cartoon appearing at the bottom of the article depicts a number of Jews, and members of

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<sup>95</sup> For another example of such an association see "Jewish M.P. Behind a Lamp-Post," *Blackshirt*, July 12, 1935, 1-2; adjacent to this article is the article "Blackshirt Recovering From Injuries," which exclaims, "Fascist C.C. Wells... was brutally maltreated and seriously injured by Jewish and Communist hooligans..."

mainstream press outlets, fuming over a newspaper propped up against a wall with the headline "Another Jew Leaves Germany." These outraged caricatures ignore the several other headlines with statements like "Hundreds More Christians Burned-Alive in Spain" and "English Families Murdered by Reds."<sup>96</sup>

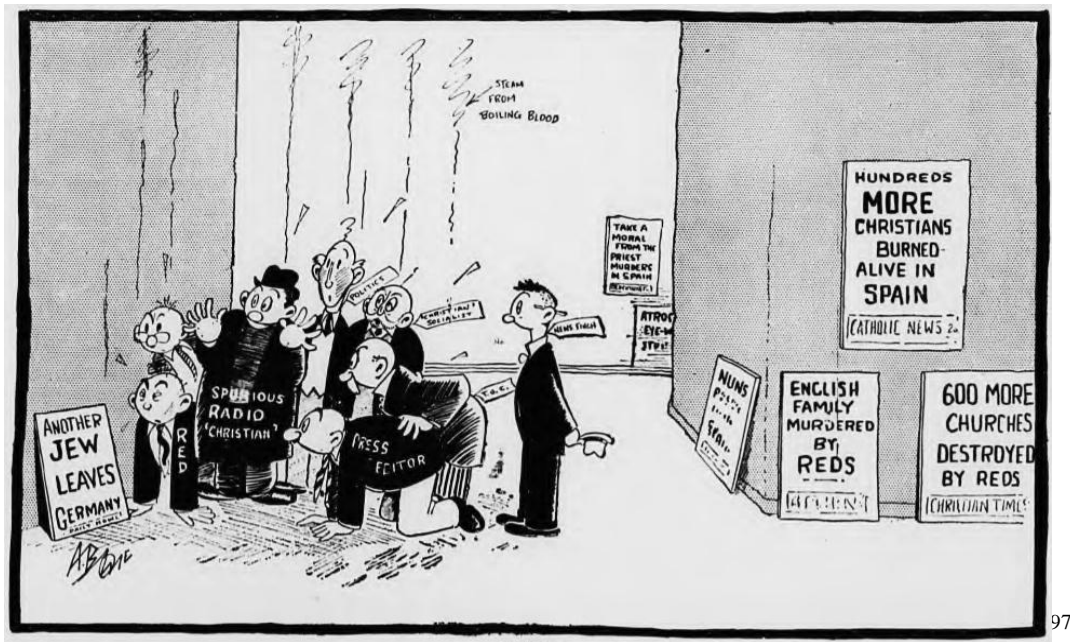


Figure 3. The British Press focuses on Germany.

By 1938, Mosley's attempt to restrict anti-Semitism in the BUF press had disappeared. Anti-fascist rhetoric and anti-fascist protesters had effectively combated Mosley's movement. Mosley responded to this opposition in his 1938 work, *Tomorrow We Live*. Mosley blamed Jews in Britain for half of the physical assaults prior to 1935. He cited "police court records" to show that the "...Jews themselves very quickly made [the Jewish Question] a concern."<sup>98</sup> Mosley stated outright that Jews had victimized the BUF. Furthermore, Mosley suggested that not all actions taken against the BUF had been

<sup>96</sup> William Joyce, "The World, the Flesh, and Financial Democracy," *Action*, August 20, 1936, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 93-94.

undertaken by local Jewish antagonists. A practice of "international usury" perpetrated by Jewish interests was victimizing the whole of Europe.<sup>99</sup>

Fascist writers openly blamed Jewish refugees, fleeing continental Europe, for unemployment in Britain. The January 14, 1939, headline of *Action* stated, "Shall British Money go to Jews While Britons Starve?" Jewish political refugees were the underlying source of contention for the author. Through the winter and spring of 1939, fascist authors continued the attack against these refugees by claiming that Jews were taking the jobs of Britons.<sup>100</sup> These authors associated Jews with conspiracy against the BUF. This "us-versus-them" theme, however, expanded beyond "communist-Jews" to Jewish financiers. Conflict between European states was little more than Jewish bankers dividing Europe for personal gain. BUF authors established themselves as both the victims and the saviors of this international Jewish conspiracy.<sup>101</sup>

Even though there is plenty of evidence prior to 1939 showing the prevalence anti-Semitism in British culture, the actual level of bigotry and its manifestation in daily life is difficult to measure. Anti-Semitism in Britain was a primarily a phenomenon of the upper-class, which included most of the BUF's leadership. The efforts made to stifle anti-Semitic posturing while the BUF had some political viability invariably gave way to extremes.<sup>102</sup> Given that the BUF sought to control and plan economic activity in the UK,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>100</sup> *Action*, January 14, 1939, 1. See also *Action*, January 7, 1939, 1.

<sup>101</sup> "Britain Humiliated: Japan Triumphs Over Divided Europe," *Action*, June 24, 1939, 1.

<sup>102</sup> See Lucifer's article in the *Blackshirt*, August 5, 1933, 2, for an example of contrast between the expected treatment of Jews when the BUF achieves power and the underlying prejudice against Jews held by the author. Lucifer stated that "Fascist Britain" would not persecute Jews like German fascists did; however, Lucifer believed that "those who have bought and sold the well-being of the nation on the Stock Exchanges of the world, [should be] brought to book." Given the context of the paragraph, the author suggested that there are international powers who criminally undermine British prosperity, and he implied that these criminal actors were Jews.

it would not be surprising if a successful BUF manifested prejudice against Jews in economic and social policies. William Joyce was bold enough to claim:

The British Union will treat the Jews, as they have constituted themselves, as a foreign community resident in Britain. They will not possess the vote or the right to Government Office, and in other particulars will be treated precisely as other aliens in Britain.<sup>103</sup>

Such a fear of anti-Semitic policy resulted in discussions of the BUF being overwhelmed by charges of racial bigotry, which occurs frequently in the academic argument. Many works in the historiography of the BUF emphasize, and some solely focus on, the issue of anti-Semitism within the BUF. British media emphasized the anti-Semitic perspective of the movement as well. As a result, Mosley often dealt with questions regarding racism in his political career when interviewed.<sup>104</sup>

Due to the events of the holocaust and, later, the end of British imperialism, many simply dismissed all forms of fascism as a racist mistake. Opponents of fascism successfully framed the movement as an evil. But the problem with limiting historical understanding of the BUF to one issue is that it ignores the complexities of the fascist worldview.

### The "Reds"

When BUF authors ever needed to produce antagonists to invoke the ire of fellow fascists, they would write about communists. Both the communists and fascists sought the same frustrated youth suffering from depression era poverty. In the battle of words between these groups, Blackshirts used several pejorative terms in their publications,

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<sup>103</sup> William Joyce, "Four Questions Answered," *Action*, July 23, 1936, 2.

<sup>104</sup> See William Buckley's 1972 interview with Mosley.

which people still use when speaking of communists today: "reds" was a common substitute; "godless," "rabble," and "killers" were other frequently used terms. Just as with the BUF conceptualization of the "old gang" and the middle class, Mosley implied that communists were effeminate cowards.<sup>105</sup> Articles concerning local communists and articles concerning international communism both made use of the pejorative descriptions, often including the victimized "us" with a pejorative "them" theme. Success of the "them," meant social collapse for the "us."

The fascist vitriol against communism is prevalent in *Action* and the *Blackshirt*, but there is very little reasoning about why a fascist would hate a communist. Yet from the very first issue of the *Blackshirt* in 1933, Mosley attacked communism.<sup>106</sup> He portrayed himself, and his organization, in public speeches at this time as the defenders of Britain against a communist takeover.<sup>107</sup> It is likely that such prejudice was common amongst Blackshirts in regular conversation, and this prejudice is reflected by the violent actions taken by Blackshirts against communists.

In order to find logical justification underlying the anti-red antagonist within BUF Press newspapers, the reader would have to pick up one of Mosley's published books. That is not to say that there is no justification provided in BUF newspapers, but most of the discourse in *Action* and the *Blackshirt* is an appeal to emotion. It is common in political speech for the speaker or the author to simplify their stance while writing and article or speaking behind a podium. The intent of politicians in such instances is to provide memorable phrases the audience can repeat, and it helps the speaker emotionally engage the audience in their speech. Mosley was great at engaging an individual through

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<sup>105</sup>"Fascists at Olympia: Sir Oswald Mosley on a New Order," *Times*, June 8, 1934, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, "I Accuse--!" *Blackshirt*, Feb. 1, 1933, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Dorril, *Blackshirt*, 224-225.

an emotionally charged speech. BUF Press writers frequently used the language from Mosley's speeches to emotionally engage the reader. Mosley used his self-published books to exhibit the reasoning underlying his political perspectives.<sup>108</sup>

For example, within *The Greater Britain*, Mosley suggested that the fundamental difference between communism and fascism was class warfare. Mosley sought to end class warfare, while Engels's and Marx's communist theory proposed class warfare as an revolutionary struggle resulting from the inevitable dialectic of opposing forces. Furthermore, Mosley further claimed that Leninism was destructive to an economic system.

The first task of Leninism was to destroy, to root up every tree in the garden – whether good or bad – merely because it had brought chaos on the heels of famine, there came a five-year plan of American conception, implemented by a nucleus of German and American technicians hired at immense expense.<sup>109</sup>

In *Tomorrow We Live*, Mosley claimed that socialism was international.

International authority threatened Mosley's desire to use nationalism as a uniting force. Mosley sought to free Britons from impositions of international authorities, whether non-governmental capitalists or multi-national governmental bodies. Furthermore, Mosley contended that the worker had been repressed by the capitalist to such an extent that an international union of workers was impossible. Also, in Mosley's opinion, the Labour Party was moving too slowly in nationalizing struggling industries, and, when they did, Mosley believed the Labour Government often ran them ineffectively. As a result, the

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<sup>108</sup> The first year of the *Blackshirt* has several articles containing some of what Mosley published in *The Greater Britain*. The intent was to introduce the reader to the fascist political perspective.

<sup>109</sup> Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 30.



common worker suffered. Essentially, Mosley viewed the socialism as a problem, not a solution.<sup>110</sup>

There were several incidences of conflict between communists and fascists in London, especially in London's East Side.<sup>111</sup> Blackshirts labeled communism as an international conspiracy, coordinated by Jewish interests, in order to gain dominance over Europe. Bolsheviks were the front for this international communist conspiracy.<sup>112</sup> Local conflicts were part of the international communist effort to undermine British traditions and national culture. Fascist authors often attributed communist success to a conspiracy "reds" and the "old gang."<sup>113</sup> BUF leaders simplified this complex interaction into a rhetorical stance that could incite both frustration and fear, while being easily repeatable in daily conversation.<sup>114</sup>

Using Mosley's press, BUF contributors tried to acknowledge, and repudiate, the apparent hypocrisy of labeling another political group as an international conspiracy while politically engaging with and receiving funding from Germany and Italy. Opponents used Mosley's connections with these two nations to claim Mosley was engaging in an international conspiracy; however, as Mosley openly stated, "Fascism,

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<sup>110</sup> Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 45-63.

<sup>111</sup> For the BUF take on the Olympia Rally See "The Truth About the Communist Disorder: Communist Determination to 'Kill Mosley,'" *Blackshirt*, June 15, 1934; For the BUF report regarding the battle of Cable street in London's East End, see "the Organization of Terror: William Joyce fastens the blame for Red Barbarism on the right shoulders," *Action*, October 10, 1936, 1; For the BUF report regarding a conflict between the two groups at Trafalgar Square, see Geoffrey Dorman, "Blackshirt: the Patriotic Worker's Paper," *Blackshirt*, July 3, 1937, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Lancelot Lawton, "Russia: the Arch-Aggressor," *Action*, Jan. 4, 1940, 5.

<sup>113</sup> The general idea was to establish a connection between communists on an international level with other groups that the BUF leadership sought to portray as antagonists. For example, "Communists and Financers," *Blackshirt*, July 5, 1935, 4, describes the U.S.S.R receiving a line of credit for railroads from the French banks as a show of an international conspiracy, perpetrated to "create civil and international war;" See also "British Resistance to Jewish Domination," *Action*, Nov. 21, 1936, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Rev. M. Yate Allen, "Michael Fighting Satan," *Action*, Oct. 31, 1936.

like all the great political creeds, is a world-wide movement."<sup>115</sup> Mosley was on the defensive.

Much like British communists, British fascists sought to overturn the status quo. Both groups wanted to create a classless society; however, it was the fascist belief in maintaining national traditions that separated them from outside claims of an international conspiracy.<sup>116</sup> The fundamental difference between the perspectives of the two groups was the absence of jingoism in much of the British communist movement. Even with these differences, there were enough commonalities that the BUF was occasionally able to convert a communist supporter into a BUF member.

When conflict did occur between communists and members of the BUF, articles in the BUF Press were often written in an epic mode. Fascist authors portrayed these conflicts as a battle for the future of British traditions and values.<sup>117</sup> An anonymous author wrote in the April 17, 1933 edition of the *Blackshirt*, "300 communists made an organized attack... against Walworth H.Q. [a BUF office] with iron bars."<sup>118</sup> The article invoked the feeling of brave fascists defending their home from a communist invasion much like the Spartans had defended Thermopylae from the Persians.<sup>119</sup>

Contributors to the BUF press never portrayed fascists as the instigators of violence; the fascists were always the heroes or the victims. Usually, these authors described BUF rallies as peaceful, glorious events, until some instigators, frequently

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<sup>115</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, "On To Fascist Revolution: Drastic Action or Disaster," *Blackshirt*, Feb. 1, 1933, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Much like Othman and the British Fascisti, Mosley had to contend with attacks of being hyper-nationalist while borrowing a philosophy from another nation.

<sup>117</sup> 'Lucifer,' "Heroism of the Early Fascists: the Epic Struggle of British Blackshirts," *Fascists Week*, Jan. 5, 1934, 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Blackshirt*, April 17, 1933, 2.

<sup>119</sup> This is somewhat of a hyperbolic statement; however, in the context of the tone presented in the *Blackshirt*, it is not too far from what the author intends.

labeled communist, intervened, disrupting Mosley's speeches to fascist supporters. Because BUF rallies were a show of order and power, BUF officials did not tolerate disruptions by dissidents and opponents.<sup>120</sup> Typically such disruptions resulted in violence. It is difficult to say if fascists first agitated communist groups, or if the communists acted first in inciting violence. According to a neutral source, the *Times*, communist agitators organized disruptions against the BUF. But it is difficult to say if communist agitators desired a violent outcome when organizing protests.<sup>121</sup>

Fascist authors frequently portrayed violent activities by Blackshirts as actions in coordination with, or behalf of, local police authorities. When M.P.'s acted against Blackshirts, these M.P.'s were not acting with "common sense," but were being swallowed by the emotion of the conflict. Mosley intended this portrayal to correlate with his message of the BUF working within the system, respecting Britain's laws and traditions, while gaining the voluntary support of Britons to overthrow the status quo.<sup>122</sup>

When fascist/nationalist forces engaged Communist/republican forces in Spain during 1936, authors in the BUF Press dedicated significant space to reporting the events of that civil war.<sup>123</sup> These authors emphasized the violent actions taken by communists in the war, describing the most violent events in which communists were aggressors.

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<sup>120</sup> Gottlieb, "Britain's New Fascist Men," in *The Culture of Fascism*, 83-99.

<sup>121</sup> "Sir O. Mosley in Edinburgh: Communists and Fascists," *Times*, June 2, 1934, 7; *Times* referred to the disruptions at the Olympia Rally as a "...campaign of interruption [that] had been well planned so that it should affect every part of the meeting in the course of the evening," *Times*, Jun. 8, 1934, 14.

<sup>122</sup> There are several examples of such articles; see "Brutal Attack on a Blackshirt: Cowardly and Unprovoked Assault by Jews and 'Red,'" *Blackshirt*, July 5, 1935, 1. The author of this article, after describing the injuries Charles Claud Wells received at the hands of anonymous communists, states, "Blackshirts and Police were successful in driving off the hooligans;" see also "Mr. Ward Price Exposes Communists: Conservative M.P.s Severely Rebuked," *Blackshirt*, June 15, 1934, 2; see also "Fascist 'Evolutions' at Bristol: Sir Oswald Mosley's Denials," *Times*, Apr. 11, 1934, 8; for a reply by the government, rebuking Mosley's victimization frame, see "Home Secretary's Reply to Sir. O. Mosley," *Times*, Apr. 23, 1934, 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Blackshirt*, March 18, 1933; Also, much of the latter half of 1936's *Action* contained articles regarding the Spanish Civil War.

Through the reporting of the civil war in Spain, the reader can see the British fascist reverence of national tradition, even when the tradition is not their own.

The protagonists in these articles regarding Spain are Christians, the Catholics who suffered atrocities at the hands of the communist "murderers" and "church burners." Contributors to *Action* emphasized the sensational in reporting the war. The journalistic standards upheld in reporting the events in Spain in the *Times* are non-existent in the articles found in *Action*. Fascist authors simply claimed "reds" were the perpetrators of the atrocities. As a result of the emphasis on the violence perpetrated against a traditional national group in Spain, the fascist author could invoke a fear of societal collapse perpetrated by the "reds."<sup>124</sup>

Expressing derision for communism took multiple literary forms. T. Ackroyd produced a short, fictional story for *Action* regarding a priest in Spain. The protagonist, a Catholic priest, embroiled in the Spanish Civil War, fights the communists with great success. The article was a fantasy piece. It is an expression of how the victim could take action to overcome an international conspiracy in heroic and violent fashion. This sort of article was rare in a BUF Press publication, but it is an excellent example of the BUF desire to maintain moral traditions while fighting against the agents of social disintegration through heroic fantasy. The moral imparted by the story is simple: justice is defending what is right from evil.<sup>125</sup>

Throughout 1936, concerns of another European-wide war were relevant in the minds many British. The BUF Press touted fascism as the only means to prevent

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<sup>124</sup> There were multiple article in *Action*, dating from Oct to Dec 1936 that emphasized the violence of the Spanish Civil War. *Times* produced articles detailing the political struggles, from multiple perspectives, that led to violence.

<sup>125</sup> T. Ackroyd, "Des Gratis: A Moving Story of Red Barbarity in Spain," *Action*, Dec. 19, 1936, 4.

catastrophe. It was the conspiracy of bankers, communists, Jews, and the Old Gang to bring the British Empire to war. The League of Nations was a "discredited" organization. Mussolini formulated the ineffectual Four Powers Pact which a fascist author claimed, "... [was] the only practical method whereby the peace of Europe and the world can be put on a practical basis."<sup>126</sup>

Considering the masculine image Mosley sought to portray in his pseudo-military organization, framing communist agitators as cowardly fit his "us versus them" dynamic perfectly. Fascist reporters claimed that communists attacked fascist women and used razor blades, bats, stones and underhanded tactics, such as sending "a woman to do the job they dare not do themselves," that is, to fight. On occasion, Mosley was not playing the victim. He was on the receiving end of opposition violence.<sup>127</sup> When Blackshirts lost a fight, they claimed it was because they were outnumbered or caught unaware. If we consider that BUF writers emphasized that there was an elaborate international communist conspiracy, which these writers claimed was victimizing and undermining the British people, it is reasonable to suggest that in the mind of the active BUF member violence against communists and Jews was justifiable.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Lucifer, "Current Cant and Fascist Fact: Only Fascism Can Prevent War," *Fascist Week*, Jan. 5, 1934, 2. Articles referring to the invasion are defenses of Mussolini, or they propose opponents should consider Britain's internal issues first; see A.K. Chesterton, "Calling the 'Holy War' Against Italy," *Blackshirt*, Sep. 6, 1935, 4.

<sup>127</sup> "Sir O. Mosley Pelted With Stones: 12 Injured at Leeds Fascist Meeting," *Times*, Sep. 28, 1936, 14.

<sup>128</sup> "Mr. Ward Price Exposes Communists: Conservative M.P.s Severely Rebuked," *Blackshirt*, June 15, 1934, 2; see also William Joyce, "Massed Forces of Sedition: Past Outbreaks of Terrorism," *Blackshirt*, June 15, 1934, 2; see also "Fascists at Olympia," *Times*, June 8, 1934, 16.

## CHAPTER IV

### The "Us"

So far, we have considered several rhetorical frameworks that attack specific groups, often through vague generalities. But the other side of "them" is the "us." While a significant portion of BUF authors either took for granted who the "us" were, or they implied who the "us" were by defining the "them," they attempted to incorporate disparate elements of society into their fold. Their strategy was to use nationalism as a significant uniting force for British and British fascists. Mosley also sought to include Irish and Scottish in his movement. In addition to promoting a common national background, BUF leaders, through their economic discourse, included labor movements and private entrepreneurs. Mosley appealed to youth frustrated by economic depression, who had lost fathers, brothers, and limbs to World War I. Finally, the BUF looked to appropriate the traditional Anglican Christian identity. They did not exclude other Christian traditions, including Catholicism; therefore, the "us" included a diversity of British subjects.

What BUF leaders expected the "us" to identify with was consistent over seven years of BUF publications. Much of the discourse in propaganda was populist; these fascists attempted to gain the support of as many disparate groups as possible under the guise of labor and nationalism. The goal of the populist discourse was to show the mutual benefit that a group, or an individual, could gain through a fascist government.

When Mosley's philosophy conflicted with a target group's popular beliefs or political objectives, BUF writers called for self-sacrifice of one goal to achieve another, usually with a suggestion of mutual benefit. Fascist authors frequently demanded obedience to the state and veneration of the leader, Mosley. These authors juxtaposed obedience to the benefits provided by the fascist government. For example, obedience was the logical justification for the sacrifices that would come if BUF overthrew the middle class and their shallow, effeminate, and materialist culture.<sup>129</sup>

### Nationalities

One common BUF slogan to include all British within the "us" was "Britain first." Fascist authors frequently repeated this slogan in articles regarding economics, often with the argument that government should protect British industry from overseas competition, and it appeared at the header in every issue of the *Blackshirt* from February 1933 to March 21, 1937.<sup>130</sup> Such a straight-forward message emphasized British identity, and it promoted the belief in British exceptionalism. The reader could perceive the statement to suggest either that Britain was greater than other nations, or that Blackshirts would place the reader's own British identity above that of any other group. Mosley was pandering to the discouraged, to people who could perceive the "Old Gang" as selling out their future for the interests of the wealthy, the foreigner, or the seditious communist. Furthermore, the phrase "Britain First" was a claim of loyalty to the throne. It reinforced the

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<sup>129</sup> William Joyce, "the Spirit of Man is Supreme: It Can Conquer the Shabby Materialism of Environment," *Blackshirt*, Jan. 4, 1935, 1.

<sup>130</sup> The editor replaced "Britain first" with the rhetorically less influential phrase "the patriotic workers' paper." *Action* took up the slogan "Britain First" in 1937.

monarchist trend in BUF discourse. Its simplicity was its beauty, making it an effective way to convey and promote nationalism, while also educating readers about the BUF identity and philosophy.<sup>131</sup>

Initially, BUF leaders sought to distance themselves from the fascist movement in Scotland.<sup>132</sup> By 1934, however, Mosley sought to broaden the BUF's influence across the whole of Britain. BUF leadership, with the financial support of the January Club, which included Scots,<sup>133</sup> and established an office in Edinburgh, where the BUF held public recruitment meetings.<sup>134</sup> In correlation with the increased physical presence in Scotland, articles in the *Blackshirt* embraced Scots as neighbors to the north. The difficulty Mosley had in recruiting Scottish Fascists was the jingoism expressed by these Scots. These fragmented nationalist groups sought their own independence, so the BUF Press attempted to co-opt Scottish nationalism by acknowledging Scotland's heritage and finding common ground in political philosophies. Specifically, William Joyce promised Scottish nationals that under an English fascist government, Scotland would have control over its own industries.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, the BUF was not successful in Scotland. After the recruitment push of 1934 and 1935, there is very little mention of the greatness of the Scots.

While Mosley was recruiting Scotsmen, the BUF was actively recruiting Irishmen in Ulster. In Northern Ireland the Blackshirts faced similar challenges as they did in

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<sup>131</sup> "Fascist Creed: Sir O. Mosley at Birmingham, 'New Policy of Action,'" *Times*, Jan. 22, 1934, 14.

<sup>132</sup> "Fascism in Scotland: A Disclaimer," *Blackshirt*, June 16, 1933, 3; the same article was printed in the subsequent issue.

<sup>133</sup> The January Club was a small group of influential fascists, including a couple of former members of Parliament, created by Mosley to help build the movement in its initial phase; see Dorril, *Black Shirt*, 258.

<sup>134</sup> "Fascism and Scotland: Sir Oswald Mosley's Policy," *Times*, Apr. 7, 1934, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Anglo-Scot, "Scotland re-Visited: a Corporate State as the Solution," *Blackshirt*, June 8, 1934, 2; see also "Fascism Comes to Scotland: Hope For Those Who Have 'Lost Faith,'" *Blackshirt*, Aug., 17, 1934, 10; see also "Scotland Prepared for Fascism: Mr. William Joyce Addresses Appreciative Audiences," *Blackshirt*, Feb., 22, 1935, 4.



Scotland; however, BUF leaders succeeded in finding common ground with the Ulster fascist groups. These groups coordinated using the heraldry of the Red Hand of Ulster transposed over a fasces. Irish fascists were hyper-nationalist as well. But Mosley had greater influence with them than he did over the Scottish nationalists because of Mosley's support of the Irish by condemning the actions of the Black and Tans in parliament following World War I. Fascists in Ireland also had to deal with the cultural split between Roman Catholicism in the south and Protestantism in the north. Such conflicts prevented the unification of Irish Fascists, and Mosley's dealing with southern fascist group, the Blueshirts, upset his northern Ulster supporters, dividing the movement and undermining Mosley's gains.<sup>136</sup>

The BUF perceived India, Ireland, and Scotland as imperial territories. In the fascist mind, these states were less important than England. Regardless of this perception, and the BUF's failure to gain a significant foothold in Ireland and Scotland, Mosley did not consider Ireland and Scotland as an out-group. Most authors were inclusive and positive toward the Irish and Scottish in their articles. Indians, however, received different treatment. British fascists blamed capitalism for the depression, and it was the oppressive international capitalists who took jobs away from Britons and gave those jobs to Indians.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, the BUF did not support Indian independence. There was a racial undertone to their sentiments, which excluded Indians from the "us." For example:

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<sup>136</sup> James Loughlin, "Northern Ireland and British Fascism," 537-548; see also "Fascism Comes to Ireland," *Blackshirt*, Oct. 7, 1933, 6.

<sup>137</sup> "Jute Industry Pawn of Finance: Dundee Betrayed," *Action*, July 9, 1938, 16; see also Lucifer, "A Betrayal of the Nation: Indian Illusions," the *Blackshirt*, June 16, 1933, 1; see also "Sir Oswald Mosley on Globalization," at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NqG2IAojNQ>, last accessed April 13, 2012.

Indian nationalism is a fake movement calculated to gain political and economic power for the bourgeois capitalist class in India, for the big baboo millionaires of Bombay and Calcutta, and for the swarm of lawyers, money-lenders and half-baked student who are the natural parasites of the Indian economic system as it exists.<sup>138</sup>

This article in the *Blackshirt* attempted to justify fascist intervention in imperial territories. The author desired to maintain order and to fight the international conspiracy that promoted Indian self-governance. Furthermore, the author suggested that only a fascist Britain could ensure a separation of India that would not hurt British industry. While the BUF allotted space for foreign fascists and fascist sympathizers to publish articles, there is not a single article purported to have been written by an Indian in BUF publications.

### Trade Unions

Mosley's aim was to eventually eliminate class conflict through the mechanisms of a corporate state; specifically, Mosley claimed that fascists could reconcile employer/employee conflicts over wages through government arbitration and policy making. The mechanized warfare Mosley experienced during World War I had resulted in the increase of industrial production, which followed significant changes to national banking that sustained such warfare for over four years. Mosley viewed these changes as the result of a new economic system that the "Old Gang" could not handle both intellectually and morally. There was a genuine concern in Mosley's writings for the well-being of the common worker, because the worker, being a "producer," was the

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<sup>138</sup> "A Betrayal of the Nation: Indian Illusion," *Blackshirt*, June 16, 1933, 1.

“basis of the nation.” Mosley welcomed the trade union into his vision of a classless, efficient society.<sup>139</sup>

Mosley sought to reinvigorate collapsing British industries and support British farmers as well. A few leading members of the BUF, including Jorian Jenks, came from agricultural backgrounds. They composed several articles reporting the state of a specific form of farming in a specific region. These articles frequently presented an "us versus them" perspective. The farmers were the in-group; they were the little men that fascism championed. Government planners, bankers, and other middle men were the them. Such discourse was intended to inspire the large group of rural farmers who suffered bankruptcy with the depression. Furthermore, given everyone's dependence on agriculture, Jenks added a tone of urgency when calling for agricultural reforms. Not surprisingly, the corporate state was the BUF's solution. Mosley claimed that "a special agriculture bank" would provide loans to "re-equip the industry" at a regulated interest rate.<sup>140</sup>

The iron and steel industries, and the producers who made use of those materials, were another target of Mosley's call for reinvigoration. Mosley believed exporting these materials was necessary for the prosperity of the nation. In *The Greater Britain*, Mosley provided simple, easy to understand statistical analyses for labor and material costs. Fascist authors followed this example to support arguments for why the "Old Gang" was ineffective.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 28-30.

<sup>140</sup> "A Farmer's Story: Banks and Agriculture," *Blackshirt*, September 30, 1933, 2; see also Jorian Jenks, "Starving Pigs," *Action*, January 11, 1940, 6; see also "Fascism and Farming," *Times*, July 9, 1934, 11; see also Martin Pugh, "Britain and its Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 494.

<sup>141</sup> Mosley, *the Greater Britain*, 50; see also A. Raven Thomson, "Lord Nuffield Criticises [sic] the Steel Industry: but Baldwin is Complacent," *Blackshirt*, Dec. 6th, 1935, 3.

Several writers published in *Action* and the *Blackshirt* described and supported Mosley's vision of the corporate state. They intended to use this vision to gain the support of trade unions. An article on the second page of the first edition of the *Blackshirt* detailed the common interest trade unions had with workers in reference to wages. The author of this article claimed, for employers to maintain wages, they would go out of business. This claim was an attempt to gain the support of employers. He continued the article with an attempt to appease laborers. The author claimed that if businessmen reduced wages, the quality of life for employees would decline. A lower standard of living for workers would have adverse effects on Britain's economy as a whole, which would lead to unemployment. The author proposed a "do or die" situation. He claimed that the economic policies of that the Labour Government are "suicidal" and that they are "fatal" to the common worker, because these policies would lead to a cyclical trend of unemployment. The author's solution to prevent this impending death was the "organization of the corporate state."<sup>142</sup>

In an effort to revitalize Mosley's political brand, along with publically advocating peace between European nations, and to distance his political movement from association with rumors of Nazi persecution, Mosley dropped the label of "fascist" from the British Union of Fascists. From then on the party was simply the British Union.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, February 1936, the *Blackshirt* changed its slogan from "Britain first" to "the patriotic worker's paper." Subsequent to the slogan change, articles in the *Blackshirt* emphasized the support of trade unions.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> "Wage Cutting is Suicidal," *Blackshirt*, Feb. 1, 1933, 2.

<sup>143</sup> I will continue to refer to the British Union as the BUF because switching back and forth is both obnoxious and confusing.

<sup>144</sup> Dorril, *Black Shirt*, 371.

The BUF had existed for five years, with little progress into gaining authority and power at the national level. BUF propagandists then decided to rework their discourse in a in order to build grass-roots support for fascism. So they shifted the emphasis of their discourse to supporting trade unions and workers. By emphasizing trade unions and workers, BUF writers were able to show how the BUF could influence in economics and politics at a local level. BUF writer, “A. Brittain” claimed that an increase in worker wages was the result of the trade union activities, promoted by the British Union represented. The author wanted to show that the BUF was getting positive results for workers at the local level.<sup>145</sup>



Figure 4. A laborer carries the banker above the waters of depression.

<sup>145</sup> The author makes the effort to capitalize “Union.” It is a subtle method of linking the “British Union” to trade “Unions”; see A. Brittain, *Blackshirt*, July 3, 1937, 3.

<sup>146</sup> *Blackshirt*, March 23, 1936, 1.

Not all trade unions, however, were interested in joining the BUF. Some preferred to support socialist parties, and many backed the Labour Party. As portrayed in the BUF press, these dissident trade unions were led by individuals who used “intimidation and victimization” as the means to keep their unions blind to “the logic of the corporate state.” Fascist authors claimed that the “reds” were attempting to influence these trade unions with “intrigue, promises, deceit and betrayal.” Fascist authors continued the anti-international rhetorical trend, claiming such influence was the result of a Bolshevik conspiracy.<sup>147</sup>

### Christian Churches

Philosophically, fascists emphasized a collectivist concept of a greater good, under the authority of the state, which they believed was the highest moral authority. The individual would have to concede their moral perspective to the will of the dictator, who justified his actions on behalf of a national greater good. Such moral authority superseded all others, yet there was potential conflicts between the dictator's will and the desires of religious groups. Because such concerns arose in political discourse, fascist authors produced several articles describing the reconcile Christianity and fascism.<sup>148</sup>

The difficulty of creating convincing and repeatable phrases about fascism and religion in these articles was that they were relatively complex philosophical discussions. BUF authors never established a simple, catchy phrase to make that could attract

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<sup>147</sup> B.D.E Donovan, “the Harvest of 1937,” *Action*, Jan. 6, 1938, 10-11; see also ‘a Working Engineer,’ “The Fight is on: an Engineer Writes,” *Blackshirt*, July 3, 1937, 5.

<sup>148</sup> “Fascism and the Roman Catholics: No Interference in a Fascist State,” *Action*, July 1, 1933, 3;

Christians. As a result, their discourse on religion was unconvincing. Articles about Christianity often were written as a defense from attacks by unsupportive Anglican clergymen. Other articles were written to dispel rumors that the National Socialist party was destroying Christianity in Germany.

These fascist authors had to be considerate of going on the offensive against the "Old Gang" while trying to include Anglicans and Catholics. Both the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church were authorities within the Britain's status quo, and both were well respected institutions in British society. In order to avoid sounding antagonistic to the English Christian tradition while attacking the "Old Gang", BUF authors only criticized clergymen who used their authority for political purposes. These authors frequently juxtaposed their criticisms of individual clergymen with claims that the BUF supported the church as a whole. Also, these authors made claims of non-interference by the fascist state in personal religious practices.<sup>149</sup>

This claim of non-interference was put to test in 1936. Rumors of religious intolerance directed against Catholics by the German National Socialist government emerged in Britain. These rumors included claims that Nazis were sending Catholic Priests to concentration camps, and some British Catholics spread this rumor in order to attack the BUF. They actively preached that fascism was a secularist, pagan philosophy. Fascist authors had to react to such claims, placing these authors in a defensive position. Reverend M. Yate Allen provided a defense, but Allen had the difficult task of explaining and justifying what was actually occurring in Nazi Germany.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> William Joyce, "Four Questions Answered," *Action*, July 23, 1936, 2; see also Rev. H.E.B. Nye, "Christianity and Fascism," *Action*, Aug. 20, 1936, 7; see also Bluebird, "Seeing Things," *Action*, Nov. 7, 1936, 6.

<sup>150</sup> Rev. M. Yate Allen, "The Religious Situation in Germany," *Action*, August 6, 1936, 3.

Allen's strategy was to outright deny the rumors of religious intolerance in Germany, and he rationalized what he could not deny. After a personal visit to Germany, Allen did not find any evidence of priests being sent to concentration camps, nor did he think that the country was "turning pagan" under Nazi rule. Furthermore, Allen blamed the financial situation and politics in Germany for the rumors. The German Catholic Church was seen as a "macroeconomic leak" because much of the Church's wealth traveled from Germany to Rome. Due to Germany's financial difficulties, the Nazi government blocked transfers of wealth through the regulations of German banking. Also, members of the "old Center Party" was making "misuse of the pulpit" to attack fascism. The Nazis, "not being inclined to interfere," only intervened reluctantly. Finally, as the author pointed out, "Hitler himself is a Catholic."<sup>151</sup>

Allen's article gave consideration to the economic and political pressures the Nazis imposed on the Catholic Church, but he pursued an argument that ignores Nazi derision of religion. Whether his recounting of the exchange between the Catholic Church and the German government intentionally or unintentionally distorted the reality of the relationship between church and state in Nazi Germany is difficult to say. It is possible that Allen mistook Nazi tolerance of German Catholics as acceptance of the Catholic tradition in German society. Furthermore, it would not be surprising if Allen felt that the restrictions imposed by Nazis on Catholics were justifiable for the greater good of the German-Fascist state. Finally, the intent of Allen's article was to make a political point directed to an English audience. He emphasized some aspects of the relationship between Catholics and Nazis, while ignoring antagonisms between the two,

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*



in order to fit a predetermined conclusion by the BUF and to fight the propaganda battle for the support of the support of England's Christians.<sup>152</sup>

Fascists tried to reconcile Christianity with fascism was through the belief in a strict "moral father." On a personal level, the family unit should be structured as a patriarchy. Moral authority derives from the father. Other members of the family follow his example and obey his commands. Likewise, the family within a church is obedient to the moral authority of the priest leading the congregation. On the state level, moral authority would be vested in a patriarchal figure, such as a king, pope, or dictator, who provides moral and legal authority in broad strokes. In the fascist view, such a hierarchy was necessary to ensure a strong, long lasting society.<sup>153</sup> This somewhat undemocratic world view was common in BUF social groups,<sup>154</sup> i.e. that participation in such a hierarchy shaped what the individual conceives of as being right and just.

A philosophical difficulty fascists faced is shown in the Allen - Nazi Germany example: how are the roles of a secular and religious authority to be reconciled? According to the BUF Press, a local church would be the authority for all spiritual matters, and the fascist state would concern itself only with the secular; however, such idealism ignores common practices of a totalitarian government. A BUF government ruling Britain could impose its will on any group because there is no guarantee of rights in any state that can seize an individual's property on a whim. The fascist agenda would inevitably conflict with the interests of the Anglican and Catholic religious authorities.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> "Fascism and Religion: a Harmony of Ideals," June 1, 1933, 2; see also George Lakoff *Whose Freedom? The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea* (New York: Picador, 2006).

<sup>154</sup> Mosley wanted the British people to democratically elect in a new fascist order. Such a desire implies that governance derived from consent of the governed; however, as soon as the hierarchy of the new order was established, democratic participation would be non-existent.

Any claim that there would not be need for interference expressed a wishful, naive belief.<sup>155</sup>

An anonymous *Blackshirt* author provided a solution by showing several commonalities between Christianity and fascism in his article, "Fascism and the Roman Catholics: No Interference in a Fascist State." He suggested that Christians and fascists promote social discipline under a moral authority. Furthermore, he claimed that this moral authority rejected "evil," implying that both groups, more specifically the father figures who lead these groups, were morally good. Also, the author correlated the Christian tradition with the feudal guild system in Britain, to which many fascists wanted to return to. These fascists believed feudalism was a more moral and organic way to structure society, and they believed that the Christian tradition supported this change. Finally, the British-Fascist government would regularly consult with the Pope to create a concordant.<sup>156</sup> So, the author's solution for potential conflict is for the fascist state to recognize each church's authority in the spiritual sphere.

This anonymous author also considered another common challenge to Christians and fascists relating to "strict father morality." He detailed a brief history of philosophies, ranging from those of the Greeks to the Renaissance, and suggested that the "multiplicity of philosophies implies an incessant clash of moral values," which had resulted in the "decay" of the Greeks. The author's overarching argument is that a strong leader, like the pope for the Catholic Church, is necessary "to torpedo the immoral, amoral [sic]... fanatics who sail in the crazy ship of liberal democracy."<sup>157</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>155</sup> William Joyce, "Four Questions Answered," *Action*, 2.

<sup>156</sup> "Fascism and the Roman Catholics: No Interference in a Fascist State," *Blackshirt*, Jan 5, 1934, 3.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

the notion of strength through diversity was antithetical to author's perception of paternalism.

Other, token gestures were made by the BUF to overcome the perception that fascists were anti-religious. One author, "a Priest," outright claimed that "fascism is not anti-Christian."<sup>158</sup> Meetings and Christmas gatherings were held at churches, and the BUF Press was sure to report those meetings. Articles used positive language when referring to English religious tradition. They claimed fascists would guarantee freedom of religious expression. Also, another fascist author claimed that a British fascist government would "...give generous grants in aid and equipping... Catholic and denominational schools."<sup>159</sup> Such propaganda may have had some appeal, as it supported the desire for a national rebirth through education, but it could also lead to concerns about fascist interference in a church's authority.

Many British women carried their religious identities into the political arena. Mosley actively encouraged female membership, and claimed that BUF support of the Anglican-Christian tradition was important to gaining female supporters. In 1934, the BUF Press provided the "Women's Section" an opportunity to engage in the battle of words through the *Woman Fascist* newspaper. This paper contained articles about issues pertinent to female fascists. The first edition of the short lived paper published an article concerning religion. It followed the theme found in other BUF publications of the fascist fighting to save Britain from evil. But this article made use of language common to

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<sup>158</sup> A Priest, "Bishop Attacks Fascism," *Blackshirt*, July, 15, 1933, 3.

<sup>159</sup> "Catholics and Denominational Schools: the Attitude of Fascism in Britain," *Blackshirt*, Jan. 4, 1935,1; see also "Fascism and Religion: a Harmony of Ideals," June 1, 1933, 2.

Christian discourse. For example, the author likens personal rejuvenation through the holy spirit to the rejuvenation of British society through fascism.<sup>160</sup>

As European nations openly engaged in war, a vindication of British fascist fears of societal collapse and the international conspiracy emerged in the BUF Press; however, fascist authors were still fighting a losing battle of words over their claim to be the saviors of Britain as British soldiers fought fascists on a home front. World War II amplified the negative perceptions the British had toward fascism, including the belief of fascist antagonism to Christianity.

In January 1940, Reverend Ellis G. Roberts attempted to overcome the "misunderstandings" regarding fascism and religion through an article in *Action*. The argument provided was similar to M. Yate Allen's: both fascism and Christianity emphasized duty over pleasure, spiritual over material, self-sacrifice over self-indulgence. Furthermore, Roberts argued that the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest quantity of people is found in both ideologies. Given the context of the war, apocalyptic rhetoric came to the fore with the statement "for the whole future of European civilization is at stake."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Gottlieb cites a single article from the *Blackshirt* by Baroness Ellas de Hemstra, and the column "Women and Religion" in *The Woman Fascist*, to argue that "the ideal fascist woman demonstrated nothing short of religious fanaticism to Mosley;" see Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 98-98; see also "Propaganda Patrols," *Blackshirt*, Feb. 23, 1934, 4; see also Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 65.

<sup>161</sup> Reverend Ellis G. Roberts, "Against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World," *Action*, Jan. 18, 1940.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion: Failure

The BUF had their greatest number of members during times of crisis, such as the years following the Great Depression and just prior to World War II. This should not be surprising considering the apocalyptic discourse that Mosley used to appeal to people who were frustrated and felt lost. The BUF Press positioned the "Old Gang" as the cause of the traumatic experience of World War I and the depression. These politicians were part of some vague international conspiracy with bankers, foreign nations, and Jews to undermine the British people for these international interests. As a result, Mosley sought to put "Britain First" and to not engage in foreign wars created by international bankers. Mosley was arrogant enough to believe that the BUF, under his authority, could save Britain. He sought to use a corporatist governmental system to plan the British economy and to remove the perceived decadence the British middle class. He believed that in doing so, the BUF could orchestrate a social regeneration toward a more moral and organic British society.<sup>162</sup>

Therefore, the BUF appealed to those who were afraid of what was to come and to those who suffered from the economic and social hardships that arose following World War I. The BUF projected its image as an organization that could give the individual

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<sup>162</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914-1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 305.

meaning and purpose. That is not to say that there were no BUF supporters who could logically justify their economic and social political positions, but that much of the discourse found in BUF newspapers appealed to emotion. Conservative leaning British could support the "battle" to return to a British culture of a less decadent time. Leftists could champion the cause of destroying the middle class, turning away from capitalism, and supporting the industrial worker. Even though many British struggled with the decline of Britain's gross domestic product and increased unemployment, especially in Britain's industrial areas, during the first few years of the 1930s, the emotional appeal was not strong enough to convince even a substantial minority of Britons that fascism was the direction the British government should adopt.

There were four phases to the discourse found in BUF Press newspapers. The first was Mosley's push to introduce people to fascism. Articles describing what fascists believed were common in the *Blackshirt* from 1932 to 1934. It was at this time that Mosley established phrases like "the corporate state," "the Old Gang," "Greater Britain," and "Britain first." Also, in this phase, the BUF made significant pushes to include as many people, British or not, as possible in their movement. With the withdrawal of support from Rothermere and his *Daily Mail* in 1934, membership in the BUF declined. Most of the articles in the *Blackshirt*, at this time, detail BUF rallies and current events. The third phase, starting in 1936, was a shift to gaining support of farmers and laborers at the grassroots. It was at this time that the BUF Press created *Action*, the *Blackshirt* became "the patriotic worker's paper," and the frequency of anti-Semitic statements increased. The final phase came in 1939 when the fears of an impending war became relevant in the minds of the British. At this point, Mosley called for peace and he

promoted patriotism. Several fascist authors claimed that an international conspiracy was going to repeat the mistakes made a quarter century prior. This message appealed to many British, and BUF suddenly became relevant.

But the BUF was never able to establish the word "fascism" as the positive, third force that could become the new status quo. Stanley Payne claimed this was because the British economy recovered quickly in the 1930s, the British were a relatively well educated people, and Britain did not have "problems of nationalism, ethnicity, or international status" that other nations had.<sup>163</sup> Gottlieb claimed that many British saw the masculine image that the BUF members portrayed as silly. Comedians "undermined" the aesthetic of the Blackshirt by mocking it, and the British in general had a tendency to laugh at the rigid, humorless image that the BUF portrayed.<sup>164</sup> Both of these authors viewed British Fascism as something that was doomed from the start.

Other than viewing membership numbers and looking through diaries, it is impossible to deduce the influence Mosley's propaganda had on the individual at the time, but we do know the BUF incited the paranoia of the Parliament and the Home Office.<sup>165</sup> By 1939, politicians noticed the anti-war message and open antagonism of the status quo in BUF Press publications. Furthermore, in the minds of these politicians, a paramilitary group operating within a war-torn country was dangerous. Many of the BUF's top leaders continued to be active in promoting peace,<sup>166</sup> but lower-ranking Blackshirts may have felt the social pressures that came with supporting a group that had

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 303-305.

<sup>164</sup> Julie V. Gottlieb, "Britain's New Fascist Men," in *The Culture of Fascism*, 97-98.

<sup>165</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm*, 186-194.

<sup>166</sup> Dorril, *Black Shirt*, 467, 470-471; this statement excludes fascists like William Joyce, who left England to engage in the propaganda war as "Lord Ha Ha."

ties to the "enemy." So the BUF press offered to deliver *Action* in a "plain wrapper" to maintain subscribers.<sup>167</sup>

Ultimately, most BUF leaders were not able to avoid arrest. The Home Office Secretary detained certain members the BUF, not because of their propaganda, but because of their actions and their ties to Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>168</sup> By using 18b to detain "fifth columns" without consideration of the rights to assembly and speech, effectively suspending habeas corpus, the British government circumvented common law legal protections, which killed the BUF Press but not British fascism. Ironically, this resolution was philosophically congruent with fascist policy.<sup>169</sup>

British politicians did adopt a lesser degree of corporatism, through nationalization of the Bank of England, coal mining, railways, and utilities under expanded bureaucracies after World War II. This bureaucratization was less than what the BUF desired, and these changes were not the result of fascist propaganda or BUF influence. Fascists lost World War II, and with it they lost the battle of words. Today, it is common to hear a politically motivated group negatively label another group as "fascists" in British politics. This occurrence is so frequent the word has lost any nuance of political philosophy and simply means "evil."

But Mosley made a lasting impression. Modern fascists venerate his speeches. Even though these groups are few in number, they actively keep his message alive through the internet. Access to Mosley's printed works are available for free on the

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<sup>167</sup> *Action*, Jan 4, 1940, 7.

<sup>168</sup> "Leading Fascists Arrested: Sir O. Mosley and Eight Others, M.P. Detained," *Times*, May 24, 1940, 6.

<sup>169</sup> See A.W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) Appendix 1, 424-425 for the full text of Defense Regulation 18b.



Oswald Mosley website;<sup>170</sup> Mosley's speeches are also available on YouTube, where critics assault his message and sympathizers defend him; BUF memorabilia occasionally appears on eBay; interviews with Mosley continued long after the British Home Office released BUF members from prison; academics have produced a good quantity of material on British fascists; and the growing British National Party uses the "old-gang" rhetoric to call for a change in government.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> See <http://www.oswaldmosley.com/free-ebooks.htm>, last accessed November 22, 2011; see also [www.europeanaction.com](http://www.europeanaction.com), last accessed April 17th, 2012; see also [www.mosleyfacsimiles.com](http://www.mosleyfacsimiles.com), last accessed April 17, 2012

<sup>171</sup> See [www.bnp.org.uk/manifesto](http://www.bnp.org.uk/manifesto), last accessed November 22, 2011.

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VITA

Sean Ryan Webb

Candidate for the Degree of

Masters of History

Thesis: **BATTLING THE STATUS QUO: THE DISCOURSE OF THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS**

Major Field: History

Biographical: A native of California, Sean R. Webb moved to Oklahoma in 2003. After a year at the University of Central Oklahoma, Webb transferred to Oklahoma State University. At OSU, Webb was appointed Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature and Chief Justice of OSU's Student Government Association. He is currently attending the University of Oklahoma College of Law.

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Name: Sean R. Webb

Date of Degree: December, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University

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Title of Study: BATTLING THE STATUS QUO: THE DISCOURSE OF THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS, 1932-1940

Pages in Study: 74

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Scope and Method of Study:

This study is an analysis of the language used in the British Union of Fascists Press's publication during Britain's inter-war period. Through description of the language used in these newspapers in support of British fascism, this study provides an understanding of British Union of Fascists' worldview. By showing a correlation between membership in the British Union of Fascists and the major issues published in the British Union of Fascists Press at a specific point in time, the study shows which political statements were the most successful in attracting new membership.

Findings and Conclusions:

The British Union of Fascists were unsuccessful in becoming a mainstream political movement. The propaganda printed through the British Union of Fascist Press was only partial cause for the movement's failure. The articles published by the British Union of Fascists Press correlated an imagined international conspiracy of the politically powerful, the press, the capitalists, and Jews with the victimization of the British people. Furthermore, the British Union of Fascists perceived the values of inter-war British industry society as decadent and materialist. The British Union of Fascists sought to regenerate society by renewing traditional social values, such as duty, honor, and sacrifice. The propaganda, published through their press, portrayed efforts to achieve this goal as an apocalyptic fight to save Britain's soul. Finally, members of the British Union of Fascists were statist and utopianist, technocrats who believed they could restructure society through economic control.

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