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**The Attempted Revival Of British Fascism:
Fascism And Anti-Fascism 1945-51**

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Synopsis

The thesis is divided into six sections. The Introduction discusses the themes of the dissertation, notably fascism, anti-fascism and Britain in the 1940s. It reviews the existing literature and outlines the method used. The first chapter examines the legacy of the inter-war years and the impact of internment on the fascists. It analyses the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women and the Mosley book clubs, which came together to form the Union Movement. The chapter ends in 1951 with Oswald Mosley's decision to leave Britain, a symbol of the failure of British fascism. The second chapter stresses the homogeneity of fascist thinking and the common possession of core ideas, including elitism, racism, and anti-socialism. It suggests that fascist parties also acted in a similar way, they glorified their leaders and encouraged anti-semitism and violence. The chapter argues that postwar fascism recruited especially well among members of the middle class. However, even within this group, only a tiny minority was attracted towards fascism.

The third chapter examines the history of the non-fascist organisations, including Labour, the Communist Party and the 43 Group. The chapter also evaluates anti-fascist methods, which involved exposing the fascists, heckling their speakers and turning over fascist platforms. The fourth chapter describes the moment at which fascists and anti-fascists opposed each other in the street. It suggests that the various state agencies, including the police, the Home Office, the law departments and MI6, worked with fascism, or did nothing to prevent its growth. Finally, the Conclusion discusses the obstacles which the fascists faced, including the legacy of the war and the Holocaust, and the success of the Conservative Party after 1945. It also suggests that anti-fascism also played significant part in the fascists' defeat.

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Abbreviations Used In The Text

AJEX	Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen
ANL	Anti-Nazi League
BAP	British Action Party
BEU	British Empire Union
BF	British Fascisti
BHL	British Housewives' League
BLEF	British League of European Freedom
BPP	British People's Party
BUF	British Union of Fascists
BVAL	British Vigilantes' Action League
CP	Communist Party of Great Britain
ENA	English National Association
FBI	Federation of British Industries
IFL	Imperial Fascist League
ILP	Independent Labour Party
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
MPA	Medical Policy Association
NCCL	National Council of Civil Liberties
NCU	National Citizens Union
NJC	National Jewish Committee
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers Party
NWM	National Workers Movement
NWP	National Workers Party
RCP	Revolutionary Communist Party
SLEF	Scottish League of European Freedom
SPGB	Socialist Party of Great Britain
TUC	Trades Union Congress

Abbreviations Used In The Notes And Bibliography

ARC	Archive of British Petroleum
BOD	Jewish Board of Deputies archive
CAB	Cabinet papers
CP	Communist Party of Great Britain archive
DCL	National Council of Civil Liberties archive
DJH	Jock Haston papers
FO	Foreign Office
GLRO	Greater London Records Office
HO	Home Office archive
<i>IM</i>	<i>Immigrants And Minorities</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>International Socialism</i> (1st series)
<i>ISJ</i>	<i>International Socialism Journal</i> (2nd series)
IWM	Imperial War Museum
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
LP	Labour Party archive
<i>LHR</i>	<i>Labour History Review</i>
LMJL	London Museum of Jewish Life
MEPO	Metropolitan Police Commissioner's archive
MRC	Modern Records Centre
MUJEX	Manchester and Salford Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen
NLLP	North Lambeth Labour Party
<i>PP</i>	<i>Patterns of Prejudice</i>
PREM	Archive of the Prime Minister's Office
PRO	Public Records Office
RLL	Rose Lipman Library
<i>WLB</i>	<i>Wiener Library Bulletin</i>

Introduction

The Attempted Revival Of British Fascism documents the attempts of the various fascist groups to establish a reborn fascist organisation in the years 1945-51, and the efforts of the several anti-fascist and state organisations to thwart them. As a result this study concentrates on three themes, fascism, anti-fascism, and Britain in the 1940s. It is appropriate at the outset to ask why we need another piece of work which explores these topics. The first theme is fascism, it is clear that British fascism has received historical attention out of all proportion to its relevance, and there are now around one hundred books, review and journal articles in print, devoted to its history. Each year, on various undergraduate courses, more people study the ideas of Arnold Leese than ever attended Leese's meetings. Stanley Payne describes British fascism as 'a sort of political oxymoron ... the volume of literature on the B[ritish] U[nion] of F[ascists] is inversely proportionate to its significance'.¹ Similarly, Richard Thurlow suggests that, 'rarely can such an apparently insignificant topic have been responsible for such an outpouring of ink'.² Why do historians return to the study of British fascism?

One reason is that its story forms a part of the history of general fascism, which has a definite value. It reminds us of the contradictory character of the twentieth century. On the one hand, this century has witnessed the most extraordinary expansion of human creative power. This has been the century of space travel, genetic engineering and computer technology. Human beings can now control their physical environment, we have the scientific resources to end hunger and need. On the other hand, this century has not exhibited the same advance in human control over society. These years have been remarkable for the combination of both increased democratisation and also increased dictatorship, which has meant more suffering and less real freedom.³ It is important to study fascism because it is an ideology which has set out from its birth to create dictatorship, therefore it reminds us that our present is not in all ways benign. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, for the case

of the Holocaust, 'We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society, whose other, more familiar, face we so admire'.⁴

The reasons for studying British fascism are linked to the reasons for studying generic fascism, but are also in some ways different. British fascism never came close to seizing state power, it was always a failure. Its interest can be explained only by its exotic character. British fascism is important not only because it failed, however, but also because it was there. Its very existence dispels the comfortable myth that this has always been a tolerant and consensual society. The cliché states that we do not do things that way here, but we did and we do.

One further reason for writing about British fascism as it existed in the 1940s is simply that nobody else has. The existing literature on the period is scanty, especially when it is compared to the literature on fascism in the 1930s or the 1970s. Yet the events themselves deserve attention, they should be rescued and studied. The significance of fascism in this period becomes clear when the events of the 1940s are compared to similar events taking place in the lives of different generations. There is a difference between the fascism of the 1930s and the fascism of the 1970s and beyond. The main fascist party of the 1930s, the British Union of Fascists (BUF), was relatively large and confident. Its programme was taken from the speeches of Oswald Mosley, its leader, the BUF's membership was often suburban and disproportionately middle-class. The main fascist party of the 1970s, the National Front (NF), was different, it was smaller and its programme owed more to Hitler than Mosley. Its membership was urban and, relative to the British Union of Fascists, more working class. From this perspective, the 1940s can be understood as a hinge in the history of British fascism, a moment of transition from one form to another.

Between 1945 and 1951, the impact of British fascism was shaped by the legacy of the second world war and the Holocaust. For the opponents of fascism, it seemed extraordinary that the fascists could dare show their faces again. Indeed, it was remarkable that the ideology could be reborn. British fascism was doubly excluded, by the actions of Italian and German fascism and by its own role in the war. British fascists were interned in 1940, broadly suspected of being traitors. Their very existence after 1945 offended a broad anti-fascist consensus, shared across the whole political spectrum, from the left wing of the Communist Party (CP), to the right fringes of Conservatism. Thus, when fascism revived, only a minority of pre-war

fascists took part, while the remaining fascists were bitter, demoralised and afraid. For one brief instant, in the autumn and winter of 1947-8, it seemed that circumstances would change. Nurtured by events in Palestine, there was a brief situation when anti-semitism again became a popular force. This moment came and went, and with it the hopes of the fascists died.

The second theme of this dissertation is anti-fascism. As yet, there is no historical literature of anti-fascism for any period, the studies we have are partial, often limited to particular campaigns or a set area. There are local histories of anti-fascist campaigns⁵ and autobiographical memoirs written by older or former activists.⁶ These accounts are personal and immediate. Only two, Morris Beckman's *The 43 Group*, and David Widgery's *Beating Time*, are even of book length. What we do not yet have is material written by professional historians, or written with any distance from the events described. Yet to ignore anti-fascism, as the historians have done, is to neglect an important part of working-class history. The size of the anti-fascist campaigns makes it clear that these movements were not peripheral or irrelevant, they were important developments which involved hundreds of thousands of people. At Hyde Park, in 1934, 100,000 people marched against fascism. Even greater numbers blocked the fascists at Cable Street, in 1936. Between eighty and one hundred thousand people took to the streets at Bermondsey in 1937.⁷ When Mosley was released from jail, towards the end of 1943, around one million people signed a petition to protest. The two Anti-Nazi League (ANL) carnivals in London in the 1970s had 80,000 and 100,000 people on them.⁸ The most recent Anti-Nazi League carnival, in 1994, saw 120,000 march, and up to 250,000 people attend the concert afterwards. By comparison, even when the British Union of Fascists was supported by Viscount Rothermere, the *Daily Mail*, and Rothermere's fleet of national newspapers, it never had more than 50,000 members, and most of them were passive, 'paper' supporters.⁹ At the height of its activity, in 1948, Mosley's postwar Union Movement had a maximum of six or seven thousand members. The National Front reached its peak membership in 1972. It then had no more than 17,500 members. Later, when the NF had a larger activist membership and was a more significant political force, it still had only 15,000 supporters.¹⁰

The real importance of anti-fascism has been that it has provided the most immediate obstacle to the growth of the fascist parties. At those times, when groups such as the BUF and the NF have been growing in strength, when fascist parties have

pulled the political agenda to the right and threatened to achieve a break-through, organised anti-fascists have been able to transform the situation. Important anti-fascist movements, including the campaigns that led to Olympia or Cable Street, Lewisham or Welling, have exposed the violence at the heart of fascism, discrediting the fascist parties before the respectable members of their audience and demoralising the members of these organisations. In terms of explaining the failure of fascism, these campaigns were not the only historical factor, but they were extremely important. Most historians maintain that these campaigns failed, and the idea that anti-fascism has ever actually succeeded is anathema to them. Part of the purpose of this dissertation, then, is to make precisely this case, by taking the example of the 1940s, this thesis will argue that such anti-fascist movements worked.

As has already been suggested, one way to understand the history of fascism in the 1940s is as a hinge, between the different patterns of the 1930s and 1970s. The anti-fascism campaigns of 1945-51 can be interpreted in the same way. The most important anti-fascist organisation in the 1930s was the Communist Party, whose anti-fascism was linked, indeed subordinated, to its wider politics, which manifested themselves in different ways. The CP sought to build a working-class party, but this positive goal was distorted by a vertical and undemocratic leadership. To its credit, the party did have enormous support among the Jews of the East End, but this benign aspect of the organisation was combined with a restrictive loyalty to the political line emanating from the Russian state.¹¹ By the 1970s, the largest anti-fascist organisation was different, not a party, but a broad coalition, the Anti-Nazi League. Inside the ANL a different politics dominated, less hierarchical, taking its inspiration from a socialist tradition that was Trotskyist and not Stalinist. The local support for the Anti-Nazi League was more diffuse geographically. Key support came from young Black or Asian workers, a different generation from the anti-fascist Jews of the 1930s. Again, something had changed.

Reading this dissertation it is important to bear in mind that old historical patterns were breaking up, and that new forces were coming to replace them. Oswald Mosley, the leader of the inter-war BUF, was on the wane, at the same time as A. K. Chesterton, formerly one of Mosley's lieutenants, was in the ascendant. The Communist Party, which had 50,000 members in the mid 1940s and represented Labour's opposition on the left, was at the peak of its influence, while smaller and also

more radical socialist groups were now beginning to emerge, even if it would be many years before their tactics became significant for the left as a whole.

The third theme of this dissertation is Britain in the 1940s. It is clear that the second world war was perceived by most ordinary British people as a war for democracy and against fascism. There was an enormous sense of people taking control over their lives. Huge numbers of people began to read. They bought Penguin Specials, 600,000 copies of the Beveridge report, anything indeed which suggested that a new and different society could be built after the war. The important question then is, 'where did the forties go?'¹² The popular radical mood was expressed in the 1945 election result, and transformed by the reality of a Labour government. Labour was the partial creator and full beneficiary of the popular mood. The Labour landslide was a huge vote for change, even *The Economist* recognised the scale of Tory defeat, 'beyond all possibility of doubt, this country wants a Labour government and a socialist programme'.¹³ Historians have disagreed, however, as to the impact of the Labour government. Kenneth Morgan insists that Labour in government was loyal to the popular desire for radical change,¹⁴ while Angus Calder suggests that it represented continuity with the National Government, not socialism, but more of the same.¹⁵

Labour did transform British society, but unevenly. The government nationalised electricity, gas, cable and wireless, coal and the Bank of England. It passed legislation leading to the creation of the national health service and the welfare state. Pensions were increased, prices fixed, the Trades Disputes Act repealed. One area where there was less change, though, was in colonial policy. The Labour cabinet continued to believe in Empire, administered Empire and used the tactics of the old colonial elites.¹⁶ In the Middle East, Labour played off different ethnic groups against each other. In Palestine, in particular, the British government alternately backed and then blocked both Jewish and then Arab aspirations. The anti-semitic riots which took place in Liverpool and elsewhere during the bank holiday of August 1947 can be understood as the chickens coming home to roost, the return of international policy into the domestic sphere. In its foreign policy, generally, Labour was far closer to the National Government than to the mood of its supporters. The government which radicalised millions voted for in 1945, went on to join NATO, accept the US loan, start its own atomic programme and side with America against the USSR in the Cold War.¹⁷ Again, Labour's international politics became domestic policy.

From late 1947 onward, Labour increasingly attacked the left as the enemy within, communists were removed from positions as teachers, munitions workers, lecturers, and civil servants. Wages were frozen, troops used against strikers on the London docks.¹⁸

The fact that the Labour government shifted rightward under the pressure of the Cold War, helps to answer one question which returns throughout this dissertation, why was the reforming Labour government of 1945-51 so unwilling to do anything to act against the rise of fascism? The police, as this dissertation will argue, displayed little desire or urgency to act against Mosley. The government itself acted as if it had enemies only on the left. In effect, Cold War politics shaped the attitude of the Labour government towards fascism.

Existing Literature

The concerns of *The Attempted Revival Of British Fascism* have inevitably been shaped by the existing work on British fascism. Although most of the studies end in 1940, before the period on which attention is focused here, the literature is considerable, and it would be wrong to ignore its methods or its conclusions. It is about forty years ago that historians first began to write seriously about British fascism. Their initial concern was with the largest, and most obvious of questions, such as how the first groups were formed, or why did the British Union of Fascists fail? The style of this history was borrowed from the conventions of high political history. The histories of Colin Cross and Robert Benewick centred around the intellectual development of Oswald Mosley and ended in May 1940.¹⁹ It was argued in these works that when then the state moved to intern the members of the BUF, British fascism suffered its final and decisive defeat. As Cross put it, 'British fascism ended in May 1940 and has not since been revived under that name.'²⁰ Similarly, Benewick finished his history in 1940 with these words,

*Fascism - updated - and allied movements have reappeared in Britain, but there is little likelihood of their emerging from the British political fringe.*²¹

More recently, however, the nature of the orthodoxy has changed, under the influence of three specific developments. First, there has been the publication of a

series of biographies and memoirs, with Mosley as their subject, which were intended to rescue him from the broad contempt which he then enjoyed. Second, the growth of the National Front and then the British National Party (BNP) showed that fascism could develop in postwar Britain. If there was fascism in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, then it would follow that there must be a continuity, whether in terms of ideas or of people, between the 1940s and the later period. Third, the growth of fascism fuelled in turn the rebirth of organised anti-fascism. As one response, anti-fascist historians have looked to the past for a model of how to organise in the present day.

The first impulse for historical development was the Mosley boom, which began of all years in 1968 with the publication of Oswald Mosley's autobiography, *My Life*. It continued with Robert Skidelsky's biography, *Mosley*, and the memoirs of Diana and Nicholas Mosley.²² Clearly, there were differences between these books. Oswald and Diana Mosley were simply concerned to revise and improve their own historical images, by contrast Nicholas Mosley explained himself by simultaneously defending his father, Oswald, and also distancing himself from him. Of these books, the most important was Robert Skidelsky's biography. It was thoroughly if selectively researched, and remains the most significant single work on the subject of British fascism. It is also the most controversial. Skidelsky spent many hours interviewing Oswald Mosley, and fitted him into the same mould as his other great hero, Keynes. He was at least as concerned to restore Mosley's reputation, as Mosley had been seven years earlier. Skidelsky's work is a subject lesson in the art of legal defence, a role which he saw himself as taking up.²³ His method is the same throughout. He grants that Mosley's character did have a certain weakness, but then re-interprets this flaw in a more positive light. For example, Mosley's anti-semitism is described as an 'English' anti-semitism, 'whimsical brutality ... more humorous ... than the attitude of the Germans'.²⁴ Fascist anti-semitism, Skidelsky claims, was the fault of the Jews, 'what started to change [the BUF's line] was the attitude of the Jews themselves, and they must take some of the blame for what subsequently happened.'²⁵ Mosley was never a traitor, he was a patriot, 'a representative of the greatest empire in the world'.²⁶ Mosley was not violent; he was the one who was attacked. The cover of the third edition of Skidelsky's book describes Mosley as the great leader Britain never had:

In this century Britain has produced two great war leaders - Lloyd George and Churchill; many people now acknowledge that Mosley was the lost peace

*leader, a man with stature and imagination to have invigorated an ailing society.*²⁷

As this dissertation will argue, many of Skidelsky's detailed arguments are questionable. Whenever the author descends from the heights of heady praise to the low detail of what actually happened, he is often wrong. Any sustained account of the detailed incidents which Skidelsky describes, of local campaigns, or membership figures, or internment, is likely to come up with a radically different picture of what actually happened in Mosley's career.²⁸ As a result, many reviewers have interpreted Skidelsky's work in the light of his revisionist project. William Bader described the book as 'seriously flawed.' He criticised Skidelsky for stressing the positive nature of Mosley's fascist project, and for whitewashing Mosley's anti-semitism, "'Mosley was right" is Skidelsky's leitmotif'.²⁹

In terms of the history of immediate postwar fascism, the importance of Skidelsky's book lies in the way that the author counterposes Mosley's later ideological career to his earlier activist track record. After 1945, he argues,

*Mosley deliberately renounced much of his old, chauvinist, racist following and tried to win new converts, and a new type of convert, to new ideas ... The atmosphere was much less military than before the war ... There was much less centralisation ... Mosley was only intermittently active.*³⁰

Skidelsky portrays the older Mosley as the champion of African development and European Socialism, an idealist, a genuinely radical thinker, who had transcended fascism and provided a set of ideas that should have influenced the postwar world. Whether this image has any truth at all, the picture of immediate postwar fascism as a healthy synthesis of new ideas has certainly impressed a number of historians. Perhaps as a consequence, the few books and articles which have discussed this subject have followed Skidelsky in focusing primarily on the utopian character of Mosleyite fascism in Britain in this period. There is no sustained history of the Union Movement, its practice as an organisation, or of its rivals.

The Mosley boom continues, in different styles, to the present day. A small group of ageing disciples, the Friends of Oswald Mosley, publish a journal, *Comrade*, dedicated to putting forward the BUF's version of events. These Friends provide material to sympathetic listeners, but are less generous when faced with anyone more critical. A. W. B. Simpson drew extensively on their help when writing his book on the

internment of fascists in 1940.³¹ Tom Linehan used their evidence to analyse the membership of the BUF in East London in the 1930s.³² Stephen Cullen has used their testimony to write a sympathetic account of the role of women in British fascism.³³ He has also written for *Comrade*,³⁴ and in one further article, has argued the broad Mosleyite position, that British fascists were largely the innocent victims of street-aggression from Jews and Communists in the 1930s.³⁵ The fourth chapter of this dissertation, on the role of the police in the 1940s, will make it clear that Cullen's case cannot be sustained.

In February 1998, Channel Four presented a drama documentary, dedicated to the life of Oswald Mosley. Scripted by Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran, the films relied heavily on Nicholas Mosley and Robert Skidelsky's published accounts, although Skidelsky has been critical of the final product. Consequently, the drama was positive about Mosley, portraying him as a womaniser who turned to fascism late in his political career, before turning away from racism when exposed to the harsh reality of anti-semitism in the late 1930s. Mosley's redemption in this drama has no relation to the actual history of the man. As this dissertation will point out, the Union Movement which he set up in 1948 was just as anti-semitic as the BUF its predecessor. What this drama demonstrates is the profound falsity of a whole genre. In order to make Mosley appear repentant, Marks and Gran were obliged to invent whole scenes, such as the scene in which their Mosley was horrified to encounter anti-semitism in Germany. In reality, this event never took place.³⁶

The second important motor of change has been the growth of British fascism, especially from 1970 onwards. This in turn has generated its own literature, with books written by such authors as Christopher Husbands, Stan Taylor and Michael Billig.³⁷ In this literature, the fascism of the mid- to late-1940s appears as an origin or prelude to the real interest, typically the growth of the National Front in the 1970s. Probably the first example of this literature was George Thayer's book, *The British Political Fringe*,³⁸ which contains short chapters, both on the Union Movement and on the neo-Nazis, including figures such as Colin Jordan, whose fascist pedigree dates back as far as 1947. Thayer's focus is on the 1960s, not the 1940s, but he does include a chapter of historical material.³⁹ Similarly, Martin Walker's journalistic account of the rise of the NF includes a brief survey linking the history of British fascism in the 1970s to the pre-history of the immediate postwar period.⁴⁰

Influenced by the growth of fascism in the 1970s, Neil Nugent has written a paper outlining the history of British fascism from the 1940s onwards, and asking whether it 'is ... legitimate, in any strict sense, to view the Union Movement, the British National Party, the National Front and others as postwar fascism?'⁴¹ Nugent's description of the Union Movement closely follows Skidelsky's earlier picture, stressing the ideological character of the Movement, 'Europe A Nation became the main rallying cry of the Union Movement ... There was a less militaristic flavour.'⁴² Nugent maintains the strong distinction between the postwar radical-thinker Mosley and the pre-war reactionary-activist fascist movement, which has its origins in Skidelsky's biography and ultimately in Mosley's own re-interpretation of his political isolation.

Another conference paper, this time by Anne Poole, focuses much more closely on the immediate postwar period.⁴³ Poole is interested to explain why the Union Movement failed, but her account can also be read as an extended commentary on Skidelsky's notion that would be inaccurate to interpret the Union Movement as a failure. If it did fail as a political party, then it was a success as a vehicle for the evolution of Mosley's thought. Poole gives a number of reasons which explain why fascism failed to make headway after 1945, these include the absence of economic crisis, the mass support for the parliamentary process, the role of organised anti-fascism and crucially the legacy of the second world war. Given all these conditions it was inevitable that Union Movement would fail. However, Poole argues, the important process is the way in which Mosley's thought developed. Poole stresses the European context of Mosley's work, the similarity between his ideas and the writings of Drieu La Rochelle, the links between Mosley himself and other postwar fascists, in France, Spain, Tangiers, Portugal and Germany.⁴⁴ Anne Poole also rejects the idea of a hard distinction between fascism and Nazism. Mosley may not have been a biological racist, but he was a racist, all the same:

The postwar writings of Mosley (and so the ideology of the Union Movement) make this an artificial distinction. There was always the occasional reference to the need for birth control in the eugenic spirit, the inequality of the races in Empire and some behaviour justified on the basis that the behaviour of some Jews merited it.⁴⁵

More recently, Richard Thurlow has published an important article defending an interpretation of Mosley's thought in the 1940s, similar to that argued by Robert Skidelsky. Thurlow suggests that Oswald Mosley was not interested in political

activity after 1945. He argues that Mosley wanted to write, and was involved in the formation of the Union Movement only because his supporters demanded it. In particular, Richard Thurlow examines Mosley's new stress on so-called European socialism, which he describes as the 'unique features to [Mosley's] creed'. Thurlow identifies Mosley as one of a generation of 'renegade socialists', which also included de Man and Deat.⁴⁶ It could be argued, though, that Mosley's claimed socialist credentials from the 1920s were actually rather thin, they amounted to a few speeches, one pamphlet, not more. The defining continuity in Mosley's career is between the social imperialist Tory of 1918 and the fascist of 1932 and beyond. The problems with locating Mosley as a figure of the left become clear when Thurlow defines socialism as being a belief in 'expanded welfare provision from a strong state'. Under this definition Mosley could be described as a socialist, but so could any British politician, from whatever political tradition, active in the 1930s.

In other work, Richard Thurlow has gone beyond the idea that 1940s fascism should be understood primarily as an opportunity for the development of Mosley's thought. In his book, *Fascism In Britain*, Thurlow deals at length both with pre-war and postwar fascism.⁴⁷ Here British fascism is interpreted in a longer context. The fascism of the 1940s is not portrayed as an embarrassing suffix to the British Union of Fascists, nor as a prelude to the National Front, but as a period of interest in its own right. Likewise, Thurlow avoids the two traps of ignoring Mosley or of downplaying his rivals among the extreme right. The result, then, is a more compelling history, at once linking and distinguishing the several attempts of Mosley, Leese and Chesterton, to justify themselves in the light of the War and the Holocaust. The release of Public Record Office material enables Thurlow to link Mosley's programmatic texts to the practice of the Union Movement, as when Mosley dismissed his contact, Francis Parker Yockey, who was a valuable link to German nazi groups, but also a possibly embarrassing hard-line admirer of Adolf Hitler.⁴⁸

One criticism of the material discussed so far, is that it provides a narrative reflecting one particular perspective, a leader's-eye-view of British fascism. Only Richard Thurlow's book is any sort of exception. Different interpretations can be found in the several biographies of the various second-rung fascists, Arnold Leese, William Joyce, Roy Campbell, A. K. Chesterton, Henry Hamilton Beamish, Douglas Reed and Nellie Driver.⁴⁹ There are also the published autobiographies of Trevor Grundy, Jeffrey Hamm, Leese and John Charnley, as well as the unpublished

autobiographies of Richard Bellamy and Nellie Driver.⁵⁰ Some of these biographies and memoirs are essential for the historian, while others are far less useful. For example, William Joyce was dead by January 1946, while Nellie Driver, a BUF activist in Lancashire, dropped out of active politics during the war. On the other hand, even brief accounts can give a sense of the disagreements among BUF members and other fascists disorientated by their isolated position in the postwar world. When it came to the formation of the Union Movement, Bellamy described the process as being led from below, a spontaneous and patriotic response to circumstances, 'some ex-18Bers and other former Blackshirts, mostly ex-servicemen recently demobilised, banded together, more with the object of forming an association of old companions than for the promotion of political ideas.'⁵¹ This positive image of the Union Movement is very different from the experiences of Charlie Watts, 'I was wasting my life on people who were not worth the effort ... I was no longer going to knock my head against a brick wall.'⁵²

The most useful biography is David Baker's study of A. K. Chesterton. Chesterton's biography fits the idea of the 1940s as a hinge, he spent most of the decade passing from group to group, establishing contacts, forming his own circles, writing for different journals, making a niche for himself as figure of stature, both for fascists and ultra-Tories. Marginal to British fascism in 1938 or 1939, Chesterton grew in importance throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and was central to the formation of the National Front in 1967.⁵³ While Baker's book is certainly a valuable introduction to Chesterton, it is also true that we still await biographical studies of important second-rung fascists, such as John Beckett, Neil Francis-Hawkins and Alexander Raven-Thomson. Historians also need to know more about the posthumous influence of William Joyce.

The third impulse to the development of the study of British fascism has been the slow increase in the number of books which make at least reference to anti-fascism. Because so much of the history of British fascism has been written by individuals who have been either sympathetic towards fascism, or less than fully critical of it, therefore any different history would have to base itself on insights taken from a different source. An under-used reservoir of material can be found in the history of anti-fascism. Over the past ten or twenty years the literature on anti-fascism has grown, although it remains true to say that few secondary accounts of the left or of anti-fascist groups in this period give adequate weight to the large anti-fascist

movement of the 1940s. There is very little mention of fascism or anti-fascism in the biographies of prominent members of the Labour Party, or the several histories of the 1945-51 Labour government.⁵⁴ Neither is there much in the standard histories of the Communist Party.⁵⁵ However, as the histories progress from the larger organisations on the left to the smaller groups, so they take more interest in the anti-fascist campaigns. As a result, there is valuable material in Henry Srebrnik's account of the Jewish members of the London Communist Party, although the cut-off point of his chronology is Phil Piratin's election victory in Stepney in 1945.⁵⁶ We also have Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson's history of the postwar Trotskyist movement,⁵⁷ while the most useful of these sources is Joan Mahoney's thesis on the National Council Of Civil Liberties (NCCL).⁵⁸ The NCCL played a vital role in the anti-fascist campaign, holding information on fascist groups, staging conferences calling for a ban on fascist and anti-semitic propaganda, and encouraging local anti-fascist initiatives.⁵⁹

The best sources for the perspective of contemporary anti-fascism are the personal papers and autobiographies of anti-fascist activists. The left Labour MP D. N. Pritt was a leading supporter of the NCCL, and worked closely with the CP in its anti-fascist campaigns. His memoirs record a strong feeling of anger at what he perceived to be the pro-fascist bias of politicians, civil servants and police.⁶⁰ There is a different, more hostile account in Douglas Hyde's *I Believed*, written after Hyde had left the Communist Party for the Catholic church.⁶¹ Hyde's claim is that the CP's anti-fascist work was entirely opportunistic. Before he left the party, Hyde was a journalist on the *Daily Worker*. He claims that he himself invented the fascist threat after the paper was unbanned and in order 'to find some issue on which I could campaign continuously and which would assist the paper to become the leader of a broad agitation'.⁶² Hyde later contradicts his own insistence on the insignificance of fascism. By 1944, he suggests, there were 'over fifty different fascist, near-fascist and crypto-fascist organisations' with 'several thousand individual members'.⁶³ Despite the many inconsistencies, there is a wealth of detail in Hyde account, some of which is likely to be correct. Even when the detail is implausible, it is still intriguing. For example, Hyde describes a visit by two individuals from Special Branch, and comments, 'They had, they admitted, practically no worthwhile information on the neo-fascists and neither had MI5'.⁶⁴

There are also two memoirs written by Jewish anti-fascists, Alexander Hartog's *Born To Sing*, and Morris Beckman's *The 43 Group*.⁶⁵ Hartog was a peripheral

member of the 43 Group, which he joined in 1946 but remained in only until 1948. He remembers turning over fascist platforms, on one Sunday, thirteen platforms in just three hours, but he grew disillusioned with the group, tired of the constant fighting and angry with the direction in which he believed it was moving, 'We who began the movement were genuine with good intentions, but it finished up as a business, a lousy business.'⁶⁶ Beckman's book is very different, a history of the 43 Group written by a figure who was a founder member of the Group and much more central to the organisation. The focus of Beckman's book is the street-fighting in Hackney, especially around Ridley Road, although there is some description of events in Newcastle, Manchester and Brighton. The local nature of the account means that there is a wealth of detail and anecdote. Beckman remembers the atmosphere before the Group was founded:

*Jewish ex-servicemen were beginning to talk about the outdoor meetings and the anti-semitic posters appearing in Jewish districts like Hackney, Edgware and Stanford Hill. They regarded the new growth of fascism with a weary sense of déjà vu. Going from a cinema showing newsreel of piles of Jewish men, women and children being bulldozed into limepits in the concentration camps, and then passing an outdoor fascist meeting or seeing swastikas whitewashed on Jewish homes and synagogues affected these servicemen with an emotion ranging from choleric anger to a cold hard desire to kill the perpetrators.'*⁶⁷

He describes the large meetings and the small confrontations, including the first time the 43 Group turned over a Union Movement platform, and the occasion on which the group tried to disrupt a fascist meeting in Romford, only to be pelted with potatoes with razors in them.⁶⁸ Beckman ends his story in 1950, with the disbanding of the 43 Group, 'By the end of the summer of 1949 the Union Movement had declined to a point where it utterly lacked cohesion and direction, and its membership was reduced to confusion and despondency.'⁶⁹ Fascism was defeated, he claims, it is that fact which explains why the 43 Group could stop.

Hartog and Beckman articulate the fear and anger of Jews who saw the revival of fascism as being little more than the growth of organised anti-semitism, and it is clear that there was a growth of anti-semitism, even after the war and the Holocaust. There is now a broad literature which considers general anti-semitism in the 1940s. This includes James Robb's survey of anti-semitism in working-class east London, Colin Holmes's description of postwar racism, Claire Hirshfield's history of the paper

Truth, which employed A. K. Chesterton as one of its editors, Christopher Husbands' paper on racism in the East End, John Gross's work on the Lynskey Tribunal and Tony Kushner's description of the anti-Jewish riots of 1947.⁷⁰ Of these books and articles, the most useful are those written by James Robb and Tony Kushner. Robb's book is based on field surveys conducted in Bethnal Green during the period 1947-9, at a time when 'regular [fascist] meetings of considerable size were being held in the borough'.⁷¹ He divided the gentile population into five grades, from the consistently anti-semitic (8.7 per cent), through mild or irregular anti-semites (17.5 per cent), a middle grade (13.6 per cent) to those who would not propagate anti-semitism (42.7 per cent), to those who were consistently not anti-semitic, or to those who would actively oppose anti-semitism (17.5 per cent). 'Only one inhabitant in Bethnal Green in eight is completely tolerant, but more than half of the remainder have to be openly invited to express their anti-semitism before they will do it.'⁷² Robb then constructed a psychological profile of the typical anti-semite, 'constricted, thwarted by external forces and by other people ... His stereotypes of the Jew are largely in terms of political and economic power.'⁷³

In contrast to this static picture of anti-semitism, Tony Kushner builds a dynamic image of the contradictory and historical nature of anti-Jewish rioting. He points out that there was surprisingly little geographic correlation between anti-semitic rioting and fascist organisation. It follows that the rioting cannot be understood as simply the product of local anti-semitism, and that other factors have to be taken into consideration. It may be that the rioting of 1947 was partly economic in origin. The riots occurred some considerable time after the blowing up of the King David Hotel and the murder of the British sergeants in Palestine, and took place in areas suffering from high unemployment.⁷⁴ Writing at the time of the riots, the *Eastern Daily Press* argued that the high level of fascist activity in northeast London served to place fascism and anti-semitism beyond the pale. In London, it suggested, the presence of both fascist and anti-fascist parties forced people to take sides. The connection between fascism and anti-semitism made anti-semitism less attractive to the unemployed. If this claim is correct, then there was no rioting in London, because the people who might otherwise have rioted, were here more likely to be against fascism.⁷⁵

This account of the material produced so far does beg the question of how the literature on British fascism is likely to develop in the future. For a start, there is a

surprisingly small quantity of books and articles with the 1940s as their focus. There is certainly no definitive history, the longest pieces which are primarily about immediate postwar fascism, are the two short papers written by Anne Poole and Richard Thurlow. Also there is an absence of synthesis, there is no history yet which combines the local and personal insights of Alexander Hartog's memoirs with the national perspective of, say, Richard Thurlow's book; and nothing which compares Morris Beckman's robust anti-fascist history to the different arguments of Robert Skidelsky or Richard Bellamy. Even the most recent of historians, and those who are best able to distance themselves from the fray, such as Poole or Thurlow, still concentrate on the history of ideas rather than people or organisations, and on the leading fascists, Mosley or Leese, not the local experience or the ideas and practice of Mosley's enemies.

Method

The main purpose of this work is to portray the attempted revival of British fascism in the late 1940s. There is not any one dominant argument or thesis, but a series of secondary claims. At every stage, these arguments are linked together. These secondary points include the claims:

- That fascism did revive after 1945
- That fascism is better understood as a movement, than as an ideology
- That anti-fascism was an appropriate response to British fascism
- That the state failed to take an active role in combating fascism, and
- That fascism failed.

In terms of method, this dissertation attempts to provide a total history of the conflict between fascist and anti-fascist in the period 1945-51. There is not any one single method. Different approaches are taken, a variety of materials used, to answer different questions. The first chapter is a conventional narrative introduction, which locates the history of fascism in the 1940s within the broader history of British fascism, from the 1920s onwards. Consequently, most references here are to published sources.

The second chapter examines fascism in the 1940s. As it offers an original account of fascism as an ideology, it is worth briefly describing how it relates to the existing literature on fascism as a general political tradition. Over the past five or ten years, a number of historians, notably Roger Griffin, Roger Eatwell, Stanley Payne and Zeev Sternhell have come to the idea that it is best to interpret fascism primarily as a set of ideas.⁷⁶ Roger Griffin, in particular, has suggested that such an approach is now 'the new consensus', the standard way that theorists of fascism should understand their subject. He describes what he sees as the benefits of this method:

The premise to this approach ... is to take fascist ideology at its face value, and to recognise the central role played in it by the myth of national rebirth to be brought about by finding a 'Third Way' between liberalism/capitalism and communism/socialism. One of the advantages of the new consensus is that it brings fascism in line with the way other major political 'isms' are approached in the human sciences by defining it as an ideology inferable from the claims made by its own protagonists.⁷⁷

A future book will develop my disagreements with this approach, and make the case that fascism should be seen as *a specific form of reactionary mass movement*.⁷⁸ As Griffin suggests, in the passage quoted, to define fascism as an ideology by listing the themes of fascist rhetoric, is to argue in effect for the same definition of fascism as the one which the fascists have used to define themselves. However, any appropriate theory of fascism can only begin with the idea that fascism must be interpreted critically. The crucial point is that the ideas of fascism are not in themselves distinctive. What makes fascism is not its language but its method of political mobilisation. Fascist parties do possess a certain core ideology, but they use it to build a party, often a form of mass party, which relies on racism and political violence, and which is likely to recruit from particular groups within society. It is the behaviour of fascism which should be used to define fascism and it is the relationship between the fascist ideology and the fascist movement which makes an organisation fascist.

In this second chapter, therefore, the method is different from that advised by Roger Griffin, Roger Eatwell and other historians who define fascism by its ideas. Rather than relying mainly on secondary material, the thesis has attempted to build up a sharper picture of what fascism was like, particularly borrowing from court records and fascist newspapers. It has also examined the various unpublished memoirs and manuscripts written by fascists and deposited with public libraries, including the

Wiener library, the Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart archive and the library at Sheffield University. The dissertation has attempted to read this material critically, not taking any claims at face value, but always relating the fascist account of the 1940s to material available elsewhere. As has already been indicated, the historical literature, notably the study of internment, has been distorted by a reliance on material given by surviving fascists, themselves keen to whitewash their role in the past. Those historians who have approached the Friends of Oswald Mosley, and conducted interviews on their terms, have often been influenced by their understanding of events. Consequently, the decision was taken not to interview any surviving fascists.

The second chapter describes in detail the violent and racist character of fascist practice. It also attempts to examine which groups of society the fascists were most likely to recruit from. At one stage, it was hoped to construct a broad survey of the Union Movement, by examining the first 50 fascists named in the Union Movement's paper, *Union*, after it resumed publication in February 1948, and by listing the 35 fascists arrested in London, between October 1947 and April 1949. These two samples produced an aggregate of 80 individuals, 50 of whom could be traced. It was then decided that this sample was too small, and the information too vague, for it to be analysed in detail. The names have been returned into the main body of the text.

The third chapter discusses anti-fascism in the same period. Its method is based on history from below, on the notion that by studying the subjective experience of those who have been largely excluded from history, it is possible to come to a fuller account of what actually happened in the past.⁷⁹ The dissertation has avoided the temptation of simply tacking this method on to the conclusions already drawn by Morris Beckman in *The Forty Three Group*. The 43 Group was neither the only, nor the most important party of organised anti-fascists. A number of different groups took part in the campaign. The idea in this chapter has been to study all the groups, in order to arrive at a sense of what each did. As part of the research for this chapter, eighteen anti-fascists were interviewed, some of whom were central to the various organisations, and others whose activities more peripheral. This dissertation has also attempted to criticise the different groups and at times the testimony of individual witnesses.

The fourth chapter examines the behaviour of the police. Most of the material here is taken from local police, Special Branch and Home Office papers held in the HO and MEPO series within the Public Record Office in London. The equivalent

sources have been used to great effect, especially by Richard Thurlow, in the study of the 1930s. My hope has been to use a similar method, of detailed archival study, to counter the argument put by Stephen Cullen, that the police formed a neutral barrier between violent anti-fascists and the passive forces of British fascism. The conclusion draws together the threads of the preceding analysis. Returning to the themes with which this introduction opens, it offers an explanation of why it was that British fascism failed.

¹ S. Payne, *A History Of Fascism 1914-45* (London, 1996), 303-5.

² R. Thurlow, *Fascism In Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts To The National Front* (London, 1998), x-xi.

³ For a development of this theme, A. Arblaster, *Democracy* (Buckingham, 1994 edn).

⁴ Z. Bauman, *Modernity And The Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1991), 7.

⁵ For Newcastle. N. Todd, *In Excited Times, The People Against the Blackshirts* (Tyne And Wear, 1995); for Stepney, H. F. Srebrnik, *London Jews And British Communism* (Essex, 1995); for Hackney, B. Burke, *Rebels With A Cause: The History Of Hackney Trades Council 1900-75* (London, 1975); for Kent. D. Turner, *Fascism And Anti-Fascism In The Medway Towns 1927-40* (Kent, 1993); for Oxford, D. Renton, *Red Shirts And Black: Fascists And Anti-Fascists In Oxford In The 1930s* (Oxford, 1996).

⁶ P. Piratin, *Our Flag Stays Red* (London, 1948); J. Jacobs, *Out Of the Ghetto: My Youth In The East End, Communism And Fascism, 1918-39* (London, 1978); M. Beckman, *The 43 Group* (London, 1992); D. Widgery, *Beating Time* (London, 1986).

⁷ C. Rosenberg, 'Labour And The Fight Against Fascism', *ISJ* 39 (1988), 55-92, 58-66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹ G. C. Webber, 'The British Isles', in D. Mühlberger (ed.), *The Social Basis Of European Fascist Movements* (Kent, 1987), 140-55.

¹⁰ R. Thurlow, *Fascism In Britain: A History, 1918-85* (Oxford, 1987), 290.

¹¹ For a critical history of the party between 1945 and 1951, D. Renton, 'Past Its Peak', *ISJ* 77 (1997), 127-39.

¹² A. Davies, *Where Did The Forties Go: The Rise And Fall Of the Hopes Of A Decade* (London, 1984); T. Griffiths, *Country: A Tory Story* (London, 1981).

¹³ *The Economist*, 28 July 1945.

¹⁴ K. O. Morgan, *Labour In Power 1945-51* (Oxford, 1984); R. Eatwell, *The 1945-51 Labour Governments* (London, 1979); H. Pelling, *The Labour Governments 1945-51* (London, 1984).

¹⁵ Davies; A. Calder, *The People's War, 1939-45* (London, 1969).

¹⁶ A. Budd, 'Nation And Empire: Labour's Foreign Policy 1945-51', *ISJ* 62 (1994), 97-106.

¹⁷ C. Hitchens, *Blood, Class And Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies* (London, 1991); V. Rothwell, *Britain And The Cold War 1941-7* (London, 1982); E. Barker, *The British Between The Superpowers 1945-50* (London, 1983).

¹⁸ N. Branson, *History Of The Communist Party Of Great Britain 1941-51* (London, 1997), 160-70; T. Bunyan, *The History And Practice Of The Political Police In Britain* (London, 1977), 166; also the file in the Prime Minister's Office (PREM) in the Public Record Office (PRO), PREM 8/947; for the use of troops against strikers, G. Ellen, 'Labour And Strikebreaking', *ISJ* 2/24 (1984), 45-74.

¹⁹ C. Cross, *The Fascists In Britain* (London, 1961); R. Benewick, *Political Violence And Public Order: A Study Of British Fascism* (London, 1969).

²⁰ Cross, 195.

²¹ Benewick, 305.

²² O. Mosley, *My Life* (Nelson, 1968); R. Skidelsky, *Mosley* (London, 1975); D. Mosley, *A Life Of Contrasts* (London, 1977); N. Mosley, *Rules Of the Game* (London, 1982); N. Mosley, *Beyond The Pale*

(London, 1983). For the tone of Nicholas Mosley's account, see his description of his father, as 'a Greek tragic hero to whom disaster had occurred (or which he had cause to occur)', in N. Mosley, *Rules Of The Game*, x.

²³ Skidelsky, xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 454.

²⁷ R. Skidelsky, *Mosley* (1990 edn).

²⁸ For a comparison of Skidelsky's account of the famous Carfax meeting in Oxford, with the rest of the available material, see Renton, *Red Shirts*; for the membership of the BUF, G. C. Webber, 'Patterns Of Membership And Support Of The British Union Of Fascists,' *JCH* 19/4 (1984), 575-606.

²⁹ W. C. Bader, 'The Return Of Mosley,' *WLB*, 4/2, 1977, 62-7.

³⁰ Skidelsky (1975), 491-2.

³¹ A. W. B. Simpson, *In The Highest Degree Odious: Detention Without Trial In Wartime Britain* (Oxford, 1992).

³² T. Linehan, *East London For Mosley: The British Union Of Fascists In East London And South-West Essex 1933-40* (London, 1996).

³³ S. M. Cullen, 'Four Women For Mosley: Women In The British Union Of Fascists 1932-40', *Oral History* 24/1(1996), 49-59.

³⁴ See the article on Cullen's research in *Comrade* 1 (March 1986); also Cullen's obituary for Richard Bellamy, in *Comrade* 18 (April-May 1989).

³⁵ S. M. Cullen, 'Political Violence: The Case Of The British Union Of Fascists,' *JCH* 28/2 (1993), 245-68.

³⁶ R. Brooks, 'TV Soap Whitewash For A Blackshirt?', *Observer* 23 January 1996; R. Skidelsky, 'Mosley Wasn't Just A Fornicator: He Was A Fascist', *The Times*, 11 February 1998; I. Mosley, 'Mosley Is Dead But His Soul Goes Marching On', *Daily Telegraph* 15 February 1998; M. Steel, 'Lloyd George Knew My Sitcom - Get It?', *Guardian*, 17 February 1998; and P. Martin, 'Contextualising Mosley', *History Today*, May 1998, 62-3.

³⁷ C. T. Husbans, *Racial Exclusionism And The City: The Urban Support Of The National Front* (London, 1983); S. Taylor, *The National Front In English Politics* (London, 1982); M. Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View Of The National Front* (London, 1978).

³⁸ G. Thayer, *The British Political Fringe* (London, 1965).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-32, 33-52.

⁴⁰ M. Walker, *The National Front* (London, 1977), 15-55.

⁴¹ N. Nugent, 'Post-War Fascism,' in K. Lunn and R. Thurlow (ed.s), *British Fascism* (London, 1980), 205-226, 205.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴³ A Poole, 'Oswald Mosley And The Union Movement: Success or Failure?' in M Cronin, *The Failure Of British Fascism* (London, 1996), 53-80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65-8

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 69-75.

⁴⁶ R. C. Thurlow, 'The Guardian Of The "Sacred Flame": The Failed Political Resurrection Of Sir Oswald Mosley After 1945', *JCH*, 33/2 (1998), 241-54.

⁴⁷ Thurlow (1987); Thurlow (1998).

⁴⁸ Thurlow (1998), 206.

⁴⁹ J. E. Morell, 'The Life And Opinions Of A. S. Leese: A Study In Extreme Anti-Semitism' (MA thesis, Sheffield University, 1974); J. A. Cole, *Lord Haw-Haw: The Full Story Of William Joyce* (London, 1964); B. Bergonzi, 'Roy Campbell: Outsider On The Right', *JCH* 2/2(1967), 133-47; D. Baker, *Ideology Of Obsession: A. K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, 1996); D. Baker, 'A. K. Chesterton, The Strasser Brothers And The Politics Of The National Front', *PP* 19/3 (1985), 23-33; B. A. Kosmin, 'Colonial Careers For Marginal Fascists: A Portrait Of Henry Hamilton Beamish', *WLB* 30/1(1973-4), 16-23; R. Thurlow, 'Anti-Nazi Anti-Semite: The Case Of Douglas Reed', *PP* 18/1(1984), 23-31; D. Mayall, 'Rescued From The Shadows Of Exile: Nellie Driver, Autobiography And The British Union Of Fascists', *AI* 8/1-2 (1989), 19-39.

⁵⁰ T. Grundy, *Memoir Of A Fascist Childhood* (London, 1998); E. J. Hamm, *Action Replay* (London, 1983); A. S. Leese, *Out Of Step: Events In The Two Lives Of An Anti-Jewish Camel Doctor* (California, n.d.); J. Charnley, *Blackshirts And Roses* (London, 1990); R. R. Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', undated manuscript in Sheffield University library; N. Driver, 'From The Shadows Of Exile', undated manuscript in Bradford University library.

⁵¹ Bellamy, 1080.

⁵² Watts, 91.

⁵³ Baker, *Ideology Of Obsession*, 190-9.

⁵⁴ G. B. Donoghue and G. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait Of A Politician* (London, 1973); Morgan, *Labour In Power*.

⁵⁵ Branson; J. Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study In British Stalinism* (London, 1993); J. Hinton, 'Coventry Communism: A Study Of Factory Politics In The Second World War', *HWJ* 10(1980), 90-118.

⁵⁶ Srebrnick.

⁵⁷ S. Bornstein and A. Richardson, *The War And The International: A History Of The Trotskyist Movement In Britain 1937-49* (London, 1989).

⁵⁸ J. Mahoney, 'Civil Liberties In Britain During The Cold War' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 222-46; also Pritt's personal papers, held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, in the London School of Economics.

⁶⁰ D. N. Pritt, *The Autobiography Of D. N. Pritt, Part Two: Brasshats And Bureaucrats* (London, 1966).

⁶¹ D. Hyde, *I Believed: The Autobiography Of A Former British Communist* (London, 1951).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 142, 188.

⁶⁵ A Hartog, *Born To Sing* (London, 1978), 74-7; Beckman.

⁶⁶ Hartog, 77.

⁶⁷ Beckman, 19-24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷⁰ J. H. Robb, *Working-Class Anti-Semitism: A Psychological Study In A London Borough* (London, 1954); C. Holmes, 'Anti-Semitism In Britain,' *Jewish Chronicle* 14 September 1979; C. Hirshfield, 'The Tenacity Of Tradition: Truth And The Jews 1877-57', *PP* 28/3-4 (1994), 67-85; C. T. Husbands, 'East End Racism 1900-80', *London Journal* 8/1 (1982), 3-26; J. Gross, 'The Lynskey Tribunal', in M. Sissons and P. French, *Age of Austerity* (London, 1963), 255-76; T. Kushner, 'Anti-Semitism And Austerity: The August 1947 Riots In Britain', in P. Panayi (ed.), *Racial Violence In Britain, 1940-59* (Leicester, 1993), 149-68.

⁷¹ Robb, 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 92-3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁴ Kushner, 158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁶ For examples of such a theory of fascism, R. Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes And The New Consensus* (London, 1998); R. Eatwell, 'On Defining The "Fascist Minimum": The Centrality Of Ideology', *Journal Of Political Ideologies* 1/3 (1996), 303-319; and R. Eatwell, 'Towards A New Model Of Generic Fascism', *Journal Of Theoretical Politics* 4/2 (1992), 161-94.

⁷⁷ Griffin, 238.

⁷⁸ D. Renton, *Fascism: Theory And Practice* (London, forthcoming 1999).

⁷⁹ The fullest statement of this method remains the preface to E. P. Thompson's *The Making Of The English Working Class* (London, 1963), 9-18; also H. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (London, 1994); and J. Rees (ed.), *Essays On Historical Materialism* (London, 1998).

What Actually Happened: Fascism And Anti-Fascism 1918-51

Even before there were organised fascists in Britain, there were individuals who articulated ideas which were close to the ideas of fascism. The extreme wing of the Conservative Party, the so-called Radical Right, was anti-socialist and ultra-imperialist. Any number of respectable thinkers flirted with anti-semitism or demagogic National Socialism. A list of such precursor-fascists would include Hilaire Belloc, Lord Milner, G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Chamberlain and Edward Carson.¹ Most of these, however, looked to the traditional elites and to the Conservative Party as the means to protect the property of the rich. If they organised outside the Conservative Party they did so as individuals, around newspapers such as *The Patriot* and *The Morning Post*, or in pressure groups including the Parliamentary Alien Immigration Committee, the Tariff Reform League, the Anti-Socialist Union, the National League for Clean Government and the British Empire Union (BEU).² At times these pressure groups did act as proto-fascist-parties, such as during the organised campaign against Jewish immigration between 1901 and 1906. Even then, however, these were campaigns and not parties. The leaders of the groups came from within the establishment, they were usually rich and often Conservative MPs. The British Brothers' League, for example, was founded by Tories, including William Stanley Shaw, Howard Vincent, and Major William Evans-Gordon MP.³ There was not yet any fascist radicalism or anti-capitalism, not even at the level of rhetoric. So far these right-wing individuals were radical Tories, not fascists.

In 1919, Henry Hamilton Beamish founded the Britons Society as a nationalist and anti-alien organisation. The Society published its own newspaper, which went through a succession of names, including *Jewry Über Alles* (1920), *The Hidden Hand* (1920-4) and the *British Guardian* (1924-5). The Britons was supported by a small number of wealthy racists, including the inventor Arthur Kitson and the former correspondent of the *Morning Post* in Russia, Victor Marsden. The year that Beamish founded the Britons, he lost a libel case and decided to flee the country. He became

'a kind of travelling salesman of anti-semitism', active in Germany, America and especially South Africa.⁴ With its founder absent, the *British Guardian* went into decline and folded in 1925. After that the Britons Society was little more than a publishing house. It specialised in producing the notorious anti-semitic hoax, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and published 85 editions by the mid-1970s.⁵

The first self-declared fascist organisation in Britain was the British Fascisti, later known as the British Fascists (the BF). This party was founded in 1923 by Rotha Lintorn Orman as a copy of Mussolini's fascists. Lintorn Orman inherited £50,000 from her mother, which she used to fund the new party. The BF was unlike most fascist parties in that it recruited predominantly from the ranks of the rich and the privileged. Prominent members of the BF included Brigadier-General Robert Blakeney, the Earl of Glasgow, Admiral John Armstrong, Lord Ernest Hamilton, Brigadier-General Sir Ormonde Winter, Colonel Sir Charles Burn, the Marquess of Ailesbury, Viscountess Downe, Baroness Zouche of Haryngworth, Lady Menzies of Menzies, and Brigadier-General T. Erskine Tulloch.⁶ With members of this calibre, the BF had close links with sections of the British state, including MI5, which Ormonde Winter helped to found.⁷ The BF reached the peak of its membership in 1925 or 1926. Several thousand BF members helped the government during the General Strike. They were accepted by the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies and used in special fascist units. The Tory Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks, insisted, however, that the BF alter its constitution to express support for parliamentary government. The organisation split over this issue and faded. Some of its members returned to the Conservative Party, while a majority joined up with Mosley in 1931-2,⁸ and the remnants of the fragmented party dragged on until 1934.⁹

The BF was more ultra-Tory than fascist. Its leaders were taken from a Conservative milieu and the organisation itself exhibited an ambiguous, broadly-positive attitude towards the existing British state. Arnold Leese later suggested that 'there was no fascism, as I understood it, in the organisation, which was merely Conservatism with Knobs On'.¹⁰ Some of the more aggressive anti-semites, realising their mistake, split off from the BF to form the National Fascisti as early as 1925. Leese himself left in 1930 and joined Brigadier T. Erskine Tulloch's Imperial Fascist League (IFL). Leese soon took over the IFL, which he presented as the true voice of radical fascism in Britain.¹¹ Its members were violent anti-semites, who dismissed their rivals on the right as 'kosher fascists'. They attempted to set up their own 'tough squad' with black shirts, khaki trousers and swastikas, but the IFL remained a tiny organisation with only about 150 members. It was important mainly as a training

ground for a generation of anti-semites, including Anthony Gittens and P. J. Ridout, some of whom were to become more prominent after 1945.¹²

The first significant fascist party was the British Union of Fascists,¹³ formed by Sir Oswald Mosley in October 1932. As leader of the BUF, Mosley was lionised by the membership and treated as a semi-divine figure who could do no wrong.¹⁴ Given the role he played, it is appropriate to describe his career in some detail. Oswald Mosley was born into a family of wealthy landowners in 1897. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1915 and sustained a leg injury while on leave at home.¹⁵ In 1918 he was elected to parliament as a Conservative. After opposing Lloyd George's record in Ireland, Mosley became an Independent and then a Labour MP. As such he was influenced by one variety of Independent Labour Party (ILP) thinking, the idea that unemployment could be reduced if the home economy was protected from the rhythms of the world economic system, using import controls. At this stage Oswald Mosley's economic thinking was not in favour of socialism, but reformed capitalism. As Colin Cross suggests, his ideas were 'capable of being implemented in almost any but a purely free-enterprise framework'.¹⁶ Mosley was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the MacDonald government of 1929 to 1931. When the government failed to implement his tariff policies he resigned, forming the New Party as a radical alternative to Labour. The New Party failed to win a seat in the 1931 general election. Mosley then cast around for new ideas, visiting Mussolini in Italy and sending members of the New Party to Munich to study Hitler's SA and SS. By late 1931, Mosley had become a confirmed fascist.¹⁷

The British Union of Fascists was loyal to the model of the European fascist parties. It borrowed the blackshirt uniform, the Horst Wessel song, and the Italian symbol of the fasces, the bundle of rods.¹⁸ Mosley also took money from Mussolini, around £225,000 between 1934 and 1937.¹⁹ The BUF bought a headquarters, Black House in Chelsea. The leading fascists lived there with up to 200 other fascists, in conditions of strict military discipline. The BUF also possessed its own secret information contingent, Division Z. James McGuirk Hughes was a leading members of Division Z, while Maxwell Knight was also friendly with the BUF, as was W. E. D. Allen, the former Conservative MP, whose bank account the BUF used to launder Mussolini's money. All three were known by Mosley to be members of MI5. These close contacts allowed the BUF access to the Security Services, and gave Mosley the opportunity to screen delicate information from his supposed observers.²⁰

British fascism stressed its nationalism, its anti-socialism, and its opposition to finance.²¹ It presented itself as the solution to the crisis of capitalism. As Mosley

argued, in a debate with Megan Lloyd George in 1933, 'You do not need fascism until the crisis which is inevitable in the modern world comes. When that crisis comes fascism is the only salvation.'²² At times this combination of ideas proved deeply contradictory. Mosley could only claim to be equally opposed to capitalism and to communism, if he could persuade his listeners that 'mob' and 'money' were somehow the same thing. The glue which held the ideas of British fascism together was anti-semitism, which became more and more important, especially from 1934 onwards. It enabled fascists to attack the left while still providing a rhetorical opposition to sections of the capitalist class. 'Reds' were Jewish, as in the fascist mythology were 'financiers'. In Mosley's writings, therefore, anti-semitism provided the bridge between his ILP opposition to unemployment and his fascist attacks on 'Jewish' or 'foreign' capital. Jews were attacked in the fascist press as 'vermin'. The *Blackshirt* published anti-semitic cartoons and songs, including one nasty parody of the *Red Flag*,

*We'll raise the golden fasces high
Beneath their shade all Jews shall die.*

Mosley himself attacked 'Jewish radicals' and described his opponents as belonging to a 'Yiddish mob'.²³ This anti-semitism existed at every level of the BUF and was shared not only by the leadership, but also by the overwhelming majority of ordinary members. Fascist marchers in the East End chanted 'The Yids, the Yids, we've got to get rid of the Yids'. In the years 1936-8, the police brought 39 cases of insulting behaviour, 61 cases of insulting slogans, 100 cases of damage to property and 60 cases of assault against members of the BUF after attacks on Jews.²⁴

From 1934 onwards, several members of the capitalist class began to express support for fascism as a bulwark against the threat of the left. The class as a whole remained broadly Conservative. It retained its own right-wing authoritarian, non-fascist values and did not need fascism,²⁵ but important individuals and segments of the class did flirt with fascism. Often these figures admired Mussolini and Hitler, but not Mosley. Thus *The Times*, *Observer* and *Morning Post* all expressed their admiration for foreign fascism, but stayed clear of the BUF. Similarly, although Winston Churchill would have nothing to do with Mosley, he did visit Mussolini in Italy and told the press, 'I could not help being charmed, like so many other people have been, by Signor Mussolini's gentle and simple bearing ... If I had been an Italian I should have been wholeheartedly with you from start to finish.'²⁶ Other members of the ruling class, unlike Churchill, gave direct support to British fascism. William Morris, the owner of Morris Motors, gave the New Party £85,000.²⁷ Viscount

Rothermere, the press magnate, supported Mosley between January and July 1934. He wrote a long article for the *Daily Mail*, justifying his decision to back the BUF, with the title, 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'. The British Union of Fascists had a dining group, the January Club, for such wayward capitalists and prominent Tories. Up to 350 people attended its larger functions, including Lord Middleton, Brigadier-General Spears, Sir John Squire, Earl Iddesleigh, Lord Russell of Liverpool and Sir Charles Petrie.²⁸ Other fascists and fascist sympathisers from this class background included the Duke of Wellington, the Marquess of Carisbrooke, the Marquis of Londonderry and the Marquess of Lothian.²⁹

One bridge between propertied individuals and fascism was Social Credit. This movement was started after 1917 by Major C. H. Douglas as a movement to cure underproduction by providing boosts of money to industry.³⁰ The Social Credit Movement possessed up to 12,000 supporters by the early 1930s. During the 1930s, however, it transformed itself slowly from a movement which stressed the positive need for increased consumption into a more negative force which blamed underconsumption first on finance and then on the Jews. The Duke of Bedford came to fascism via this route. John Beckett of the BUF, Major-General 'Boney' Fuller and Mosley all expressed their support for Social Credit. The Aberdeen branch of the BUF was built by Chambers-Hunter, a former disciple of Major Douglas.³¹ Other members of the middle class or the ruling class came to fascism along other paths. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound became fascists through their attachment to anti-semitism, which they claimed was a form of anti-usury.³² Lord Rothermere was attracted by the charisma of Mosley, and his press portrayed the BUF not as fascists, but as Chamberlainite Conservatives.³³

The year 1934 began well for the British Union of Fascists. The organisation had around 40,000 members. There were large BUF branches in Birmingham, Sussex, Newcastle, Wales and Northern Ireland and successful women's sections.³⁴ Most BUF members came from the lower middle class, although a significant share of the fascist leadership was made up of former colonialists or men who had been officers during the war, and a layer of the BUF rank-and-file was also recruited from among non-unionised workers.³⁵ With the support of the *Daily Mail*, the fascists were able to recruit from a large pool of disgruntled Tories. Fascist groups were set up in the Universities of London and Birmingham, Stowe School, and Winchester, Beaumont and Worksop Colleges.³⁶ According to Mosley's son Nicholas, 'The mood in the Black House was that the BUF would probably be in power within 12 months.'³⁷ As a sign of its growing confidence, the British Union called a major rally, to take place

at Olympia on 7 June 1934. This was to be the moment at which the BUF was to achieve its break-through, 'MPs, peers, diplomats, big businessmen and leading journalists' were invited to hear Mosley speak and 12,000 people showed up on the day.³⁸

At this stage, with the British Union of Fascists at its peak, anti-fascists began to organise their opposition. There were anti-fascist groups in Britain going back at least to the National Union For Combating Fascism, organised by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, in the early 1920s.³⁹ In 1924, the Plebs League published an important pamphlet, influenced by Klara Zetkin, warning that 'fascism has special characteristics which give it an international importance greater even than that derived from its success in Italy'.⁴⁰ However, there was not yet any national organisation which played a co-ordinating role. The Labour Party was the largest force on the left and could have filled the gap. To this end, Labour conducted surveys to examine the extent of the fascist danger, published anti-fascist pamphlets, and even supported two demonstrations against Mosley, in 1933 and 1936. However, the leadership of the party argued that fascism should be opposed in parliament, not in the streets, and Labour was determined not to associate itself too closely with the forces of radical anti-fascism.⁴¹ The next group which could have filled the vacuum was the Communist Party (CP). However, in 1929-34, the party went through a sectarian and ultra-left phase, during which it argued that the most dangerous fascists were the 'social fascists' of the Labour Party and the ILP.⁴² Through 1934 therefore, and despite the indifference of the CP, a whole series of small ad hoc anti-fascist groups were set up in different areas, including the Anti Fascist League in Tyneside and the Red Shirts in Oxford.⁴³ In the run up to Olympia, these independent anti-fascists did everything they could to prepare an adequate response. Left-wing students in London forged letters to the *Daily Mail*, in order to get tickets for the meeting. They competed with each other to see how the most absurd letters could obtain tickets, giving rise to the masterly, 'I like the Blackshirts because I want to die for my country and they seem to offer the best opportunity.'⁴⁴

Almost at the last moment the Communist Party woke up and took full part in campaigning against the meeting which took place at Olympia in June 1934. The CP's newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, published route maps and arranged transport, encouraging all anti-fascists to protest against the BUF meeting. Altogether 10,000 anti-fascists demonstrated outside Olympia, where they were attacked by 760 mounted police. Several hundred anti-fascists forged tickets, or sent letters, and got in. There, they heckled Mosley and disrupted his speech. As the anti-fascists

shouted, Mosley stopped, and the organisers of the meeting shone spotlights on the hecklers so that they could be identified and removed. The hecklers were then physically attacked by stewards and dozens of anti-fascists and others were badly beaten up.⁴⁵ The middle- and ruling-class elements watching Mosley were now forced to consider whether they wanted to support such a brutal movement. Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd MP, the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Stanley Baldwin, wrote to the *Yorkshire Post*:

*I am bound to say that I was appalled by the brutal conduct of the fascists ... I can only say that it was a deeply shocking scene for an Englishman to see in London ... I came to the conclusion that Mosley was a political maniac and that all decent English people must combine to kill this movement.*⁴⁶

Thus, the result of the events at Olympia was that the fascist violence proved counter-productive. Many middle-class supporters of fascism were disgusted and left. Thus, after Olympia, the British Union of Fascists quickly went into critical decline. Lord Rothermere withdrew his support for Mosley, Dr. Robert Forgan, a prominent supporter who followed Mosley from the New Party days, also left. Within a year, BUF membership fell from 40,000 to 5,000. Vernon Kell of MI5 went so far as to argue that 'Mosley has suffered a check which is likely to prove decisive'.⁴⁷

Eventually, two things saved the organisation. First, the BUF was re-organised along military lines by Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, who joined Mosley in late 1934.⁴⁸ Second, the fascists made a tactical shift and re-orientated their party. The stated idea was to take up local issues in local areas, cotton in Lancashire, tithes in East Anglia, shipping in Liverpool. The most successful of these local drives was the anti-semitic campaign in the East End, which increasingly dominated the politics of the BUF as a whole. In effect, the BUF dropped the middle-class dissident conservatives who had joined in 1933-4 in favour of a layer of working-class racists living in the East End. The fascists aimed to recruit workers ground down by the experience of unemployment and poverty, isolated from the labour movement and attracted to the BUF's anti-semitism. Leslie Paul, a churchman living in the area described the poverty and misery of the unemployed workers who gravitated towards fascism after 1936. The fascists recruited 'bitter, hopeless and even degenerating individuals whose unwantedness had become the very core of their lives'.⁴⁹

The result of this tactical shift was that from 1935, through 1936, the British Union of Fascists came to rely much more heavily on racism, 'a convenient Jewish scapegoat was identified in East London and exploited for primarily opportunistic

reasons.⁵⁰ Although the main purpose of shifting the BUF towards the East End was to win a new layer of working class fascists, this tactic of re-locating the fascist movement did not rule out the possibility of alliances with middle-class groups. In Stoke Newington, for example, the fascists worked in temporary alliances with the Grocers' Association, the United Ratepayers' Association, and the local Mayor.⁵¹ In Halifax, Harrogate and Nelson, the BUF continued to recruit younger Tories and businessmen, as well as textile workers and the unemployed.⁵²

Helped by the success of its new tactics, by 1936, the BUF seemed to be in the ascendant once more. The fascists established new branches in the East End in 1936, in Stepney, Limehouse and Bethnal Green.⁵³ The British Union of Fascists claimed to have 4000 members in Shoreditch alone, 'The BUF won recruits, particularly from the younger elements in Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stepney. Jews were attacked every time they were outnumbered or in no position to defend themselves.'⁵⁴ It was in this context that Mosley announced a planned demonstration from the Royal Mint to Aldgate and then Limehouse, to take place on 4 October 1936.

Quickly, anti-fascists determined to oppose this march. At the heart of the anti-fascist movement was a layer of East End Jews who aligned themselves with the Communist Party.⁵⁵ Many were members of the Jewish People's Council, which collected 100,000 signatures for a protest petition in just 48 hours. Individual members of the Labour Party, the ILP and trade unionists all called for the march to be banned. The support of the London Committee of the Communist Party was crucial to the fate of the protests. Originally it supported a rival Aid Spain demonstration in Trafalgar Square. With just two days to go, however, and under pressure from its membership, the London Committee of the CP changed tack, and agreed to back the anti-Mosley demonstration.⁵⁶ Still, the leaders of the Labour Party and the Jewish Board of Deputies insisted that their members should avoid the protest. George Lansbury, the MP for Poplar, advised people to stay at home. The *Daily Herald*, the newspaper of the Labour Party, said the same. On the day, however, at least 100,000 people showed up to blockade Gardiner's Corner, the nub of any route from the City into East London. There they were attacked by large numbers of police, many on horseback, who tried to force a way through for the 1,900 members of the BUF. When the police charges failed to make headway, they turned their attention instead on Cable Street. When the police failed there, too, Sir Philip Game ordered the fascists to turn round. They then marched westwards to the Embankment and dispersed.⁵⁷

The chief effect of the Battle of Cable Street was to give hope to Jews, socialists, and anti-fascists living in the East End. Phil Piratin, then an organiser for the Communist Party describes how the talk went round the barber shops and the bookies, 'nothing had changed physically ... but the people were changed ... Each one was a hero.'⁵⁸ At the same time, a lesson was learned for the future, the state would not protect Jews from fascists, the community would have to defend itself. It was the left which claimed the kudos of the successful battle, according to Gisela Lebzelter, 'Compared to the defence activities of Anglo-Jewry, the motley anti-fascist left, embracing not only Communists but civil liberty champions of various shades, mounted a far more successful defence against fascist anti-semitism.'⁵⁹ One further result of 4 October 1936 was the passing of the Public Order Act, which made it illegal to wear paramilitary uniforms and gave the police more powers to ban public meetings or demonstrations.⁶⁰ As for the effects of this bill, the view of contemporaries is neatly divided into two. Those who supported the bill before it was passed were unanimous in the opinion that the bill 'worked like a charm'.⁶¹ Left-wingers and civil liberties campaigners, however, pointed out that the bill was far more regularly used against the left and against ordinary workers than it ever was against the right, 'the people of Stepney learnt that if law and order were to be maintained they would have to do it themselves, for the police were acting as their enemies'.⁶²

In the immediate aftermath of Cable Street, however, the British Union of Fascists remained buoyant, and even won new recruits in the East End, with 650 new members joining after one meeting at Bethnal Green in April 1937.⁶³ In the 1937 London City Council elections, the British Union of Fascists obtained 23 per cent of the vote, doing well in Stepney and North East Bethnal Green, but failing to win the three or four victories predicted by Mosley.⁶⁴ After the 1937 election, though, the BUF quickly went into crisis. The organisation was broadly on the defensive after Cable Street. The layer of Cable Street fascists, who had joined in late 1936 quickly melted away. At the same time, the Communist Party became more and more involved in local campaigns, around issues such as housing, taking part in rent strikes, opposing evictions, and winning support in areas where the BUF thought it had a monopoly. The CP campaign weakened the BUF in its East End strongholds. At the same time as the fascists were on the defensive, and possibly because the organisation was no longer recruiting on the expected scale, the British Union of Fascists went into financial crisis. The Northern Command HQ had to be closed down and the number of paid staff was reduced from 143 to 30. The BUF then suffered a debilitating split

when William Joyce and John Beckett left or were forced out to form another rival party, the National Socialist League.⁶⁵

1939-45

Again, however, the fascists recovered from their set-back. In the last months of summer 1939, the British Union of Fascists even enjoyed something of a boom in popularity. In July 1939, Oswald Mosley spoke to an audience of up to 20,000 people at Earl's Court. He told them that 'a million Britons shall never die in your Jews' quarrel.' In the same month, the BBC lifted its long-standing ban on the reporting of fascist meetings.⁶⁶ The BUF portrayed itself as an innocent party of the patriotic middle-classes, keen only to avoid another war on the scale of 1914-18. Meanwhile there were a number of other groups, such as the Link, the Right Club, the Nordic League and the Anglo-German Fellowship, which also sought to promote pro-German and often anti-semitic feeling among the middle and ruling classes and which received the support of the Conservative newspaper, *Truth*.⁶⁷ The 'main object' of the Right Club, for example, 'was to oppose and expose the activities of organised Jewry'.⁶⁸ In just a few months, in late 1939, the Link's membership rose from 1800 to 4300 members.⁶⁹ Under the impact of war, however, most of the fascists' middle class and patriotic audience deserted the fascist parties. The 'boom' ended abruptly, to take just one indicator, the number of British Union meetings held in London fell from 313 in August 1939 to just 21 in September.

Although Mosley himself, members of his family, and several historians have since tried to present the BUF as a pacifist organisation genuinely upset by the horrors of war,⁷⁰ it is evident that BUF opposition to the second world war was tactical and not principled. In 1939-45 fascists were not opposed to war in general, but to this specific war. 'Mosley was all in favour of Hitler making war, so long as Britain was able to save her skin.'⁷¹ Fascists saw no reason why they should fight against their brother-fascists in Germany. Mosley tried to ride two horses at once, both urging his followers 'to do nothing to injure our country' and also blaming the war, this 'alien quarrel', on 'the dope machine of Jewish finance'.⁷² The BUF's contradictory pacifism did not go down well with its audience. When the BUF stood candidates in three by-elections between late 1939 and early 1940, none of the candidates managed to win even 3 per cent of the vote.⁷³

The War Cabinet was eager to insist that the second world war was a war for democracy. Given the ambivalent attitudes that Churchill, Chamberlain, Halifax and others had displayed towards continental fascism between 1933 and 1939, it would be easy to insist the opposite, that the war was simply fought to defend the British Empire. However, despite the instincts of the ruling classes, objectively Britain was at war with Germany. The war was, at least in part, 'an international ideological civil war',⁷⁴ 'a war in which ideology had a special role to play'.⁷⁵ Germany was the world's major fascist power. The war could be won only if millions of people felt themselves to be part of a popular crusade against fascism. So when the Allied forces suffered a series of defeats, leading to the fall of Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium, and in a climate where millions saw Mosley and the others as potential fifth columnists, the state was obliged to act. From 22 May 1940, the authorities began to intern prominent fascists, under Defence Regulation 18B, including around 800 members of Mosley's party. The leadership of the BUF was detained and the fascist party was disbanded.⁷⁶

For the admirers of Oswald Mosley and the BUF, internment was the great moment of truth, the point at which the state turned decisively against British fascism. Since 1940, therefore, surviving fascists, orchestrated by the so-called Friends of O[swald] M[osley], have been determined to expose what they have viewed as their unjust treatment. They have tended to make two points, first, that they were a loyal group which should not have been detained; and second, that that their treatment was especially harsh and cruel.⁷⁷ In order to stress their loyalty, the Friends point to those members of the BUF who did serve with the British army, but they ignore the other members of the BUF who also took an active part in the battles of 1939-45. Walter Purdy, Benson Freeman and Gerald Hewitt worked in Goebbels' Propaganda Department. Marietta Smart and Theodore Schurch served in the Abwehr and the Gestapo. Francis McLardy and Thomas Cooper joined the SS's British division, the British Free Corps. Albert Alfred Tester, Mosley's assistant in 1938, worked with the German government setting up front companies in unaligned countries. He joined the Gestapo and was killed on active service with the German army in Romania in 1941.⁷⁸

As for the idea that the detention of the British fascists was a particular act of cruelty, it would be more accurate to understand internment as part of a government strategy to deal forcibly with what it saw as its unwanted problems. At the same time as detaining fascists, the government also interned 27,000 so-called enemy aliens, the majority of whom were Jews who had fled as refugees from Nazi Germany or from Austria after the Anschluss. 'There is no evidence to show that 18B detainees had to

endure the barbarous conditions faced by many enemy aliens between May and August 1940.⁷⁹ Indeed, Mosley was allowed to keep servants, and a garden, and was given a 2-bedroom flat covering one whole wing of Holloway prison.⁸⁰ The fascist detainees were allowed to wear their own clothes, vary their meals, use the post and receive private health care. By 1941, all detainees had full access to medical services, and some camps enjoyed tennis courts to play in. Many prisoners were free to go on trips to the cinema. Nellie Driver, one BUF detainee, felt that her home in Rushen camp was a 'peaceful haven'.⁸¹ Robert Ling also maintained that 'if only we had a little more freedom of action, it wouldn't be too bad'.⁸² The Jewish prisoners, by contrast, were locked up in diseased, rat-infested factories. In one such 'transit camp', there were 18 taps for 2000 detainees, in another there were just 60 buckets for toilets. At Sutton Coldfield, the only mattresses were heaps of straw provided for the chronically sick. Eventually, 7,000 of these enemy aliens were deported. 1,300 aliens including both German Jews and non-Jewish Italians were sent to Canada, on the *Arandora Star*. All 1,300 were killed when the ship was blown up by the German navy.⁸³

Many historians have argued that internment dealt a terminal blow to British fascism, at least of the Mosley variety. According to Richard Thurlow, 'for the majority of fascist internees their experiences in the second world war terminated their interest in extremist politics'.⁸⁴ Colin Cross argues that 'British fascism ended in May 1940, and has not been revived under that name'.⁸⁵ If Cross is right then the story would finish in 1940, fascism was stopped there and then. However, British fascism did not end in 1940, most fascists were never interned, fewer than 40 fascists were arrested in Manchester, just six in Hull, only four in Kent.⁸⁶ The BUF was allowed to leave its records for safekeeping under a bridge in Hackney⁸⁷ and elsewhere in storage in Eaton Square and Westbourne Grove.⁸⁸ The majority of fascists involved in local groups were left at large. Those not detained were free to meet, or to start their own new papers and publications. In Bethnal Green, for example, former BUF supporters met regularly throughout the war.⁸⁹ In Bristol, ex-BUF members kept themselves going with small stunts such as the cutting of telephone box cables.⁹⁰ Joseph Thumwood, previously the district leader of Kensington branch of the BUF, distributed leaflets with the details of German radio stations. He was caught and sentenced to three years' penal servitude.⁹¹ Gertrude Hiscox, a member of the Right Club, stole documents from the Ministry of Supply, to send to Germany.⁹² Jorian Jenks, formerly the BUF's agricultural correspondent, was invited onto the executive of the Council for the Church and the Countryside, where he could freely socialise with such fellow-

thinkers as H. J. Massingham, Arthur Bryant, the historian and a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship, and the Duke of Bedford.⁹³ Other fascists tried to infiltrate the pacifist movement. Some joined clear pacifist groups, such as the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), while others founded new parties which combined elements of pacifism with elements of fascism. One such party was the British Council for Christian Settlement.⁹⁴

The interned fascists were allowed maintain a sense of political adhesion in the camps. They arranged regular political meetings, elections, printed leaflets and papers and held commemorations of Mosley's birthday, complete in the larger camps with 'Hail Mosley' toasts and portraits of the Leader.⁹⁵ In the Ascot camp, for example, Charlie Watts established a network of ex-BUF internees. He produced a newspaper, *The Flame*, and through his activities became the leader of the detainees in the camp. The authorities accepted his right to negotiate on behalf of the other internees. At Peel Camp in the Isle of Man, there were a series of attempted escapes. Six hundred fascists rioted. Then when Osbert Peake, the under-secretary at the Home Office, visited the camp, he was met with organised heckling, and shouts of 'He is a Jew' and 'Hail Mosley'.⁹⁶ In retrospect, it seems clear that many of the Union Movement's later supporters were driven by their memory of internment, which became a decisive episode in the formation of a new generation of fascists.⁹⁷ Charlie Watts became an important ally to Mosley after 1945 and his memoirs concentrate on 1940-1 as the defining moment of his life.⁹⁸

The war years also witnessed a brief resurgence of anti-semitism.⁹⁹ A series of newspaper articles accused the Jews of taking an active part in the black market.¹⁰⁰ The *Daily Mail* supported the internment of Jews, claiming that many were fifth columnists.¹⁰¹ According to Tony Kushner, by May 1940, it was 'quite the done thing to be anti-semitic'.¹⁰² Certainly, there was a strong mood of anti-semitism in the 'clubland' of middle- and ruling-class southern England.¹⁰³ Anti-semitic cartoons and jokes abounded.¹⁰⁴ Tom Harrison, writing in 1941, noted the prevalence of anti-semitism in war-time popular fiction, 'nearly half [of the books he surveyed] worked in a Jew somehow or other, and only in 1 case was the reference not unfavourable'.¹⁰⁵ It is not true that a majority of the British immediately responded sympathetically to the plight of the Jews in Nazi Germany. It was only after the news came back of the Holocaust, and especially after 1943, that the tide of popular feeling turned decisively against anti-semitism.¹⁰⁶

The fascist groups remained intact in the local areas. Large numbers of fascists were very quickly released from internment. For these reasons, the war years saw

the emergence of a whole series of small fascist groups. These would be formed, merge, split and re-form again, in bewildering succession. Between 1941 and 1944 active fascist groups included the British National Party, the League of Ex-Servicemen, the 18B (British) Aid Fund, the 18B Publicity Council, the League of Ex-Servicemen and the only pre-war survivor, the British People's Party (BPP).¹⁰⁷ Members of the pre-war leadership of the British Union of Fascists also began to hold meetings again in 1943, although at this stage the meetings were closed to the public, and the name was never used.¹⁰⁸ As the new groups were launched, so anti-semitic graffiti went up all over London, even the Lenin memorial was daubed with 'PJ', the Nazi slogan, 'Perish Judah'.¹⁰⁹ The BNP claimed to have 50 branches in 1942.¹¹⁰ Its members sent letters to the paper, *Peace News*.¹¹¹ In 1943, though, the BNP dissolved itself. Its leader, Edward Godfrey, then set up another small fascist party, the English National Association (ENA).¹¹² The most important organisation at this time was the 18B Publicity Council. This Council produced a number of leaflets calling for the abolition of 18B, and staged a number of socials and dances, with up to 1000 fascists and their supporters in attendance.¹¹³ The 18B campaign became an organisational link between the pre-war BUF and a new series of fascist groups that sprung up after 1945.

While Mosley remained interned, however, it was unlikely that any of these groups would grow to any significant size. The few prominent fascists that remained out of custody, including Fuller and the Duke of Bedford, did not have the personal stature to lead any significant movement. Thus the government's decision to release Mosley, in September 1943, on the grounds that he was suffering from phlebitis, was a major fillip to the fascist right. It signalled an end to the period of state action against fascism, and opened up a new era, in which state action was out of odds with public opinion. The release was bitterly opposed. The polling company, Mass Observation, estimated that between 66 per cent and 87 per cent of the population wanted Mosley to remain in prison.¹¹⁴ The release was opposed by the TUC, the Communist Party, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, the Transport and General Workers' Union, by hundreds of individual trade union branches, and even by a majority of Labour MPs. The Home Office received between 15,000 and 16,000 separate letters, resolutions and petitions protesting about the decision.¹¹⁵ Herbert Morrison was the Home Secretary responsible for Mosley's release, and his biographers describe the anti-release movement as 'the biggest storm of Morrison's wartime career'.¹¹⁶

1945-51

Other fascists were also released. A. S. Leese was let out in 1944. He subsequently joined up with former members of the Imperial Fascist League to publish a paper, *Gothic Ripples*. Publication halted in 1947, when Leese was sentenced to a year in jail for helping Dutch Nazi prisoners of war to escape to Argentina.¹¹⁷ Some fascists, including Bedford and Fuller, tried to link up with a renewed form of Social Credit.¹¹⁸ Major Douglas, the founder of the Social Credit Movement, was now a virulent anti-semitic and the remaining members of his movement were fully-fledged fascists.¹¹⁹ Ronald Hargrave of the rival Social Credit Party also had much the same politics as Douglas.¹²⁰ A. K. Chesterton worked with other fascist stalwarts, Henry Williamson, G. F. Green, H. T. Mills and Bedford, to set up a fascist party called the National Front After Victory.¹²¹ Other new parties included the Britons Patriotic Society, the New Order Group, the Union of British Freedom, the British Vigilantes Action League, the Imperial Defence League, the Order of the Sons of St. George, the Gentile-Christian Front, the National Workers Party, and the British Empire Party.¹²²

For a moment, it seemed that a number of these different groups would join together, possibly with the Duke of Bedford as their leader. Bedford relaunched his British People's Party (BPP) in 1945, as a catch-all fascist party, although the BPP failed to get off the ground.¹²³ The BPP was not the only planned fascist initiative that would pull together fascists from different ideological traditions. In May 1946, K. Stevenson purchased the Britons Publishing Company and offered to turn the company over to the different fascist groups. The new company's planning meetings were attended by A. K. Chesterton, John Beckett, Lockwood of the BPP, Hearn, who was a Mosleyite, and Walter Stevenson, on behalf of the Glasgow Protestant and extreme Nazi, Alexander Ratcliffe.¹²⁴ The League of Christian Reformers received a surge of publicity, when one of its members, Captain Gordon-Canning, a former Mosleyite, bought the bust of Hitler from the German Embassy.¹²⁵ A more significant organisation was the British Vigilantes Action League (BVAL) which booked the Albert Hall for a rally in March 1946. Unfortunately for the BVAL; it sold only a few hundred tickets for a venue with a capacity of ten thousand. On the day, a mere 100 fascists showed up, as opposed to 500 anti-fascists. The BVAL tried to hold its speeches regardless, but the meeting was closed down by the police.¹²⁶

The most successful of these mini fascist parties was the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, founded by James Taylor in 1938, and led by Jeffrey Hamm

from 1944. Hamm held public meetings, even in places like Hyde Park, where he was most likely to meet with opposition.¹²⁷ In 1945 he moved his meetings to East London, where the fascist organisations held together better than elsewhere. Hamm was also given some acknowledgement from Oswald Mosley. Mosley claimed at the time that he himself was not looking to set up any new organisation, 'I am in no way connected with any present day party ... I am not interested in active politics. My only interests are books and farming'.¹²⁸ However, his later autobiography puts the matter rather differently, 'directly the war was over and I was free to move anywhere in Britain I began the organisation of a political movement.'¹²⁹ Most anti-fascists thought at the time that Mosley was planning to set up a party:

*There is a tremendous amount of coming and going in ex-fascist circles today. Former Mosleyites are being contacted and sounded as to where they stand. The Mosleyites have, it appears, the leading cadres, the framework of a national organisation, the basis or a rank-and-file of some thousands, a number of friendly bookshops in existence with more planned, and the prospect of a flow of new material from the proposed Mosley press. In addition the reappearance of a Mosley organisation would probably be quickly followed by mergers with a number of kindred organisations.*¹³⁰

It seems that the anti-fascists were correct, plans were made to form a single fascist party. In December 1945, for example, Charlie Watts sent an important letter to former members of the British Union of Fascists. He promised that a new fascist organisation would soon be launched, but he insisted that the remnants of the BUF needed to get rid of what he described as the 'Hail Hitler Brigade':

*Whilst we are patiently awaiting the call to renewed activity as an organisation no effort should be spared to rid ourselves of this pro-Germanism, so that when British Union is again reconstituted, we can start off with a decent, clean British organisation to which the British people can give their full confidence.*¹³¹

Between 1945 and 1948, the building blocks of a new party were assembled with a degree of co-ordination that suggests careful planning. First, Mosley published two books, one, *My Answer*, to provide an apology for his past, the other, *The Alternative*, to act as a programme for the future.¹³² Then there was a Mosley paper, the *Mosley Newsletter*, which could be bought under the counter at W. H. Smiths.¹³³ Next, a network of Mosley book clubs were set up, to provide a forum to discuss the leader's ideas, and also with the intention of recruiting a new layer of respectable fascists.¹³⁴ Then, Mosley, Hamm, and Alexander Raven Thomson did the rounds of the several grouplets, encouraging even such renegade anti-Mosley fascists as John

Beckett to join the new organisation.¹³⁵ Finally, in November 1947, Mosley held a large meeting, attended by Hamm, the British League, the book clubs, and about 50 organisations all told, where he announced that he would soon form a new political party, the Union Movement.¹³⁶

Despite the success of these groups in building a level of fascist organisation, there is no doubt that fascism was extremely unpopular after 1945. According to a Mass Observation poll, taken in July and August 1946, 58 per cent of the population believed fascists speeches should be banned.¹³⁷ Similarly, in December 1945, *Reynolds News* asked its readers whether they thought fascism should be banned. Over a hundred of its readers wrote in. Of the letters that were analysed, two-thirds wanted to see fascism banned.

Table 1: Sample Of Letters Received By *Reynolds News*¹³⁸

Point Of View	Total
Ignore or tolerate fascists	10
Excusing Mosley	2
Communism also to blame	6
Communism not the same as fascism	11
Suppress fascists	36
Expose Tory sympathisers with fascism	2
Total	67

One of the results of the war was to link fascism irreversibly to Hitler and to the Holocaust. It took several years for the reality of the Holocaust to sink in. For most of the 1940s, the Holocaust was understood not in terms of the systematic killing of Jews, but as an extension of the pre-war labour camps. The press photographs did not come from the extermination camp at Auschwitz, but from the British liberated concentration camps, such as Belsen.¹³⁹ After 1943, however, and increasingly, the message got across that German fascism had committed unimaginable crimes. Consequently, 'Extremist anti-semitic and fascist groups were handicapped ... by the public connecting them with the Nazis.'¹⁴⁰ Moreover, most people associated Britain's fascists with the war-time traitors, the British Free Corps,¹⁴¹ John Amery, Theodore Schurch, and especially William Joyce.¹⁴² Anti-fascist hecklers would reinforce this point, shouting 'Gairmany calling', or 'where is the invincible army?' or 'go back to the Isle of Man' at fascist speakers.¹⁴³ The National Council of Civil Liberties published a leaflet in 1946, listing two death sentences for treachery, two commuted death sentences and several long prison sentences for treachery, earned by BUF members

in World War Two.¹⁴⁴ Anti-fascists used the experience of Germany as a further argument that there could be no room for complacency in Britain:

*Precisely the same thing happened in Germany. The young Nazi organisations were considered by most German people to be too weak to matter. It was not until it was too late that the German people realised the enormity of their mistake.*¹⁴⁵

Meanwhile, British society had moved to the left since the 1930s. The experience of the war created a 'new popular radicalism, more widespread than at any time in the previous hundred years'.¹⁴⁶ The Communist Party, which went into the war with just 18,000 members, now had between 45,000 and 56,000.¹⁴⁷ The feats of Russia in the war were met with a huge Aid Russia campaign, sponsored by Churchill's wife, but involving hundreds of thousands of people who saw Russia as some beacon of hope. Two communists involved in the campaign were bemused to find that their ideas were now 'official':

*We ... suddenly find ourselves addressing large and influential audiences on the achievements of the Soviet Union. His Worship the Mayor is in the chair, the leaders of local society are on the platform, where the grand piano, presently to accompany both "God Save the King" and the "International" is prophetically draped with the Union Jack and the Red Flag, sociably intertwined.*¹⁴⁸

The best evidence of this new mood came in the 1945 election. Labour's manifesto, *Let Us Face The Future*, promised full employment, a National Health Service, decolonisation, and the nationalisation of fuel, power, inland transport, iron and steel. The Labour Party, it said, 'is a Socialist Party and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain'.¹⁴⁹ With this left-wing programme, Labour won a majority of 146. This was a massive popular vote for left-wing politics. The left was on the offensive. In the words of the *Patriot*, 'Under present conditions, any appeal to logic or common sense will fail, because the person who makes the appeal will be drowned by an unreasoning propaganda which is un-English, and anti-English'.¹⁵⁰ The right, including the forces of fascism, was in retreat.

Several prominent Mosley fascists refused to take part in the Union Movement. Nellie Driver, from Nelson BUF, dropped fascism for Catholicism.¹⁵¹ Alec Miles, formerly one of the BUF's industrial organisers, left the fascist movement and eventually became a left-wing councillor on Westminster City Council.¹⁵² Henry

Williamson begged Mosley not to start the Union Movement. As he later told a friend, 'I wanted [Mosley] to write his memoirs instead. He was news, but bad news.'¹⁵³

Leslie Grundy wrote in his memoirs:

*I never renewed my membership of the Union Movement ... The intrigue, duplicity, dishonesty and treachery in British politics disgusted me ... I was aware that our movement was under surveillance, and I suspected certain persons of doing this.*¹⁵⁴

From 1945 onwards, Robert Saunders attempted to contact former members of the BUF living in Southern England. 'Pip' Davies from Portsmouth told him that he could not build another fascist party, 'practically everyone from my area has left it'. 'Jack' in Exeter said that any political activity would hurt his business. Ralph Jebb told him 'If there was anything to save I would risk that but there isn't'. Another former member of the BUF, Dr. Margaret Vivian, wrote to say that, 'We are covered with mud to such an extent that I doubt whether we could ever be successful, and when the next war comes, we might all end in jail'.¹⁵⁵ Even Jeffrey Hamm was depressed. In June 1945, he attempted to join the Colonial Office.¹⁵⁶ Again, in 1946 and 1947, he planned to emigrate to South Africa.¹⁵⁷ If it had not been for the events in Palestine, which galvanised the forces of British fascism, it is likely that Hamm, Mosley's most effective organiser, would have emigrated and turned his back entirely on activity in Britain.

Simply in order to survive, the fascist groups denied that they had any connection with the past. They evolved different strategies to defend themselves. One was to deny that the Holocaust had taken place. The anti-semites, Alexander Ratcliffe and Douglas Reed, both produced books denying that the Holocaust had even happened. Oswald Mosley argued that 'pictorial evidence proves nothing at all'.¹⁵⁸ Another strategy involved fascists or fascist groups accepting the Holocaust, accepting that fascism was responsible, but denying that they themselves were fascist. Alfred Norris published a pamphlet *The Union Movement: Is It Fascist?*, which argued that the Union Movement was not fascist because it was not anti-semitic:

*Union Movement has no desire to persecute any racial or religious minority loyal to Britain and to Europe, but in the interests of the separatist community of the Jews supports their demand for a national home where their intransigent racial loyalty may find a healthy patriotic outlet.*¹⁵⁹

Norris's pamphlet, however, was only a limited and defensive account of the Union Movement's politics, in order to succeed, a fascist party had to articulate a new message. For Oswald Mosley, the great idea was 'Europe A Nation'. This concept

was spelled out in Mosley's book, *The Alternative*. Europe would be amalgamated into a single state protected by tariffs, and given the best parts of Africa to exploit, under apartheid conditions.¹⁶⁰ Mosley's purpose was, as Mervyn Jones commented, 'to make each eager youngster envisage himself, suitably clad in khaki shorts and carrying a whip or revolver, striding magisterially across a vast plantation where countless black backs bend in rhythm'.¹⁶¹

The Union Movement presented Europe A Nation as a new idea, and suggested that the movement itself was a new force. At the same time, however, the Union Movement took over an organisation inherited from the old BUF. Some members of the movement expressed nostalgia for the old party; others insisted that they preferred a new start. In January 1948, Robert Saunders wrote to Rafe Temple-Cotton another southern England fascist, promising that the Union Movement would be different, and not a duplicate of the 1939 British Union of Fascists:

Ridley Road meetings may be [the same], but they have not been held by UM but by British League of Ex-Servicemen. And it [the League] is without doubt little more than 1939 BU operating in 1947.

Saunders attempted to use Rafe's hostility to the past as an argument to say that Rafe should renew his activity and become an active member of the Union Movement:

*We all know that a part of BU's support came from people who were crudely anti-Jewish and nothing more. I expect you fear that UM will be dominated by the same type of people. I clearly see the danger, too. The important thing is to see that UM's leadership, locally as well as nationally, is in the right hands.*¹⁶²

Saunders' hopes went largely unfulfilled. Mosley may have come up with a new intellectual synthesis, but the fascist character of the Union Movement remained largely unchanged. In terms of core politics, anti-communism, anti-socialism, eugenicism, elitism, racism, and a belief in the use of force against its opponents, in the destruction of trade unions and in the abolition of democracy, the Union Movement was little different from its predecessor, the BUF. Mosley's biographer, Robert Skidelsky argues that even in terms of membership there was very little difference. 'The prevalence of the "old guard" soon gave it a depressingly familiar look. Like the Bourbons, the fascists seemed to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing.'¹⁶³ Skidelsky, here, may be exaggerating, for the Union Movement did involve a new generation of fascists, and most of the leaders of the pre-1939 BUF did not play an important role in the new party. However, it is revealing that Union

Movement speakers, accused of being fascists on the streets, were instructed not to disown the name:

*When you are called fascist, do not attempt to apologise. On the contrary point out that Hitler's economic policy ... is the only way in which this country can escape from our present intolerable dependence on the Almighty Dollar.*¹⁶⁴

The best indicator of continuity is the way in which the Union Movement continued the anti-semitic tradition of the BUF. In principle, anti-semitism was not tolerated, but there was plenty of anti-semitism in practice. Following the November 1947 pre-launch meeting, Mosley gave an interview to the press. He said that Jews would not be allowed to join the Union Movement, that a Union Movement government would deport Jews from Britain, that Buchenwald and Belsen were 'unproven', and that the German gas-chambers had been designed to burn the corpses of Jews killed by British bombing.¹⁶⁵

When members of the Union Movement spoke in local areas, they gave little mention to Mosley's European dreams. They concentrated instead on xenophobia. Fascist speakers referred to Jews as 'Filthy lice, underhanded swine, black marketeers corrupting the children of the country.' One claimed that 'the reason why so many British mothers were dying in childbirth was because the hospitals were full of alien refugees.' Another suggested that 'the Jews should be given food, they have to be alive for when we want them later.' Further speakers gave the PJ signal, or attacked 'Jewish Communists,' or claimed that the Labour government was controlled by the Jews. One said that 'Jews are responsible for the black market everywhere and anywhere including Germany.' Another said that 'Communist shop stewards were exploiting their comrades' welfare for the benefit of their alien Jewish bosses.'¹⁶⁶ From September 1948, the Union Movement's newspaper, *Union*, also began to attack black immigrants, but it was anti-Jewish racism, which was central to the movement's agitation.¹⁶⁷

Events in Palestine may have helped the fascists. Between 1945 and 1948, there were 80,000 British troops policing the territories, and 338 British subjects were killed.¹⁶⁸ Following the bomb attacks on the King David Hotel, and the killing of the two British sergeants at Natanya,¹⁶⁹ there were large anti-Jewish riots in August 1947 in Liverpool, Eccles, Salford and Manchester, and smaller incidents in Plymouth, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Swansea, Devonport and Newcastle. There were 230 attacks on property in Liverpool, and fifty arrests. Between 300 and 400 people rioted in Manchester. The Merseyside Docks was covered with the slogan, 'Death to all

Jews'. Slaughtermen in Birkenhead came out on strike against the employers responsible for the production of kosher meat, the Liverpool Shechita Board. Rioters in Eccles shouted 'exterminate every Jew'.¹⁷⁰ In August 1947, the *Morecambe and Heysham Visitor*, a local paper in North Lancashire with a circulation of approximately 17,000, ran an editorial welcoming the riots and insisting that British Jews had earned the hostility of the crowd,

*The Jews are indeed a plague on Britain, and unless they are put in their place by the will of the people, they may do more harm to this fair isle than ten of the approaching economic crises ... Violence may be the only way to bring them to the sense of their responsibility to the country in which they live.*¹⁷¹

The editor, James Caunt, was charged with seditious libel, and sent for trial. The judge, Mr. Justice Birkett, told the jury that that Caunt should be released, 'It is the highest degree essential ... that nothing should be done in this court to destroy or weaken the liberty of the Press'.¹⁷² Caunt was acquitted.¹⁷³ Lionel Rose, a member of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, maintained the result made life easier for anti-semites, 'Hate-mongers of all types ... have been encouraged to intensify the virulence of their writings.'¹⁷⁴ There was more press racism in 1948 and 1949, after Sidney Stanley, an East End spiv, was brought before the Lynskey Tribunal, accused of bribing a government minister at the Board of Trade. Some papers made anti-semitic jokes at his expense, while others called for his deportation.¹⁷⁵

The fascists certainly tried to use the killings in Palestine to their advantage. Supporters of the British League of Ex-Servicemen And Women told the press that their street meetings, 'were designed as protests against terrorism in Palestine'.¹⁷⁶ In August 1946, two hundred and fifty people came to hear Jeffrey Hamm speak at Hereford Road. According to the police, 'it was quite apparent that a large number of persons present sympathised with the speakers when the question of Palestine was raised'.¹⁷⁷ After the murder of the two sergeants, the fascists pinned newspaper accounts of the deaths to their platforms.¹⁷⁸ Fascist speakers, including Bertram Duke Pile, said that Jewish premises in Britain should be searched, and the *Jewish Chronicle* should be prosecuted, 'for stirring up hate against British soldiers in Palestine'.¹⁷⁹ The British League of Ex-Servicemen And Women did not have any members in Liverpool when the riots took place, but it immediately sent speakers there, in an effort to establish a group.¹⁸⁰ Back in London, members of the British League physically attacked members of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, speaking from their own platform in Buckfast Street, Bethnal Green.¹⁸¹ Fascist

meetings grew in size in July and August, and there was less hostility from the unaffiliated members of the audience. One thousand people heard Hamm speak at Ridley Road on 10 August 1947. According to the police, the majority were favourable to the fascists. They described 'prolonged applause' when Hamm spoke about Palestine.¹⁸²

By the autumn and winter of 1947, 'the fascists were on an upward curve.' They 'were holding more outdoor meetings at both regular and new pitches, while the many new faces at these meetings confirmed ... the success of their recruitment drive'.¹⁸³ The police recorded 22 British League street meetings in the first half of August 1947, 30 in the second half.¹⁸⁴ Mosley's supporters claimed to be holding 34 public meetings each week.¹⁸⁵ The most detailed survey estimated that, 'the number of avowed fascists probably is 6,000 to 7,000. To this, however, must be added a considerable number of people with fascist sympathies, but who, if challenged, would hotly deny that they could be so described.'¹⁸⁶ Mosley was also in contact with the leading members of the fascist jet set, Oswald Pirow in South Africa,¹⁸⁷ Hans Ulrich Rudel and Francke Kriesche in Germany,¹⁸⁸ Francis Parker Yockey from America,¹⁸⁹ and Maurice Bardèche in France.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the Mosleyites had sufficient funds to print and publish a German paper, the *Deutsches Flugblatt*, which they attempted to distribute in Germany.¹⁹¹

Although Mosley could claim to be an important player in the international Nazi jet set, his supporters founded their greatest support within one very narrow area between Hackney and East London. The British League of Ex-Servicemen and the Union Movement held their strongest base in the area between Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, and around Dalston Junction.¹⁹² Outside London, the Union Movement remained relatively weak. In south-west England, the organisation claimed to have a presence in Dorchester, Plymouth, Exeter, Southampton, Poole, Salisbury, Bournemouth and Bristol, but although this list may seem impressive, none of these groups had more than a precarious existence.¹⁹³ In south Hackney, by contrast, the movement was on the up and up. A number of pubs in this area allowed fascist groups to meet on their premises, including the Green Gate in Bethnal Green,¹⁹⁴ and the Roses, the Ridley Arms and the Crown, all in Dalston.¹⁹⁵ In 1947, the *British League Review* listed twelve districts of the British League of Ex-Servicemen And Women. Of these twelve, four were in East London or Essex, and three were in or near south Hackney, one covered Hackney itself, another Bethnal Green, and a third, Hoxton and Shoreditch.¹⁹⁶

By the winter of 1947-8, therefore, the British League and then the Union Movement seemed to be very powerful, confident and threatening. As one veteran anti-fascist comments, 'We'd had the news of the Holocaust. It was not all revealed but what we had heard was bad enough, and then these bastards came along with their arms up, giving the fascist salute. Our minds boggled.'¹⁹⁷ Different organisations responded to the fascist threat in different ways. Labour was in government, and was thus in the best position either to change the law or to demand that the police acted against anti-semitic speakers. The Labour Party did have some tradition of fighting fascism, going back to the 1930s. Before 1939, Labour supported anti-fascist demonstrations. Clement Attlee had given his support to Republican troops in Spain. As late as 1943, many Labour MPs voted against Morrison's decision to release Mosley. Labour MPs were prepared to put principled anti-fascism before party loyalty, even to the extent of voting for the likely resignation of their cabinet minister.¹⁹⁸ Between 1945 and 1951, however, the Labour government did nothing to stop fascism. There were no Labour-sponsored demonstrations against fascism, no speaking tours, no pamphlets, and no campaigns. There was no change in the law, neither to ban fascist parties, nor to outlaw anti-semitic propaganda.

The failure of the Labour Party to take a lead in the street campaigns against Mosley meant that there was a gap on the left, which was partly filled by the Communist Party. Even before Mosley's release, the CP started to take a strong anti-fascist line again. From as early as February 1943, the party's paper, the *Daily Worker*, began to report details of fascist meetings and to call for a ban on fascism.¹⁹⁹ The party also played an extremely important role in the campaign against Mosley's release. The *Daily Worker* was the first newspaper to break the news that the government was planning to discharge Mosley from detention.²⁰⁰ Many Tory papers believed the whole fuss was caused by the CP. *The Times* noted that 'the Home Secretary's decision ... is being criticised by the Communists'.²⁰¹ According to the *Morning Advertiser*, 'the Communist Party has got itself into a fury'.²⁰² It is true that Communist Party members were able to push the campaign forwards, and provide it with a structure and leadership. The party called two large marches against the release. One of the marches was made up entirely of delegates from the factories engaged in war-time production. Thirty thousand people joined the other demonstration.²⁰³ Probably one million people signed the petitions of protest. The day after Mosley was released, 14,000 people signed the petition, in just one bookshop in Central London.²⁰⁴ Within three days, 100,000 signed the petition in Coventry, out of a total population of 180,000.²⁰⁵

Between 1944 and mid-1947, the Communist Party and its youth wing, the Young Communist League, took a less central role than they had in 1943. There were leaflets, but no national demonstration, and very little co-ordination. Anti-fascist work was left to local CP branches. After the formation of the Union Movement, though, and from mid-1947 the CP did step up its campaign. In particular, it worked alongside the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). From the point of view of the Communist Party, the idea of acting through the NCCL had one big advantage, the NCCL was viewed as neutral ground, National Council members included Tory MPs, Labour, Liberal and Communist Party supporters, Church groups, Jewish groups, and other often unaffiliated individuals. As well as the Communist Party and the National Council for Civil Liberties, the rest of the left was also involved in the anti-fascist campaigns, as far as resources, permitted. So Common Wealth, the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Trotskyists of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) all played a part.

Alongside the working class left, there were also a number of Jewish groups which organised against the fascist threat. In 1947 and 1948, individual Jewish Communists played an important role, putting pressure on the Communist Party to take anti-fascism seriously and producing a series of newspapers, such as the *Jewish Clarion*, *Jewish Opinion* and *Jewish Forum*, which publicised the anti-Mosley campaign.²⁰⁶ The Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX), organised by Major Lionel Rose, organised street meetings in which ex-army speakers would defend Zionism, or the role of Jews in the war. The idea was to put forward a positive message of religious toleration and thus to undermine anti-semitism through education. The years 1947-8 also witnessed the emergence of the 43 Group. Its campaign is the best documented of all, as a result of Morris Beckman's book of the same name. At its peak, the group had 2000 members. It ran its own newspaper, *On Guard*, and sent infiltrators into the Mosley Book Clubs and the Union Movement. The Group seems to have specialised in turning over fascist platforms. A typical 43 Group 'commando' might close down 13 fascist meetings in one Sunday's work.²⁰⁷

To the fascists, the combined activity of these different anti-fascist groups working at a local level without much official co-ordination must have felt much as it would have if the separate organisations had been consciously working together. In the local areas, the 43 Group turned over fascist platforms, while the Trades Council and the Communist Party organised petitions and anti-fascist demonstrations. What the fascist speakers experienced was a single anti-fascist opposition. One arm of the movement won the local community to the politics of anti-fascism, while the other arm

attacked fascist street meetings. Together, they made it increasingly difficult for the Mosleyites to hold their meetings in public.

From the winter of 1947 onwards, and probably as a response to the anti-fascist campaign, the Union Movement concentrated on holding large meetings at central venues. Thus the size of the very largest fascist meetings increased. At Ridley Road, for example, the numbers attending rose from about 700 in September 1947, to about 3000 one month later.²⁰⁸ At the same time, however, a large number of much smaller meetings were closed down. During the autumn and winter of 1947, the fascists held street meetings in fourteen London boroughs. By spring 1948, they were holding meetings in only three or four areas.²⁰⁹ By concentrating its resources, the Union Movement made it far harder for anti-fascists to turn over fascist platforms. The fascists were able to hold large meetings which were relatively secure. But the Union Movement was also weakening itself and undermining its own future. The change reduced the number of new people that the fascists could relate to politically. At large meetings of 2000 or 3000 people the Mosleyites could address much the same people each week. What they could not do was expand the base of their support, and build a large new audience.

Fascists and anti-fascists fought each other on the streets throughout the autumn and winter of 1947. There were pitched battles at Ridley Road every week from mid-August till October; at Hereford Street in Bethnal Green, from September till October 1947, at Rushcroft Road in Brixton, from mid-August till late-October 1947, and at Trebovir Road in Earl's Court, from September till October 1947. Between June 1946 and December 1947, there were 41 cases involving 96 people, arising out of violent disturbances at pro-fascist meetings.²¹⁰ Dozens of anti-fascists were convicted. The magistrates told the defendants that they had sympathy with their cause, but anti-fascists should stay at home. In September 1947, one magistrate told Philip Goldberg, 'If people like you would keep away from these fascist meetings, you would find that all these inflammatory nonsense would rapidly disappear'. He then bound Goldberg over for 12 months.²¹¹ Smaller numbers of fascists were also convicted. In October 1947, Blake Odgers bound Jeffrey Hamm over for using insulting words. Odgers told Hamm that it was perfectly in his right to attack Jews for being communists, just as long as he did not attack Jews for being Jews. This judgement outraged the *Daily Worker*.

If a fascist says that the Jews are out to destroy Britain, that they are behind every black-market racket, that they are organising to foully murder British troops in Palestine and that all British people ought to combine against them,

*that is wicked and criminal. But if he says that most Jews are Communists and Communists are Jews then he can accuse these Jew-Communists of all those things and much more besides, and can call for all possible action against them.*²¹²

One important street battle came in May 1948. Oswald Mosley planned to celebrate May Day by staging a huge march from Dalston to the East End. Three days before the march began J. Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary, banned all demonstrations in East London. The Union Movement march was re-routed through Hackney to Holloway. Four hundred fascists and Union Movement supporters took part, along the route they fought with at least 1500 anti-fascist counter-demonstrators,²¹³ at the scene 834 police made thirty-two arrests.²¹⁴ Writing after the demonstration, Mosley informed his readers that the ban on the original Union Movement march meant that the fascists were back to the harsh times of 1940. Mosley insisted that it was 'the end of real free speech'. It would no longer be possible to build a mass movement in the image of the BUF. The fascists had to try 'new methods', which Mosley described as 'permeation'. Members of the Union Movement should infiltrate 'athletic clubs, boxing, running, hiking [and] cycling [teams].' Part of Mosley's idea was that fascists should enter the existing political parties, and attempt to take them over from within, 'I would not rule out ... membership of the old parties'.²¹⁵

Mosley saw the permeation tactic as an innovative solution to the post-war unpopularity of fascism. As a tactic, however, it was not particularly original. After 1945 non-Union Movement fascists were busy infiltrating everything they could. John Hooper Harvey was a former supporter of Arnold Leese, and now a devotee of Count Potocki, also known as 'His Majesty Wladyslaw the Fifth, By the Grace of God King of Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, Grand Duke of Lithuania, Silesia and the Ukraine, Hospodar of Moldavia, etc., High Priest of the Sun', who lived in Little Bookham in Surrey.²¹⁶ After 1945, John Hooper Harvey wrote *The Plantagenets*, a school textbook which praised Edward I for expelling the Jews from England, 'it is difficult to doubt the statesmanship of Edward's decision'.²¹⁷ A. K. Chesterton built himself a career as a journalist on *Truth* and then the *Daily Express*.²¹⁸ Major-General Fuller took a leading part in the MI6-sponsored Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations.²¹⁹ Roy Campbell started a literary magazine, *The Catacomb*.²²⁰ Douglas Reed continued to write books for Jonathan Cape and also published a favourable biography of Otto Strasser, *The Prisoner Of Ottawa*.²²¹ Henry Williamson became the editor of the *Adelphi*.²²² Andrew Fountaine, who had fought for Franco in Spain, joined the

Conservative Party. He told the 1948 Tory conference that Attlee's government was 'a group of conscientious objectors, national traitors, semi-alien mongrels and hermaphrodite communists'. Although repudiated by the Conservative Party's national leadership, Fountaine was nominated by the Chorley association, and stood in the 1950 general election.²²³

Permeation was a long-term tactic. Members of the fascist parties recognised that fascism could not be revived in 1948 or 1949, but they also believed that there might come time when the Union Movement could grow. At this stage, the hidden fascists would be able to come out into the open. Charlie Watts argued, in a letter to Robert Saunders, that permeation would only be a temporary necessity,

*When the crack up comes, and you and I know just how inevitable that is; when the masses of the people find that they want a strong lead, these [covert fascists] will be in the best position to come out into the open and join forces with the active movement.*²²⁴

Watts envisaged that in the time before the crisis broke, the task for fascists was to sink roots in their area and in their professions. John Charnley, already a delegate on the South-West Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, joined the Tory Party and was the chair of the Burscough and Latham Conservatives by 1952.²²⁵ Robert Saunders joined the Dorchester Agricultural Society, the Bournemouth and District Parliament, the Economic Reform Club, the Liberty Restoration League, and the Rural Reconstruction Association. He stood as an 'Independent' in local elections and in 1963 came within one vote of beating Henry Plumb in the contest for the vice-presidency of the National Farmers Union.²²⁶

Despite Watts' hopes, permeation did not build the fascist party. From 1948, the Union Movement ceased to grow. It was hurt by changes in broader society. The Cold War meant that the Tory Party was able to exercise a hegemony on the right, with the stakes so high, there was little point in backing such an insignificant force as British fascism. Meanwhile, the war ended in Palestine and this deprived the fascists of their one popular issue. The fascists stalled and went into reverse. Michael Maclean, the Union Movement's Birmingham organiser, quit the organisation in July 1948. Tommy Moran, one of Mosley's few surviving pre-war lieutenants, left in February 1949,²²⁷ as did Bertram Duke Pile and Ronald Hargreaves.²²⁸ Fifteen fascist candidates in the 1949 election obtained just 1993 votes between them.²²⁹

The size of Union Movement meetings declined rapidly in 1949. In October 1949, Alf Flockhart told Dudley Barker, a journalist, that the Union Movement had 108

branches, with between 15 and 38 members in each. That would suggest that the Union Movement had around 3000 members, about half the figure it had boasted in early 1948.²³⁰ By 1950, there were an average of only 250 supporters even at the larger London meetings, 'the Union Movement had been beaten and was in serious decline'.²³¹ In February 1951, Oswald Mosley addressed a meeting at Kensington Town Hall. He was clearly on the verge of renouncing all practical activity.²³² Finally, in March 1951, Mosley left Britain for Ireland. Mosley's parting statement was a recognition of defeat:

*My service to the European idea will be more effective when I am no longer a virtual prisoner of a British government which first ruined Europe and now ruins Britain ... England has been turned into an Island Prison cut off from the crusade for European Union. No man can start a crusade from within a gaol.*²³³

Mosley promised that he would not return. The Union Movement was in a state of decline, with its key activists despondent and more interested in fighting among themselves than in building any large fascist movement, 'perhaps it was a feeling of treading familiar paths that led Mosley to leave Britain in 1951'.²³⁴

¹ For a description of how the British Union of Fascists attempted to claim some of these figures, especially Carson, as their inspiration, R. Benewick, *Political Violence And Public Order: A Study Of British Fascism* (London, 1969), 22-4; the standard fascist analysis of the roots of British fascism is W. E. D. Allen, *Fascism In Relation To British History And Character* (London, 1933); for G. K. Chesterton, J. Pearce, *Wisdom And Innocence: A Life Of G. K. Chesterton* (London, 1996).

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⁴ L. W. Bondy, *Racketeers Of Hatred: Julius Streicher And The Jew-Baiters International* (London, 1946), 141.

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⁷ J. Hope, 'British Fascism And The State, 1918-27: A Re-Examination Of The Documentary Evidence', *LHR* 57/3 (1992), 72-83.

⁸ Thurlow (1987), 56-7.

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- ¹¹ J. E. Morrell, 'The Life And Opinions Of A. S. Leese: A Study In Extreme Anti-Semitism' (MA thesis, Sheffield University, 1974), 15-39; R. M. Gorman, 'Swastika Over England: The Life And Thought Of Arnold Spencer Leese' (MA thesis, Georgia College, Milledgeville, 1975).
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- ¹³ The British Union of Fascists was later to change its name, first to the British Union of Fascists And National Socialists, and then to British Union, before it was closed down in 1940. For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to it as the British Union of Fascists, or BUF, throughout.
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- ¹⁵ 'Army Gave Mosley Marching Orders Over Injured Leg', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 February 1998.
- ¹⁶ C. Cross, *The Fascists In Britain* (London, 1961), 36.
- ¹⁷ Thurlow (1987), 92; for the New Party, H. Nicolson, *Diaries And Letters 1930-9* (London, 1969), 65-111; for the influence of the NSDAP on the New Party, P. Henri, 'Verge Of Treason', *Searchlight*, Sep-Oct 1989.
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- ¹⁹ Janus, 'A Spectator's Notebook', *Spectator*, 14 June 1946; R. Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1990 edn), 3. The fullest account is in R. Thurlow, *Fascism In Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts To the National Front* (London, 1998), 89-90, 106-8.
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- ³² A. Hamilton, *The Appeal Of Fascism: A Study Of Intellectuals And Fascism 1919-45* (London, 1971), 274-6, 285-290.
- ³³ D. S. Lewis, *Illusions Of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism And British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester, 1987), 64-7.
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The Heil Hitler Brigade: Fascism 1945-51

The Introduction argued that there is a growing trend for historians to understand fascism primarily as a series of ideas. What is important for such historians as Roger Griffin and Zeev Sternhell is neither the fascist movement, nor the nature of the fascist regime, but the way in which fascism is perceived to synthesise certain ideological propositions, notably nationalism and socialism. Although this method is presented as a means to understand fascism as a general phenomenon, it has also been applied to particular fascist movements,¹ therefore one way in which historians have interpreted the history of British fascism is as a contest between British fascists and British Nazis. Fascists are then described as fascists who believed in the overriding myth of the nation, while Nazis are defined as fascists who believed in the deciding importance of race. This is how Richard Thurlow distinguishes the two,

Fascism was rationalised in terms of an idealist political philosophy which emphasised the striving of the human will to create higher spiritual forms, and the transformation of political society within the confines of the nation state and its dependent territories. Nazism on the other hand, saw the function of will power as being subordinate to a materialist base. The function of the will was not to enhance aesthetic and moral values within human society, but instead merely to implement the deterministic laws of nature by a process of Darwinian natural selection.²

From such a definition it follows that particular British fascists were Nazis, notably Arnold Leese and perhaps Francis Parker Yockey,³ but none of the mainstream figures, neither John Beckett nor A. K. Chesterton,⁴ and certainly not Oswald Mosley. Mosley was not a full-blooded racist, 'the idea of race was not significant for either Mussolini or Mosley', so therefore he was only a fascist.⁵

This clear distinction conceived in the realm of ideas is normally applied to explain the politics of individuals, but it is not often applied to fascist organisations, when it is the distinction breaks down. The Nazi parties contained fascists and the fascist parties harboured Nazis. One example of a fascist working with Nazis is the

Duke of Bedford. In 1942, Bedford, who is normally be described as a moderate fascist, wrote leaflets for the very Nazi British National Party.⁶ Just as often it was the other way round, Nazis were tolerated as members of fascist parties. In this way, Thomas St. Barbe Baker was a member of the British Union of Fascists. He was detained with other BUF members in 1940 and interned in Peveril Camp. In 1941 Barbe Baker came to the idea that Hitler was acting on God's orders and that Hitler was in fact a Second Coming of Christ. This idea should have put him beyond the pale within BUF circles, but it did not. In April 1942, Barbe Baker expressed his ideas about Hitler into a speech on 'God is Love' to inmates at Peveril. Over 30 fascists attended and listened, including prominent Mosley loyalists such as J. L. Flockhart and H. T. Brock-Griggs. Afterwards the audience, including both Flockhart and Brock-Griggs, shouted 'Heil Hitler' and gave Barbe Baker the Nazi salute.⁷ Similarly, Francis Parker Yockey was a full blown Nazi, who left America to volunteer as a German agent during the second world war.⁸ After the war Yockey stuck to his beliefs, and published a long book, *Imperium*, arguing that Hitler was right and that all human history was the history of race.⁹ Despite his known Nazi background Yockey was not originally cold-shouldered by Mosley. He was allowed to join the Union Movement and write articles for its paper, *Union*.¹⁰ He even advertised in *Union* for a place to stay.¹¹ Eventually Mosley did remove Yockey from the Union Movement; but it took him several months to do so.¹²

In effect, there was a continuum of ideas. Prominent fascists might hold ideas that belonged to one fascist tradition, but this did not stop them from holding other ideas that normally belonged to another trend of fascist thought. Even as these fascists held one idea, other ideas, fixed points in their mental universe would slowly change. Thus A. K. Chesterton left Mosley in 1938. He portrayed his departure as a decision of principle:

*I left because I became convinced that the BUF was playing about with a great idea and producing in its own organisation a parody of National Socialist thought and principle.*¹³

But this principled objection to Mosley fascism lasted only until Chesterton was asked to write for the first edition of Alexander Raven Thomson's Mosleyite journal, *Modern Thought*, in September 1946.¹⁴ Suddenly A. K. Chesterton decided that Mosley was not so bad after all. Chesterton's newspaper, *Sovereignty*, described Mosley as 'the only man who has ever looked like saving Britain from the road ahead'.¹⁵ Chesterton's ideas changed, as they would change again. This does not make him less principled,

it could be argued that he was never very principled to start off with, but it does make it difficult for the historian to construct a set of constant fascist ideas, and it makes it impossible to separate the fascists into different neatly-contained categories. The fascists were fascists, and the Nazis were fascists, as well. When looking at British fascism in the 1940s, no useful distinction can be made between the two.

There were points of fascist ideology which did mark off individual fascists from other members of society, but they were not only or even typically the ideas, including nationalism and socialism, which the later historians have so keenly fixed upon. Admittedly, nationalism was there, embodied in slogans including 'Britons First', 'Britain For The British', or 'Britons Unite With The British League'. The *Patriot* insisted that the only way to push forward fascist ideas was through an insistence on nationalism:

*The international field must be renounced ... As a political preserve, it belongs exclusively to the left. The right must contend on the traditional ground of nationalism in defence of the constitution.*¹⁶

This nationalism expressed itself in xenophobia and also racism. Oswald Mosley rejected 'the argument that every savage was in every way the brother and equal of a European'.¹⁷ Alexander Raven Thomson, writing in the Union of British Freedom paper, *Unity*, described Jews as 'the vermin that can only live parasitically on the belly of a nation other than their own'.¹⁸

Although there was a fascist nationalism, there was no such thing as a fascist socialism. The fascists put forward ideas that were the very opposite of socialism. The *Patriot* condemned the Beveridge Plan, and the idea of a National Health Service, 'Those responsible for the Plan abrogated to themselves all the attributes of a Dictatorship'.¹⁹ Beveridge, the paper insisted, was 'designed to fit into a master plan issuing in a totalitarian state'.²⁰ Douglas Reed's paper, *London Tidings*, denounced the activities of the Labour government, for taking money from the rich, 'those who by the wise application of their capital ... made Great Britain what she was, are being systematically despoiled'.²¹ Fascist publications spent their every moment attacking the left and the working class movement. The *British League Review* described the Communist Party as 'sub-human oriental ape-men'.²² The Liberator Council, the Banking Reform League, the New Age Association, the Social Credit Party, and the Social Credit Co-ordinating Committee and the Common Law Parliament all campaigned against local authorities who borrowed money to pay for public housing.²³ *At Random*, the paper of the 'Modern Thought Discussion Group', warned that

Communists were ruining British industry, 'Dare we say "it cannot happen here", when our vital mining industry is dominated by the avowed Communist Horner, who has threatened us with a coal stoppage, would we quarrel with Russia'.²⁴

Fascism based itself on radical elitism, that is on the notion that certain human beings were morally or genetically better than others. The most obvious form of this was racism. *The British League Review* denounced what it described as 'the lie of racial equality'.²⁵ *The Patriot* believed that whites were naturally cleverer than Blacks, who could only be 'docile and useful citizens' if they were not allowed to leave Africa.²⁶ The Union Movement demanded a 'Colour Bar' against 'Black parasites'.²⁷ Arnold Leese's paper, *Gothic Ripples*, argued for what it described as a natural law, that should determine all human conduct, 'all is race'.²⁸ Fascist parties were not only racist, they also believed that women should have a more subordinate place in society.²⁹ John Webster's paper, *Britain Defiant*, insisted that 'we do not need the women back at work again, until every man who is able to work is working'.³⁰ *The Patriot* and *Sovereignty* both called for women to stay in the home.³¹ Alexander Raven Thomson attacked the idea of equal pay for equal work, 'it is absurd to carry the modern fetish of equality to such a point'.³²

The most commonly expressed fascist theme was anti-semitism. G. F. Green's paper, the *Independent Nationalist*, advertised *The Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion*, as did the *Social Crediter*, *London Tidings*, and *Union*.³³ *The Patriot* insisted that *The Protocols* was not a forgery,³⁴ while A. K. Chesterton also quoted them.³⁵ *Gothic Ripples* gave itself the masthead, 'an occasional report on the Jewish question issued for the Jew-wise'.³⁶ Leese claimed there were up to 1,500,000 Jews in Britain,³⁷ and argued that they should be interned, or deported to Madagascar.³⁸ Fascist anti-semitism was linked to the fascist response to capitalism. What was wrong with capital, according to the fascists, was its links with finance. Finance was usury, and usury was, according to the Duke of Bedford, 'what the modern Jew has successfully taught the world'.³⁹ If only the financiers could be liquidated in the interests of industry, then all would be well. The National Workers Movement promised that it would introduce 'national money to be put at the disposal of all worthy enterprises at the lowest economic interest rates'. The banks would be closed down.⁴⁰ The fascist attacks on finance were predicated on absolute support for industrial capital. *London Tidings* campaigned to prevent state supervision of industry, 'the government should have no thought of intervening in the national economic life except through the medium of common law'.⁴¹ The attacks on finance

may have seemed like a form of anti-capitalism, but they were linked to a movement which would have given all power into the hands of big business.

The fascists opposed every idea or action that would lead to more equality or more real freedom. The fascists defended every prejudice, every form of oppression. Their positive ideal was a society in which the many had no rights, and were the slaves of a few. They called this dictatorship a 'Leader state', or an 'aristocracy'. In Captain R. Gordon-Canning's phrase, 'To hell with democracy'.⁴² Mosley believed that biology should be used to produce a new generation of leaders. He described this principle as 'Hereditry' or 'Selection'.⁴³ The Duke of Bedford argued for the abolition of parliament and all political opposition. The functions of government would be hived off to corporations, whose decisions could be validated by an occasional referendum.⁴⁴ Alexander Ratcliffe contended that 'democracy has not benefited us not one jot or tittle'.⁴⁵ Leese insisted that his highest idea of society was 'some kind of Aristocracy', in which there would be the maximum inequality, 'We always stood for recognition of the fact of inequality both of individuals and races'.⁴⁶

There were, then, ideas which fascists tended to share, but there were also several important ideological differences between different groups of fascists. Fascists did disagree, while still remaining fascists; what fuelled these disagreements was a sense which many different fascists held, that they were now cutting against the grain. As Leese put it, 'We hold our own in these difficult times, but the Jew-wise public is yet only a small section of the community among English-speaking peoples'.⁴⁷ Mosley suggested that the only future for his supporters was as part of, 'A movement created by a long, slow struggle with many ups and down in which faith publicly proclaimed [would be] greeted with universal abuse and supported only by a small minority'.⁴⁸ The crimes of Hitler and Mussolini, especially the war and the Holocaust, meant that the majority of people in British society were strongly anti-fascist. According to Chesterton,

*Fascism certainly failed. It failed so disastrously [that] it is impossible even to mention the word without invoking, not what its adherents meant when they used it, but what its deadliest opponents intended it to have meant. And that is defeat indeed.*⁴⁹

Hitler had discredited fascism as a general force. Different fascists, and different fascist organisations, therefore, were obliged to work out new strategies to explain their isolation, or to justify their continuing political existence.

The most important of these new strategies was Oswald Mosley's idea of 'Europe A Nation'. This system was outlined in a series of articles in the *Mosley Newsletter*, and in Mosley's new book, *The Alternative*, published in July 1946. Europe A Nation became the main theme at the heart of the propaganda of the Union Movement after 1948. The starting point of Mosley's thinking was the notion that capitalism was on the verge of its final crisis, 'we still live in an economic crisis which threatens the life of Britain.'⁵⁰ From this, it followed that the standard fascist solution, the dictatorship of one leader, was still valid. Mosley supported 'the leadership principle, which is the opposite of what is now called "Democracy"'.⁵¹ He also defended Hitler as an example of a successful leader, 'The mighty shadow of the Thought-Deed man has already appeared on Earth'.⁵² Oswald Mosley stressed again and again that his new emphasis on Europe represented a continuity with the past. As he told the *Sunday Pictorial*, 'I have not changed my political ideas one inch. I do not retract anything that I have either said or stood for in the past'.⁵³ However, if Mosley believed fascism was still relevant, he was prepared to acknowledge that it was now deeply unpopular. In Mosley's view, fascism failed, because it was too nationalist, 'Our political ideology and propaganda were far too Nationalistic even to mould the minds of men in a new sense of European kinship'.⁵⁴ What Mosley supported, therefore, was not the re-birth of Britain, but the formation of a single nation state in Europe. Europe A Nation would be protected by tariffs from booms and slumps. It would take its wealth from an African empire, ruled under conditions of extreme exploitation, 'Our economic problems could be solved by Negro labour under white direction in Africa'.⁵⁵ In response to the accusation that the idea of Europe A Nation was racist, Mosley replied, 'Have we a "sacred trust" to keep jungles fit for negroes to live in?'⁵⁶

The standard response of non-Mosley fascists was to argue that Mosley's new concern with European fascism was unnecessary or even counter-productive. A. K. Chesterton argued in *London Tidings*, that Mosley's big mistake was to play down the importance of the nation:

*Fascism, he asserts was too narrowly nationalistic. He will not repeat the mistake. He will instead, unite Europe and exploit Africa, that he may succeed where fascism failed. 'Hail Mosley', shout his followers in ecstatic agreement ... How thoroughly in keeping with the hapless Mosley's temperament it is that he should seek to return to political life ... having divested his political stock-in-trade of the one part of the fascist argument which was demonstrably true.*⁵⁷

It followed that what was needed was a return to nationalism in defence of the fascist traditions of the 1930s. Chesterton's alternative to existing society was 'to contract out of the international finance system [and] out of the international trading system'.⁵⁸ From such a nationalistic and autarchic foundation, could be created a fascist dictatorship, as Chesterton called it, 'the monarchical or national state'.⁵⁹

Each strand of fascist thinking had its own solutions to the problems of British society, and by implication, to the isolation of British fascism. There were Christian fascists who used their religion as a thin veneer to justify their fascist politics. Father Denis Fahey wrote that Communism was a Jewish world conspiracy to increase the power of international finance. He called his book, *The Mystical Body Of Christ In The Modern World*.⁶⁰ J. L. Battersby believed that Hitler was the Messiah, the Second Coming of Christ,⁶¹ he named his paper, *The Christian Digest And Witness*. Robert J. Scrutton argued that the world was being run by a secret cabal of Jewish financiers, 'the rulers of the world's darkness',⁶² his paper was the *Parliament Christian*. The best known of these Christian fascists was the Duke of Bedford, one of the richest men in Britain and the owner of large chunks of land in Bloomsbury and across England and Scotland.⁶³ Bedford believed that Social Credit was the only alternative to capitalism, and that Hitler had been a true Social Crediter, 'the Axis did not bother much about Gold'.⁶⁴ Therefore the solution for Britain was to copy the 'revolutionary movement' of Nazi Germany.⁶⁵ The Duke of Bedford had a three-point plan to save humanity, he wanted to see more religion, 'real Christianity',⁶⁶ he supported disarmament to prevent future wars, and he called for 'monetary and foreign trade reform', the abolition of the Bretton Woods system of guarantees for international finance, and its replacement by a system of autarchy based on Social Credit.⁶⁷

Other fascists also stressed the need for monetary reform. According to Sir Alliot Verdon-Roe, formerly a leading member of Mosley's January Club, reform would be 'a first step to deliver the people from the present appalling state of world affairs'.⁶⁸ The British Action Party (BAP) promised autarchy, as part of an attack on finance and support for industry, 'British credit shall be used for British Industry, ensuring fair return for capital invested, fair wages for employees, and reasonable prices for the consumers of industry's production'.⁶⁹ Many of the fascists who attacked finance were also opposed to the new Bretton Woods system. Norman Thompson described Bretton Woods as an American and Zionist plot.⁷⁰ H. T. Mills also attacked Bretton Woods, in *The Patriot*. He argued that the problem with Bretton Woods was that it would restore international control over exchange rates and hence over the entire economy, 'We see a new attempt to fasten upon the nation the grip of

the international money lender'.⁷¹ The main theory of monetary reform within British fascism was Social Credit. Its founder, Major C. H. Douglas, was now himself, 'anti-Socialist, anti-Jewish, anti-Internationalist, anti-Beveridge, anti-Planning and anti-Communist'.⁷² After 1945, he published a pamphlet, *The Big Idea*, blamed the war on the Jews,⁷³ while his paper, *Social Credit*, claimed that Hitler's Germany, like Britain, Russia and America, was controlled by a secret Jewish conspiracy, and asked, 'Isn't this Jewish-persecution-by-Hitler business wearing a bit thin?'⁷⁴ The advantage of such a theory was that it allowed Social Credit to explain the post-war isolation of the fascists, their unpopularity, like everything else, was the fault of the Jews.

Another tradition within British fascism insisted that the only way out of their impasse was to return to Hitler's full Nazi theory. Arnold Leese was 'the high priest of post-war neo-Nazism'.⁷⁵ He insisted that Hitler was 'the Jew's chief enemy'.⁷⁶ It followed that the second world war was a 'Jewish' war, 'the Jewish war of survival'.⁷⁷ Alexander Ratcliffe denied that the Holocaust had happened, '95 per cent of the Jew "Atrocity" stories, and the "photographs" of such "atrocities" appearing in the press, magazines and journals, are mere invention'.⁷⁸ J. Marston Gaster, of the North Western Task Group insisted that 'the Nazi ideology is ours'.⁷⁹ F. P. Yockey claimed that race was the most basic reality in the world, 'race in a man is the fundamental plane of his being'. He predicted 'a new state form', and the victory of Hitler's ideas even after his death.⁸⁰

Other fascists came up with their own analyses. Admiral Barry Domville wrote that the world was being controlled by a hidden conspiracy of Jews and Freemasons, 'Judmas'. He thanked Hitler for helping him to see the light, 'it was Hitler's attack on Judmas that really started me thinking'.⁸¹ Captain Ramsay stood closer to the standard anti-semitic conspiracy theories, 'We have in Britain a Jewish "Imperium in Imperio"'.⁸² Wing Commander Young developed Leese's notion that the Jews who were responsible for all the world's ills were in fact Tartars and Khazars from Asia.⁸³ Basil Stewart believed that the fighting in Palestine was but a prelude to the final conflict and the Millennium, as outlined in the Book of Ezekiel.⁸⁴ Douglas Reed, the journalist, based his ideas on the works of Otto Strasser. His book, *From Smoke To Smother* outlined his theory that the Communist Party of Great Britain was about to stage a coup, with the support of the Labour Party and 230 MPs receiving instructions from the Fabian Society. Their opponents were to be accused of being anti-semites and then removed.⁸⁵ Then the world would understand the secret Communist-Zionist conspiracy based in America, which had as its aim the seizing of Palestine.⁸⁶ The

most curious aspect of Reed's fantasies is that Jonathan Cape agreed to publish them.⁸⁷

Fascism In Action

Fascism was not just a series of ideas, the reactionary ideas were also taken up by a fascist movement, which used them to attempt definite ends within British society. As Colin Sparks suggests, fascism is a distinct form of political practice, recognisable by its style of political mobilisation:

In the course of its life, fascism shuffles together every myth and lie that the rotten history of capitalism has ever produced like a pack of greasy cards and then deals them out to whoever it thinks they will win. What is important is not the ideas themselves, but the context in which they operate. Many of the ideas of fascism are the commonplaces of all reactionaries, but they are used in a different way. Fascism differs from the traditional right-wing parties like the Conservative Party not so much in its ideas but in that it is an extra-parliamentary mass movement which seeks the road to power through ... attacks on its opponents.⁸⁸

The first step which every single fascist attempted, was to build a distinctively fascist party. Arnold Leese, for example, formed or supported a succession of different fascist organisations. In 1945, he set up a Jewish Interest Bureau,⁸⁹ while in 1946, Leese encouraged his supporters to join the Duke of Bedford's new British People's Party.⁹⁰ In 1947, he claimed to have 250 supporters distributing *Gothic Ripples*,⁹¹ then in 1948, Arnold Leese told his supporters, 'Many readers of *Gothic Ripples* will desire to assist a real movement not only to deliver this country from Jewish control but also to establish the conduct of its affairs once more on British standards'.⁹² The plan was form a National Workers Party (NWP), with Anthony Francis Xavier Baron as the nominal leader, but with Leese in real control.⁹³ At its peak, the NWP claimed up to 1000 supporters.⁹⁴ By 1950, however, members of the National Workers Party were meeting in separate groups known as the National Workers Movement and the Nationalist Party.⁹⁵ Later that year, sections of the National Workers Movement, notably Edwin Horton and Colin Jordan, again split off to form a new party, the Bath and West National Crusade, with a newspaper, *Crusade*.⁹⁶ In 1951, Leese told his supporters to join P. J. Ridout's British Empire Party. This new fascist party also failed.⁹⁷

A similar, if more successful, process led to the formation of the Union Movement. In each area it began as a book club or a society or as a series of private groups, which 'may or may not be identifiable at first glance'. Then Oswald Mosley, or Alexander Raven Thomson, would visit the groups, and merge them to form a branch of the Union Movement. The movement would subsequently begin public activities. Fascists would start to sell *Union*, and put up slogans or graffiti on walls. By then, members of the Union Movement would be sufficiently well-organised to hold their own meetings, or heckle left-wing speakers. Finally, there would be a large fascist rally, where Mosley would speak, and announce that the movement was 'coming forward as a fully-fledged political party', which would stand candidates in elections, and in this way the movement would achieve an open existence.⁹⁸

These organisations were not just parties, they were a particular form of political structure, fascist political parties, with a strong leader, a language of racism, an emphasis on violence, and a typical membership. Each party had its leader, the most important of whom was Oswald Mosley. Members of the Union Movement had a religious devotion to their leader. In detention, elaborate ceremonies were arranged to celebrate his birthday, at which they saluted his portrait and sang hymns to him.⁹⁹ At an 18B reunion dance in 1945, 'Mosley became the centre of a surging mob of hero-worshippers many of whom were on the edge of hysteria'.¹⁰⁰ Mosley fascists wrote about their leader in tones of awe, and using capitals to convey their devotion. Jeffrey Hamm wrote in the *British League Review*, 'Oswald Mosley has given us The Idea, and it is for us to build The Movement that will propagate that Idea'.¹⁰¹ Raven Thomson produced a book, *Mosley, What They Say, What They Said, What He Is*, designed to demonstrate that the leader was omnipotent, omniscient, and infallible.¹⁰² At meetings, the congregation treated Mosley like a God who could be watched and adored.¹⁰³ Trevor Grundy, then a young boy, has described the adulation of Mosley's audiences:

*In his book, Beyond The Pale, Nicholas Mosley, Oswald's eldest son, said that he went to an East End pub with Mosley and Diana [Mosley] and experienced what it was like to walk into a room with his father and how some of Mosley's supporters touched him to gain strength or power. He was right. It was just like that. My mother used to touch him and she'd say afterwards at home: 'That will give me strength till next year'.*¹⁰⁴

As well as having their own leaders, every one of the fascist parties was openly racist. The Union Movement, for example, revived the BUF chant of 'the yids, the yids, we've got to get rid of the yids',¹⁰⁵ other supporters of the movement shouted

'Get out of it, you Jew bastard', or 'Go back to Belsen'.¹⁰⁶ Fascist street-corner speakers spewed out a torrent of anti-semitism. In December 1946, Victor Burgess of the Union of British Freedom called for Palestinian Jews to be publicly flogged.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in April 1947, a British League Of Ex-Servicemen speaker claimed Britain was being run by a 'lying rotten Jewish dictatorship',¹⁰⁸ while in August, F. A. Young attacked 'the shylock money lenders [who] strangled Germany and are slowly strangling you the British people'.¹⁰⁹ In January 1948, a Union Movement speaker at Hereford Street accused Jews of living off brothels. In June of that year, another speaker at Ridley Road claimed that Jews lived off brothels and sweatshops. Later that June, a fascist speaker suggested that 'Hitler did a good job against certain people'. In November 1948, a Union Movement speaker at Lewisham asked 'Can you imagine what a stink they made, all that number of Yids together?' One month later, a fascist speaker at West Green said that, 'Jews are filthy, parasitic vermin, feeding on the political body of the country. The sooner we get rid of this lot the better. Hitler closed the doors of his gas chambers too soon.'¹¹⁰ A National Workers Movement (NWM) speaker in Bath in June 1949 claimed that the Talmud was anti-gentile, 'When you have read this you will keep children away from every Jew'.¹¹¹ In July, another NWM speaker called for the removal of British Jews.¹¹²

The fascist parties moved quickly from violent words, to physical violence. In 1944 fascists attacked a Jewish boy in Stamford Hill.¹¹³ Two youths were arrested for stealing rifles to give to Johnson, a member of the National Socialist Party, in August 1945.¹¹⁴ In January 1946, fascists damaged bookshops in Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, and Coventry.¹¹⁵ Four months later, a Jewish shop in Hampstead was attacked.¹¹⁶ In December 1946 and January 1947, fascists attempted to set fire to synagogues in Clapton, Dollis Hill, Bristol, and Willesden.¹¹⁷ Members of the Ku Klux Klan sent hate mail to the Edgware MP, Mrs Ayrten Gould, to Sir Hartley Shawcross, D. N. Pritt, Waldon Smithers, and to the Reverend Saul Amias.¹¹⁸ In July 1947, Liverpool fascists set fire to a Jewish cabinet factory.¹¹⁹ In August, an anonymous fascist sent threatening letters to C. H. Darke, the Secretary of Hackney Trades Council.¹²⁰ One month later, members of the British League of Ex-Servicemen, throwing bottles and fireworks and shouting 'Hail Mosley', attempted to smash up a Communist meeting in Ridley Road. Three people were injured.¹²¹ Also in September 1947, a gang of fascists attacked three Jewish ex-Servicemen in Kingsland Road, Hackney, and beat them with knuckle-dusters.¹²² In October, three fascists, John Arthur Parker, Frederick William Mendham, and Arthur Jordan, were each given 28 days in prison for assaulting Jews.¹²³ John Parker told one of his victims that he was

in charge of a defence squad in Hackney, 'I received orders to beat you up.'¹²⁴ In December, Ivor Worth, a member of the British League of Ex-Servicemen And Women, was sentenced to 18 months in jail for placing a bomb outside the London headquarters of a Zionist organisation.¹²⁵ In March 1948, David Barrow was fined for waving a gun, while he spoke at a fascist meeting.¹²⁶ The next month, Victor Burgess, a Union Movement speaker, was bound over for twelve months, after he assaulted a man selling the anti-fascist paper, *On Guard*.¹²⁷

Fascism In Society: Class In Britain 1945-51

The fascist parties related to broader society in a certain common way. They went to great trouble to approach certain groups in society, while ignoring or attacking other sets of people. Clearly, for example, fascism treated Jews differently from non-Jews. But there were only 400,000 Jews in Britain at this time. Jews made up 0.8 per cent of British society. Even in London, where most Jews lived, only 3 per cent of the population was Jewish.¹²⁸ Race was not the fundamental division in British society at this time, the most important cleavage in British society was class. Class affected every aspect of peoples' lives, from what job they had and what their experiences were at work, through to their lives as consumers, what housing they lived in, how they spoke, how long people could expect to live, what education their children received, the possessions they had at home. If class is defined in terms of different relationships to production, then it follows that Britain in 1945-51 was divided into three different classes.¹²⁹ First, there was a capitalist class made up of those who owned or controlled land or capital, and in sufficient quantities so that they had power over the labour of others. It is hard to be precise about how many people made up this layer, though certainly it was not large. One per cent of the population considered themselves 'upper class' according to a 1952 Gallup survey, and a similar figure, 1.2 per cent of families, had resident domestics in 1951.¹³⁰ The 1951 survey estimated that 5 per cent of the population were employers or proprietors.¹³¹ About one fifth of these would count properly as members of this capitalist class.

Then, there was a second, middle class. This was made up of people who supervised capital but did not own it and people who felt they owned capital, but whose wealth was really owned by other capitalists. They made up a larger layer of society. The size of the middle class is indicated by the 5.4 per cent of the population who were professionals in 1931, or the 26 per cent of the population who were paid

salaries in 1935.¹³² Another indication is the fact that over five million families in Britain paid taxes on incomes of between £250 and £500. The 1951 census suggested that managers, higher professionals, lower professionals and technicians, forepersons and inspectors made up about 15 per cent of society.¹³³ This so-called middle class was more fragmented than the capitalist class above it, or the working class below. Many of the people who might be considered middle class attempted to define themselves out of the middle class upwards. Professionals such as doctors or lawyers often claimed that they were closer to members of the capitalist class than small shopkeepers. Other members of the middle class could possibly be defined downwards, as workers. Most of the clerks who made up 10.5 per cent of the labour force in 1951 were only 'propertyless, contractual labour'.¹³⁴ In between doctors and clerks, there was a small stratum of society which both owned capital and worked. This fluid layer of small producers could be called a petty bourgeoisie. In terms of broader society, it was not a significant group, as it included just four or five per cent of the employed population. If the petty bourgeoisie had any importance it was only in the sense that it possessed a definite position in society between capital and labour. Hal Draper has described the contradictions it faced:

If a line is drawn between property owners and the propertyless, then they are property owners; and as such they can rejoice in their identity with millionaires and thrill to orations on the Rights of Property. If a line is drawn between those who live by their own labour and those who live by others' labour, then the petty bourgeois belong with the former, and they are workers; and as such they can appreciate the grievances of the working classes, including the proletariat.¹³⁵

Finally, there was the third and largest class, the working class. What defined the working class was the situation of workers in relation to production. Because they did not own any means of production, workers were obliged to work for other people in a relationship in which profits could be extracted from their labour. To use Marx's phrase, these workers were 'free in a double sense', 'Free from the old relations of clientship, bondage and servitude, and ... free of all belongings and possessions, and of every objective, material, form of being, free of all property'.¹³⁶ Many worked in manufacturing, but there were other jobs which depended on production and which were not themselves directly productive, in this way railway signal workers were part of the working class, as were shop workers and telephone operators. One 1953 survey based on status definitions estimated that 66 per cent of the population

regarded itself as working class,¹³⁷ while the census figures suggested that 80 per cent of the working population had working-class occupations.¹³⁸

Fascism In Society: Relating To The Classes

There was a definite historic relationship between sections of the British capitalist class and fascism, especially continental fascism. In the 1930s, the connection can be traced through the papers of Lord Nuffield¹³⁹ or Cunard shipping,¹⁴⁰ in the records of universities,¹⁴¹ and through the pages of *Hansard*. Tory MPs, from Winston Churchill to Neville Chamberlain, expressed their admiration for the fascist dictators, although fewer spoke up for Mosley.¹⁴² Sir Thomas Moore, MP for Ayr Burghs, suggested that 'there cannot be any fundamental differences of outlook between Blackshirts and their parents, the Conservatives.'¹⁴³ Four Tory MPs, Captain A. Lennox-Boyd, T. B. Martin, Roger Conant and Hugh Molson, were members of Mosley's January Club and sided publicly with the BUF.¹⁴⁴ Other BUF supporters included Sir Alliot Verdon Rose, owner of Avro Aeroplanes, Major James Shearer, a director of Courtaulds, Maynard Mitchell, a director of Mitchell's and Butler's, and Tony Twist, the son of the owner of Twist's breweries.¹⁴⁵ Captain Maule Ramsay MP was one of the founders of a different and more National Socialist variety of fascism, in the form of the Right Club.¹⁴⁶ Members of the Anglo-German Fellowship included Sir Frank Sanderson, a Tory MP and on the board of Saltaire, Sir S. Shute, another Tory MP, and one of the directors of Combined Egyptian Mills, and Lord Sempill, the chair of Fortrose Investment.¹⁴⁷ Just six members of the Anglo-German Fellowship owned a total capital of £257 million.¹⁴⁸

In the 1940s, the equivalent sources reveal far less. There was no Lord Nuffield, no Lord Rothermere to act as a prominent external patron of fascist causes. Likewise, the Tory Party line was that Mosley was a cad, it had been right to detain him in 1940 and it was right to release him in 1943. Now he had been released, he should be ignored.¹⁴⁹ Occasionally this line was extended, thus two Conservatives, Molson and Earl Winterton, both rejected the demand for laws against fascism and suggested instead that Communists, as supporters of 'foreign totalitarian regimes', should be banned.¹⁵⁰ This argument eventually became Tory policy, following the party's 1947 Conference. Yet in the period 1945-51, there was no Tory MP who publicly praised Mosley and there were no MPs who even flirted with fascism.

There were opportunities for fascists to form alliances with individual members of the bourgeoisie. Many businessmen believed at this time that their firms were being destroyed by the trade unions, who they saw as leading unofficial strikes, cutting the company's profits and transferring far too much power into the hands of ordinary workers. Leonard Lord, the chair of Austin Motor Company, told a Birmingham meeting of the National Union of Manufacturers that

*The factories have been sold to the shop stewards ... Shop stewards are now demanding an interest in management, but why should they have an interest in management?*¹⁵¹

If the fascists had been able to offer a realistic offensive strategy against the trade unions, no doubt men like Leonard Lord would have listened. Other members of the authoritarian right were angered by the withdrawal of Britain from India and by Labour's proposals for nationalisation. They formulated all manner of wild plans to defend private industry. Brigadier Hollis Burrows of the Indian Chamber of Princes believed that the only way to ensure that the oil wells of Iran remained in private hands was to set up a new colony around the oil fields, run by 'a martial race or two' from India and Pakistan.¹⁵² Neville Gass, of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company considered the proposal, thanked his friend for his interest and declined.¹⁵³ If it had seemed to Neville Glass or Brigadier Burrows that Mosley had any chance of turning the Brigadier's ideas into something approaching reality, then either might have listened to him. Yet the possibility of Mosley playing this sort of role seemed so unrealistic as to be laughable, Mosley did not have the political resources to bring such people onto his side.

The best chance the fascists had to link with members of the capitalist class was probably to join the several alliances against Labour's proposed nationalisations. There were large campaigns run by the Cement Makers' Federation, the British Insurance Association and the Iron and Steel Federation.¹⁵⁴ The largest was that run by Tate and Lyle in 1949 and 1950, against the nationalisation of sugar refining. Sir Leonard Lyle, the President of the company, was also the chair of the National League of Freedom, a former member of the Anglo-German Fellowship,¹⁵⁵ and a fanatical opponent of nationalisation. Tate and Lyle spent at least £250,000 on their campaign.¹⁵⁶ The centre-piece was the creation of a cartoon character, Mr. Cube, who attacked nationalisation and was put on the side of every sugar packet that Tate and Lyle produced.¹⁵⁷ The various fascist parties were mostly irrelevant to these campaigns. The Lyle money was given to respectable capitalist organisations, such

as Aims of Industry, and the National Citizens Union (NCU). Bodies such as these were mostly made up of authoritarian Tories, such as Lyle himself. On the other hand, any group of reactionary Conservatives would inevitably have a few fascists in its midst. The NCU was no exception. Its executive committee included such veteran fascists as Sir Alliott Verdon Roe, formerly a member of the January Club, the Duke of Wellington, formerly the chair of Ramsay's Right Club, and Commandant Mary Allen, a founder member of the Women's Police Force, now a member of Mosley's Union Movement and the organiser of its drum corps.¹⁵⁸

For most of this period, the main fascist parties eschewed these respectable campaigns. They did offer verbal support to the campaign against nationalisation, thus the fascist paper *Unity* publicly opposed the nationalisation of road haulage,¹⁵⁹ but the main way in which the fascists built themselves was through direct anti-semitism, or by campaigning against immigration. Such issues may have held the Union Movement together among racists living in the East End, but were not destined to build bridges with the capitalist class. During the late 1940s, in a period of labour shortage, the priority for industry was to recruit new immigrant labour, not exclude it. Similarly, to support anti-semitism was by implication to attack the war, and indeed to attack the whole recent experience of mainstream British patriotism. Again, this was only going to create barriers between fascists and members of the capitalist class.

There were attempts to break through the obstacles. Individual fascists did organise several projects to recruit the children of the bourgeoisie, one clear example being the fascist Corporate Club, which Desmond Stewart and P. Thomas organised at Oxford University.¹⁶⁰ The Corporate Club published its own newsletter *Avant Garde* with translations of Spengler, and an article by Kenneth Tynan.¹⁶¹ Raven Thomson organised a Modern Thought Book Club, for fascist intellectuals living in Chelsea. At one stage the club claimed 500 members.¹⁶² Colin Jordan had less success with his Cambridge University Nationalist Club, which failed to get off the ground.¹⁶³ Overall, this middle class support was small beer compared to the success of the pre-war Mosley movement, with its fascist flying clubs, its whist runs, its sports groups and the January Club.

In so far as fascists built any significant links with members of the capitalist class, they did so as individuals. A good example is A. K. Chesterton. In 1944 Chesterton was made deputy editor of the newspaper, *Truth*.¹⁶⁴ At this stage, *Truth* retained a large circulation, it was owned by members of the Conservative Party and was sent to every Tory club in the country.¹⁶⁵ With Chesterton as deputy editor and Collin Brooks as editor, *Truth* maintained a role which the *Patriot* had played earlier, it

merged the concerns of fascists and capitalist Tories. The paper carried advertisements for Abbey National, Cable and Wireless and Dunlop-Ranken steel. It ran at least four and sometimes five pages of business news and stock market tips,¹⁶⁶ while the Midland Bank published its annual accounts in *Truth*.¹⁶⁷ The paper had a regular column, 'Murmurings Of An Individualist', written by the orthodox Tory, Ernest Benn, who was President of the Society of Individualists, while it also published details of the meetings of the respectable League of European Freedom.¹⁶⁸ As well as all this Conservatism, however, *Truth* also ran articles from Chesterton, writing under the pseudonym, Caius Marcius Coriolanus,¹⁶⁹ published articles praising Peron's Argentina,¹⁷⁰ and defended the Nazi idea that history is a struggle between races.¹⁷¹ *Truth* also published anti-semitic poems,¹⁷² and in January 1946, a letter from R. Gordon Canning explaining that he bought Hitler's bust from the German embassy, 'to prevent a historical work of art falling into the hands of iconoclasts'.¹⁷³ Using his position as a launch-pad for his personal career, Chesterton built up an image of considerable respectability. In 1953, he was appointed literary adviser to Lord Beaverbrook. The contacts Chesterton made as a journalist, he then used as the editor of a series of fascist reviews and newsletters. It may have helped that Chesterton had expressed his support for the war. His 'anti-nazi' credentials must have made it easier for him to persuade clear Tories that he was on their side. His paper, *Sovereignty*, featured long articles by Major Douglas,¹⁷⁴ Christopher Hollis, the Catholic Tory MP,¹⁷⁵ Collin Brooks,¹⁷⁶ Douglas Reed,¹⁷⁷ Lord Queenborough¹⁷⁸ and Sir Ernest Benn.¹⁷⁹ It seems clear from this list that there was a black prawn cocktail circuit, in which ultra-Tories and well-known fascists could meet and freely socialise.

Few fascist editors were as successful as Chesterton in persuading reactionary Tories to write for their papers. There were definite barriers to any rapprochement between fascists and Conservatives, but they were not insurmountable. The larger fascist events continued to attract the cream of London society. In December 1945, for example, the campaign against the war-time Defence Regulations held a Christmas dance at the Royal Hotel. Of the 137 known guests, roughly 10 per cent were officer class, one was an earl, one a count, one a knight, three were ladies, one an admiral, two captains and two were senior RAF officers.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, when Oswald Mosley's daughter Vivian married Desmond Adam, in January 1949, members of the Union Movement rubbed shoulders with prominent members of London society, including several businessmen and at least one Tory MP.¹⁸¹ Sir Oswald himself remained a member of the capitalist class. When his estate at

Crowood House was sold, together with its 1100 acres of farmland, *The Times* sent its estate market correspondent to view the property.¹⁸²

The top levels of society were over-represented in certain local branches of the Union Movement. In Dorset prominent fascists included George Pitt-Rivers the anthropologist and Henry Williamson, the novelist and landowner, as well as Robert Saunders and other important local farmers. Compared to the Dorset branch, however, the majority of Union Movement branches in London had less success in retaining the support of members of the capitalist class. Eric Hamer was described as 'Mosley's only post-war officer-type lieutenant'.¹⁸³ There were more members of the capitalist class in the smaller fascist groups. Many of these parties were dominated by renegade ultra-Tories, the majority of whom were propertied, a significant number being members of the capitalist class. The British People's Party (BPP), for example, included on its eight-man council, Commandant Mary Allen, Lady Clare Annesley and the Duke of Bedford.¹⁸⁴ The most prominent supporter of the Common Law Parliament was Lord Queenborough, a Tory peer, and also the President of the Royal Society of St. George, a very respectable right wing body whose chief patron was the King.¹⁸⁵ James Larratt Battersby, who founded the fascist paper *Practical Christian*, was also a wealthy hat manufacturer from Stockport.¹⁸⁶ Chesterton's patrons included Lord Beaverbrook and also the millionaire R. K. Jeffrey. Arnold Leese received over three thousand pounds from the will of another wealthy fascist, Henry Hamilton Beamish.¹⁸⁷

When it comes to analysing the actual relationship between fascism and the capitalist class, it is clear that there were distinctions and barriers. It is true that there was something of a dalliance, a disproportionate number of fascists were from capitalist class, or certainly officer backgrounds. However, while any capitalist could be an ultra-reactionary Tory, it was not considered appropriate or respectable for a member of the capitalist class to be a fascist. The significant institutions of the capitalist class, the Federation of British Industries, or the Tory Party in parliament, had no formal links of any kind with the fascist groups.

The fascist parties won more members when they attempted to link up with members of the middle class. Again, the overwhelming majority of middle class people were not remotely interested in fascism, but fascism did find more support from this layer. When it came to relating to the middle class, fascists could draw on a well of middle-class anti-Jewish racism. As Tony Kushner has suggested there was a meshing of class and race prejudices, especially during the second world war, when clubland was the most anti-semitic place in British society. This middle class racism

can be used to explain official support for the internment of Jewish refugees in 1940,¹⁸⁸ but it continued well beyond then. In June 1943, Grims Dyke Golf Club turned down Rosa Phillipps for membership because she was Jewish.¹⁸⁹ In August 1943, Mere County Club in Knutsford insisted that no Jews could come into the club, not even as guests.¹⁹⁰ In October 1943, Staines Chamber of Commerce called for aliens to be banned from starting up new businesses during the war.¹⁹¹ In April 1948, Guy Birwood, the President-elect of the Institute of Chartered Auctioneers and Estate Agents, and a partner in the firm of Edwards, Son and Bigwood, spoke to a meeting of his institute's London Junior Members. He delighted them with his amusing anecdotes, 'I don't think there need be any sympathy for speculative builders. In my part of the country they were all of the Hebrew Fraternity, and have all left for South Africa, where they consider there is more scope for their talents.' This part of his speech was warmly received by the audience.¹⁹² In April 1949, Leamington Town Council passed a motion, saying that 'the Jewish method of slaughter is barbarous and cruel'.¹⁹³ As late as 1953 and 1954, the Cambridge University Appointment Board warned Cambridge students against taking employment with Jewish solicitors, characterising such lawyers as 'sharp and slick', or 'short and Jewish with wet palms'.¹⁹⁴ As J. H. Robb argued, in his survey of racism in Bethnal Green, the greatest anti-semitism was found among impoverished or unemployed members of the middle class, the pessimistic, the isolated and the submissive, people living in a large houses who complained about housing, people who did actually have some control over their lives, but who also felt 'thwarted and shut in by external forces'.¹⁹⁵

Groups like the Union Movement could also appeal to the imperial traditions of the middle class. There were up to 200,000 British subjects in official employment or receiving pensions from the colonial service.¹⁹⁶ In the 1930s, Geoffrey Garratt suggested that it was pensioners with colonial and Indian service, who had spent their active careers exercising private petty dictatorship over Asiatic or African servants, that formed the handiest of all raw material for a British fascist movement, 'It is easy for those who have done the controlling of the subject races to exclude also as unfit for liberty those of their own countrymen who have placed themselves outside the pale by their subversive politics or inconvenient demands'.¹⁹⁷ Bertrand Russell made a similar point, 'Thank God we had an Empire, for if it had not been there to act as a labour-bureau for the upper and middle classes, we would have had a lot more fascists at home'.¹⁹⁸ In the period 1945-51 there were several fascists with this sort of background, including Jeffrey Hamm and Arnold Leese, Major-General Fuller, Henry Hamilton Beamish and Arthur Kenneth Chesterton. This group of fascists came close

to vindicating D. N. Pritt's suggestion that fascism grew out of the prejudices of colonialists, 'the fascists found fertile soil because of the prejudices that have been built up in the minds of Europeans over hundreds of years'.¹⁹⁹

The fascists' best hopes were always likely to rest with propaganda which was aimed at small owners. As a layer within society, the petty bourgeoisie came closest to sharing the fascists' own simultaneous belief in anti-socialism and anti-capitalism. The mood of this group between 1945 and 1951 is well captured by a letter written in January 1947 by one G. L. de la C. Fuller to A. Barnes, the Labour Transport Minister. Fuller, who had £3700 invested in rail shares, complained that rail nationalisation was bleeding members of the middle class dry:

*I am but a little man with not sufficient income from invested capital to live on in England as taxed today, and so in my old age (nearly 63) after a life of thrift, have still to work - my income tax being far more than my pay ... Like most little men, I am patriotic, and so when asked to save England for my government, started to do so from the day I joined the Army in August 1939 ... No one could have backed up the government better ... The fact stands, I am to be £14 a year the loser and you £14 a year enriched ... I do not threaten, I am but a little man, but I cannot see what good socialism gains by breaking all the decent little people in the country.*²⁰⁰

Time and again, the fascists tried to connect to these 'decent little people'. Before the war, the BUF organised a British Traders' Bureau, producing leaflets especially for shopkeepers.²⁰¹ In 1942, the British National Party (BNP) put out a leaflet, *To All Private Traders*, insisting that 'for years private traders of this country have suffered the encroachments of chain-store and co-operative'. The BNP blamed the Jews, 'aliens who run the multiple shop and chain store organisations which are forcing the small British Trader out of existence'. The remedy was to close all the chain stores in favour of the smaller firm.²⁰² In 1943, the English National Association (ENA) promised that the ENA 'rejects ... the muddling inefficient type of "democracy" which has given real power into the hands of aliens who run the multiple-shop and chain-store organisations which are forcing the small British Trader out of existence'.²⁰³ John Preen, the leader of the British Vigilantes' Action League (BVAL), attempted to set up a Master Builders' Maintenance Association, planned as a trade organisation and also a fascist front group.²⁰⁴ Leaflets for the British Vigilantes' rally at Earl's Court in March 1946 also promised that the BVAL would 'stop all red tape', 'stop reckless exports', give a 'free hand to builders' and 'support the small shopkeeper'.²⁰⁵ In 1945, the Women's League of Empire organised a petition against foreign refugees moving to Hampstead. The campaign stressed standard middle

class concerns, with the Women's League warning that foreign refugees would lower house prices. Up to 3000 people signed their petition.²⁰⁶

When the post-war fascists came to plan their tactics, they did have recent models to copy. The most successful fascist campaign among the middle class was that waged by the Medical Policy Association (MPA), from 1943 onwards, against the Beveridge proposals for a nationalised health system.²⁰⁷ At the core of the MPA were a number of supporters of Social Credit, such as Basil Steele, Bryan Moynihan and Alexander Rugg-Gunn. MPA pamphlets warned their readers that the Beveridge Plan was drawn up by 'aliens', with 'an innate bias towards totalitarianism and an acquired urge to humiliate and enslave the white peoples'.²⁰⁸ The first number of the Medical Policy Association's *Newsletter* carried adverts for *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It seemed at this stage, to be just another fascist news-sheet. Throughout 1943, however, the momentum against the proposals for a national health system grew from within the British Medical Association, itself. Under the pressure of events, the Medical Policy Association moderated its language, and its newsletter became one focus of the anti-Beveridge campaign. The September 1943 meeting of the BMA even agreed by 200-100 votes to reject the Beveridge proposals. This victory was ascribed by the MPA to its own work.

After 1945, a number of near-fascist organisations took an active role in the smaller capitalists' campaigns against privatisation. The Cement Makers' Federation's campaign against privatisation was sponsored by the British Housewives' League (BHL), led by Dorothy Crisp and Irene Lovelock.²⁰⁹ When the Home Secretary was urged to investigate the Housewives' League, he wrote a long letter insisting that the BHL was not fascist,²¹⁰ but the League did allow its speakers to stand on fascist platforms and make anti-semitic speeches, as when Mrs. Lumley spoke at the unsuccessful British Vigilantes' Action League rally at Albert Hall in December 1945.²¹¹ Lumley even paid the £170 booking fee for the hall.²¹² Dorothy Crisp, herself, was a reactionary Tory and not a fascist,²¹³ but Crisp nonetheless penned a series of anti-semitic articles²¹⁴ and was a friend of recognised fascists, including Lord Queenborough.²¹⁵ The Housewives' League also shared some of its membership with the Face the Facts Association, run by Elizabeth Tennant. Tennant attended planning meetings of Jeffrey Hamm's British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, and shared anti-semitic jokes with the fascists there.²¹⁶ The Face The Facts Association also agreed to speak at the Albert Hall meeting,²¹⁷ and gave a platform to Jeffrey Hamm, then Mosley's best-known lieutenant, in March 1946.²¹⁸

All this activity meant that the fascists were able to win greater support from middle class people. Fascist papers ran a series of advertisements from self-employed fascists, including R. Kenneway, a bespoke tailor,²¹⁹ Eileen Young, a contract typist,²²⁰ Oshea and Warren's electrical repairs and installations,²²¹ Charles H. Port, ladies and gents' tailor,²²² the Holborn printing and distributing company²²³ and J. Preen builders and decorators.²²⁴ One anonymous *Union* reader offered £3000 for a shop with living accommodation.²²⁵ A businessman being paid £315 a year sought a paid position within the Union Movement,²²⁶ while another 'young businessman' wanted commissions in South Africa²²⁷ and one member of the Union Movement advertised in the fascist press for a 'young girl' to be offered work as a housekeeper.²²⁸ One tailor offered a new Harris Tweed suit, 'for the best individual effort to raise local funds',²²⁹ while another tailor, living in Harlesden, offered rooms in his shop as a free headquarters for the British League of Ex-Servicemen And Women.²³⁰ Several publicans encouraged fascist groups to meet on their premises, with one, Francis Kinane, the landlord of the Skiddaw pub, also signing J. C. Preen's nomination papers for a council bye-election in 1947.²³¹

A disproportionate number of fascists were middle class. For example, Mr. Dodds, an active member in London, was first a policeman and then an accounts manager,²³² while Jeffrey Hamm was a teacher, although he sometimes described himself as a book keeper.²³³ Victor Belfrage, who wrote one article for *Union*, and may have been only a fascist sympathiser, had been the film critic for the *Daily Express*.²³⁴ Mr. Burton, one of the members of the Birmingham branch of the Union Movement, owned his own business, and 'money in plenty'.²³⁵ Alexander Raven Thomson worked as a manager in an aircraft factory,²³⁶ and Arnold Leese was a retired veterinary surgeon.²³⁷ A. Smith, a full-time worker for the Union Movement, was a former commercial actor and producer,²³⁸ while H. Gardner, of the Birmingham Union Movement, was a manager in a book firm,²³⁹ and Thomas Starling, arrested in June 1947, was a professional motorist.²⁴⁰ B. S. Manningham-Butler, who ran the Westminster branch before his arrest in 1949, was a company director,²⁴¹ and Frank Burgess, a fascist from Birmingham, was a master baker and 'of more than comfortable means'.²⁴²

Among those who were middle class, a very large number belonged to that small stratum, the 4 per cent of society that can best be described as a petty bourgeoisie. Thomas Turner possessed his own ice cream van,²⁴³ while Charles and Edward Booth, fascists from Birmingham, owned a family tobacco store and had 'an interest' in a cloth manufactory.²⁴⁴ Arthur Beavans ran his own shop, making furniture,

general woodwork and advertising displays,²⁴⁵ and Frederick Beet had his own business repairing electrical goods.²⁴⁶ Victor Burgess, the leader of the Union of British Freedom, was a self-employed printer and publisher,²⁴⁷ as was David Barrow, also known as David Hearn, arrested by the police in January 1948.²⁴⁸ Leslie Burton, another Birmingham fascist, owned a small firm making metal boxes.²⁴⁹ James Smith, arrested in June 1948, was a self-employed painter,²⁵⁰ while Spencer Comley was a wholesale coal merchant.²⁵¹ Len Wise was a company director,²⁵² while Charles Foster owned his own drapery business,²⁵³ and Sidney Grundy was a landlord, and worked as a self-employed photographer.²⁵⁴ Bertram Farland owned 'a furtive little cafe in Coventry'.²⁵⁵ E. Valeriani managed and controlled the Holborn printing company,²⁵⁶ and Benny Lynch ran 'Benny's Cycles' in Birmingham.²⁵⁷ J. R. McCarthy owned the Carmac press,²⁵⁸ while William Scannell had his own drapery business in Smethwick,²⁵⁹ and George Dunlop, the organiser of the 18B Detainees Aid Fund, worked as a self-employed glass-blower.²⁶⁰ Bruce Tomkins was 'in business as a farmer [and] fairly comfortably off'.²⁶¹ John Wynn owned two small cinemas.²⁶² Jack Vickerstaff had a successful fishmongers' business,²⁶³ while Arthur Tresarden was a wardrobe dealer.²⁶⁴ Samuel Instone was a self-employed market gardener.²⁶⁵ Alfred Norris owned five grocery shops in Wales,²⁶⁶ and Robert Saunders owned a farm in Dorset.²⁶⁷

The fascists had far less success when they attempted to relate to members of the working class. Fascist groups did occasionally maintain that they had the interests of workers at heart. The *British League Review*, for example, suggested that the British League of Ex-Servicemen was pro-working class, while the Communist Party was not, 'Communism is not a "working class" movement designed to overthrow the Capitalist System, but a cunningly devised plot to tighten the stranglehold of International Finance'.²⁶⁸ The National Workers Movement also claimed to stand for the 'protection of the National Worker from injustice, from capitalist exploitation of his poverty or Communist exploitation of his misery'.²⁶⁹ The only sustained fascist attempt, however, to relate to working people came in 1948, when the Union Movement asked trade unionists to contact the BUF's former industrial organiser, M. J. Ryan.²⁷⁰ This initiative led to the formation of the National Council of Labour (NCL), in 1949, as a front organisation which would attack Communists within the trade unions. The Council's membership cards promised 'to exclude politics from Trade Unionism', and to 'end restrictive practices which throttle production and depress living standards'.²⁷¹ The NCL ran its own newspaper, the *Pioneer*. The organisation claimed to have distributed 100,000 pamphlets to 5000 supporters in 10 regional and

20 local groups by the end of 1950.²⁷² Reading the *Pioneer*, however, it is evident that the NCL's successes were few and that the organisation was in fact tiny, it had a dozen real members at most. From its beginning, the NCL was strongest among agricultural workers²⁷³ and, as a result, the NCL was increasingly superseded by the Union Movement's Agricultural group. This group was far larger but more middle class in its support, with the large majority of its 100 plus members owning their own farm. Hardly any were members of the Agricultural Workers' Union.²⁷⁴ The NCL itself was formally wound down in 1952.

These occasional attempts to relate to workers were weakened by dozens of anti-working class statements, emanating from the higher echelons of the different fascist groups. Major C. H. Douglas described trade unions as 'an alien culture',²⁷⁵ while Oswald Mosley insisted that the idea of paying benefits to the unemployed represented the negation of 'British and all human progress'.²⁷⁶ The Duke of Bedford argued that full employment was a danger to be avoided,²⁷⁷ and The *Patriot* described workers as 'sub-men ... anthropoid hooligans'.²⁷⁸ The Union of British Freedom paper, *Unity* attacked transport strikers as hostile to the healthy patriotic spirit.²⁷⁹ *London Tidings* accused the unions of fomenting a general strike, which would be a prelude to a 'Jewish' take-over of Britain, 'We think the "transport workers strike" was the rehearsal for the second general strike ... The "national strike" would begin with the usual "grievances", for the delusion of the strikers and public, but would in fact be a bid to overthrow this government and substitute another; and to inflict on the land the final leg-irons of dictatorship.'²⁸⁰ *London Tidings* also gave an offensive account of ordinary workers, 'the work-shy factory hand who has little interest in life beyond "fags" and "the Pools"'.²⁸¹ Meanwhile, the *British League Review* attacked homeless families squatting in empty properties. It demanded that the government prosecute the squatters, 'a government which allows its laws to be broken with impunity is opening the floodgates of anarchy'.²⁸²

A small number of workers did join the fascist parties, notably inside Mosley's old hunting grounds in the East End. Arthur Harding followed the fascists before the war, and his brother signed up to the BUF then, but Harding himself only joined as a retired worker after 1945. He believed that he needed something to do, 'I wanted to get out of myself. There was that urge of excitement.'²⁸³ Walter Stevenson, Alexander Ratcliffe's representative in London, was an electrical engineer,²⁸⁴ and Edward Thomas Day, a British Freedom candidate in the 1947 Paddington bye-election, also described himself as an engineer.²⁸⁵ D. P. Leslie-Jones was a salesman in a West End fashion house.²⁸⁶ Frederick Bailey, arrested in October

1947, was a slater and tiler,²⁸⁷ while Victor Cestrelli, arrested one month later, was a radio engineer,²⁸⁸ and Sidney Parris, arrested in December 1947, worked as a hotel porter.²⁸⁹ Wyndham Rackham, arrested at a fascist meeting in February 1948, was a postal clerk,²⁹⁰ while Margaret Hutchings, arrested at in March 1948, worked as a dress finisher,²⁹¹ and Mr. Couch, another Oxford fascist, was a bank clerk.²⁹² Donald Temple, arrested in May 1948, was a painter.²⁹³ Francis Shaw, who led a physical attack on two Jewish boys in 1949, was employed as a railway maintenance worker.²⁹⁴ Brereton Greenhous and Barry Aitken, two members of the Union Movement who were fined for breaking the windows of the Russian embassy in 1950, were both clerks,²⁹⁵ as was M. J. Ryan, the member of the Union Movement charged with the responsibility for building its support amongst organised workers.²⁹⁶

Even when workers did join the fascist parties, there was often a tension between their material interests and the reactionary ideology of the fascist groups. Fascism claimed to stand up for British workers, but it subordinated its members' concerns into its more important campaign against the Jews. At times, individual fascists would express their unhappiness at the way in which leading fascists refused to speak up for the interests of ordinary people. In January 1946, A. R. Hilliard, who was briefly a member of the executive of the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, asked why it was that the group did not campaign for ordinary ex-servicemen, but devoted its whole energies to anti-semitism,

*Hilliard thought they would do better if more was said about pensions for ex-servicemen and less about the Jews ... Hamm replied to this by saying that if he were to drop his anti-Jewish propaganda, the communists would be more than ever entitled to say they had defeated him.*²⁹⁷

Hilliard seems to have found Hamm's reply unsatisfactory and he soon dropped out of practical activity. At other times the contradiction expressed itself in the opposite direction, as when prominent fascists were openly dismissive of the ordinary members who made up their rank and file. After a British League of Ex-Servicemen meeting in August 1947, for example, one fascist speaker told the journalist, T. Pocock, 'Don't get us wrong ... We only appeal to the 'caff boys' in these street meetings. It's no good talking to them about policy.'²⁹⁸

There are several different surveys which have attempt to analyse the British fascists of the 1930s. W. F. Mandle has examined the leadership of the BUF, which he has suggested was dominated by middle-class ex-officers, 'Time and again the prefix captain or colonel crops up before the names of BUF members of whom we

know nothing than that they spoke at a local meeting reported only in the fascist press, or wrote an occasional article for it, or were arrested, or interned in 1940.²⁹⁹ Tom Linehan has looked at the rank-and-file of the movement in East London, many of whom, he has argued, were working-class.³⁰⁰ One unused source is the names of the 779 traceable fascists detained in 1940. Of these it is possible to locate the occupations of about one-eighth. Housewives have to be excluded, as just three are mentioned in the source, which must be too low a number to provide any real indication of proportion. If BUF full-timers and serving or former army officers are also excluded, then the remaining 52 fascists whose jobs are listed can be analysed. It is striking that this remainder were mostly employed in peripheral occupations. Although shop-keepers, teachers and police were all well-represented, there were no miners, dockers or transport workers. There were more writers and novelists than civil servants, textile workers or printers. The detained fascists were extraordinarily unrepresentative of British society as a whole.

Table 1. Occupations Of Fascists Detained In 1940.³⁰¹

Shopkeepers 9	Civil servant 1
Teachers 7	Dentist 1
Police 6	Driver 1
Farmers 4	Explorer 1
Racing motorists 3	Film star 1
Vicars 3	Printer 1
Managers 2	Professor 1
Writers and novelists 2	School pupil 1
Boxers 2	Ship's captain 1
Anthropologist 1	Solicitor 1
Architect 1	Trawler owner 1

If a similar survey was to be compiled for the Union Movement in the mid to late 1940s, it is likely that there would be some differences. Going simply by the careers of the fascists who have already been named, it seems likely that there would be more managers and more military figures, fewer teachers, more clerks, fewer policemen, more farmers and perhaps more members of the capitalist class. There might be fewer women, as Jeffrey Hamm acknowledged at the time,³⁰² and there would be even more members of the petty bourgeoisie.

It is evident that the fascists had their greatest relative success when it came to appealing to members of the middle class and especially members of the petty bourgeoisie, a disproportionate share of the middle class was attracted to fascism. This is not really surprising, given that it was this layer in society that fascism tried

hardest to woo. Postwar fascism attempted to meet the needs of middle class people and, in this sense, it was a middle class ideology. However, it would be wrong to exaggerate the fascists' success, for even within this layer of society, only a tiny minority were attracted towards fascism during this period. If it is right that there were at most only six or seven thousand fascists in Britain, then fascism was marginal even within the petty-bourgeoisie.³⁰³ Even where it was strongest, fascism remained pitifully weak.

¹ R. C. Thurlow, 'The Guardian Of The "Sacred Flame": The Failed Political Resurrection Of Sir Oswald Mosley After 1945', *JCH* 33/2 (1998), 241-54; P. M. Coupland, 'The Blackshirted Utopians', *ibid.*, 255-72.

² R. Thurlow, 'Fascism And Nazism: No Siamese Twins (I)', *PP* 14/1 (1980), 5-15, 9.

³ R. Thurlow, 'Destiny And Doom: Spengler, Hitler And "British" Fascism', *PP* 15/4 (1981), 17-33.

⁴ R. Thurlow, 'Fascism And Nazism: No Siamese Twins (II)', *PP* 14/2 (1980), 15-23; D. L. Baker, 'A. K. Chesterton, The Strasser Brothers And The Politics Of The National Front', *PP* 19/3 (1983), 23-33.

⁵ Thurlow, 'No Siamese Twins (I)', 12.

⁶ British National Party, *The War Behind The War* (London, 1942); also published as Duke of Bedford, *The Neglected Issue: Some Essays On The Need For Monetary Reform* (Glasgow, 1946).

⁷ J. A. Harris, 'Religious Meetings In Camp', unpublished document, 2 April 1942, in the Home Office files (HO) in the Public Record Office: HO 214/45.

⁸ K. J. Coogan, 'Francis Parker Yockey And The Nazi International: A Preliminary Report', unpublished document in Wiener Library, 3.

⁹ U. Varange (F. P. Yockey), *Imperium* (London, 1948), 308, 404.

¹⁰ *Union*, 21 February 1948; *ibid.*, 6 March 1948.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1948.

¹² For a full account of the break between Mosley and Yockey, R. Thurlow, *Fascism In Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts To the National Front* (London, 1998 edn), 206.

¹³ A. K. Chesterton, *Why I Left Mosley* (London, 1938), 1.

¹⁴ *Modern Thought*, September 1946.

¹⁵ Quoted in J. Gaster, 'Notes On The Development Of Anti-Semitic Propaganda And Organisation', unpublished document (1947), 9, in the Communist Party archive (CP), in the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester, CP/IND/MONT/9/7.

¹⁶ *Patriot*, 14 February 1946.

¹⁷ O. Mosley, *Union Of Europe* (Ramsbury, Wiltshire, 1947), 2.

¹⁸ *Unity*, 20 December 1946.

¹⁹ *Patriot*, 4 January 1945.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1946.

²¹ *London Tidings*, 26 August 1948.

²² *British League Review*, May 1946.

²³ *Parliament Christian*, September-October 1944.

²⁴ *At Random*, August 1947.

²⁵ *British League Review*, September 1947.

²⁶ *Patriot*, 3 April 1945.

²⁷ 'Mosley Men Seek To Impose A Colour Bar', *South London Press*, 4 September 1951.

²⁸ *Gothic Ripples*, 21 March 1946.

²⁹ For an alternative view of the relationship between gender and British fascism, S. M. Cullen, 'Four Women For Mosley: Women In The British Union Of Fascists 1932-40', *Oral History* 24/1 (1996), 49-59; M. Durham, 'Women And The British Union Of Fascists 1932-40', in T. Kushner and K. Lunn, *The Politics Of Marginality* (London, 1990), 3-18; and M. Durham, 'Gender And The British Union Of Fascists', *JCH* 27/3 (1992), 513-29.

³⁰ *Britain Defiant*, October 1947.

- ³¹ *Patriot*, 20 September 1945; *Sovereignty*, June-July 1947.
- ³² *Modern Thought*, November 1946.
- ³³ *Independent Nationalist*, 22 September 1949; *Social Crediter*, 20 August 1949; *London Tidings*, 6 September 1947; *Union*, 5 March 1949.
- ³⁴ *Patriot*, 15 March 1945; *ibid.*, 16 May 1946.
- ³⁵ A. K. Chesterton and J. Leftwich, *The Tragedy Of Anti-Semitism* (London, 1948), 75-7.
- ³⁶ *Gothic Ripples*, 25 February 1948.
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Not Just Commandos: Anti-Fascism 1945-51

The growth of fascism in Britain after 1945 meant that a whole number of different organisations were obliged to take sides. Political parties, community organisations and individual anti-fascists all took a stand. The vast majority of the non-fascist groups considered themselves to be anti-fascist, but the fact that they thought they were anti-fascist does not mean that they deserved the name. For example, a large number of Conservative Party members found the ideas of fascism objectionable, but most Conservatives did nothing to oppose fascism. In practical terms there was a spectrum. At one end, were the owners of the Conservative newspaper *Truth*, who gave an editorial post to the fascist, A. K. Chesterton. Nearer the middle was Winston Churchill, who had spent the early 1930s expressing his admiration for both Mussolini and Hitler. After 1945, he peppered his history of the second world war with references suggesting that Communists, not Mosley, should have been interned in 1940.¹ At the other end of the spectrum was Quentin Hogg, who maintained that Conservatives would find Mosley's ideas disgusting, but would not believe in using the law to stop them.² Of course, the Conservative Party was not fascist, its members were neither semi-fascists nor partial fascists, but nor were they anti-fascists. They did not act to stop fascism, but argued instead against those anti-fascists that aimed to stop Mosley from below, through demonstrations and campaigns at the street level. They even opposed those anti-fascists aiming to stop Mosley from above, through Parliamentary delegations and changes to the law.

The first way, therefore, in which anti-fascists distinguished themselves from non-fascists in 1940s Britain was through their stress on activity. Anti-fascists by definition were activists, people who objected to the rise of fascism, who hated the doctrines of fascism and did something to stop their growth. Thus Morris Beckman's account of the 43 Group opens with a description of the mood among Jewish ex-servicemen in London in the immediate aftermath of the second world war. Beckman

describes the anger these Jews felt, after the war and the Holocaust, at the revival of organised anti-semitism.

I recollect standing on the corner of Star Street in Kilburn on a cold and wet January evening in 1946 with my cousin, Harry Rose, who had just been demobilised. Harry had been a sergeant in General Wingate's chindit force that had operated behind Japanese lines in Burma. He'd had a hard war. Harry listened open-mouthed to the fascist speaker on the platform, then exclaimed, 'I'm going to shut that bastard up!' 'You can't', I held his arm, 'Cause a disturbance and those police over there could arrest you, heckle, fight, push over the platform and you could go inside'. 'Bloody worth it,' growled Harry, adding, 'Isn't anybody doing anything about it?' 'That,' I replied, 'Is what we're all asking ourselves. What to do, and how to set about it.'³

For Beckman, the point in recording this dialogue is not to show that he was especially determined to do something or uniquely certain as to what should be done. The point rather is to stress the generality of his experience. All over London, he suggests, there were Jews and ex-servicemen, asking the same questions and hundreds, or even thousands, agreed that something had to be done. It was when they took part in similar discussions and came to the conclusion that action would be more successful than inaction, that they became anti-fascists, in any meaningful sense of the word.

The second point at which anti-fascists distinguished themselves from non-fascists was through their stress on organisation. Almost every anti-fascist shared the belief that fascism could not be beaten by individuals, but only by an anti-fascist group or campaign. This acceptance of the need for organisation followed from the stress on activity. If a number of people were going to act against fascism, then it would follow that they should work in a collective, organised, efficient and disciplined manner. So the history of anti-fascism in the 1940s is a history of organisations, including the Communist Party, the National Council of Civil Liberties, the Association Of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and the 43 Group.

The Organised Left

The first such organisation which could have played a role in combating fascism was the Labour Party. Labour did, in fact, have anti-fascist credentials and the majority of its supporters were committed opponents of fascism. Indeed, a significant minority of its members were active in the anti-fascist movement. In addition, during the 1945

general election, Labour speakers positively encouraged the idea that Labour in power would ban fascism. Pro-Labour newspapers ran articles exposing the continuing activities of the fascists, and suggesting that one sure way to stop fascism was to vote Labour. It was to this end that the *Daily Mirror* interviewed Arthur Winn, a fascist and a member of the 'National Book Service':

I asked: 'Are you doing anything in the present General Election?'

Mr. Winn pointed to 'Vote National' posters on the wall and snapped: 'Supporting the Tories.

'We think that if a Tory Government gets in we can get away with more than any other party.

'Certainly, we couldn't get going under a socialist government.'⁴

After the 1945 election, the Labour Party was in government. In this new situation, the Labour Cabinet could have used its position to change the law, to ban fascist parties or outlaw anti-semitic propaganda, but the Cabinet did almost nothing to stop fascism. In terms of its official policy the new Labour government was no different from the National governments of the 1930s.

The Labour Cabinet first discussed the problem of fascism in December 1945. The Home Secretary, J. Chuter Ede, said that he would consider banning fascism but also that he believed fascists could be dealt with under the existing law. Other ministers disagreed and as a result, the Cabinet agreed to set up a Committee of Ministers to investigate the problem.⁵ At the first meeting of the Committee, Ede was in a minority, and a majority of ministers wanted to move straight on to a discussion of how fascism could be stopped. According to the Home Office account of the meeting, 'it was assumed that it would be a good thing to suppress fascism, and the policy was not discussed'.⁶ Over the next few months, however, Ede fought back. Two of his civil servants, Miss P. Nunn and one Mr. Cornish, composed a memorandum arguing that it was necessary to allow fascist propaganda to go unchecked in order to defend freedom of speech:

We cannot escape the position that either fascism is so strong and has so much appeal to the public that in order to suppress it we must be prepared to go to extremes, or else that it is not strong enough to be a danger or to make it worth our while to incur the odium of sponsoring measures restricting political freedom.⁷

This argument was used by Ede and adopted by the Committee and it eventually became the basis of the Committee's report. Accordingly, when the Committee of Ministers reported back to Cabinet, in April 1946, the members presented themselves

as having reached three interlinked conclusions. First, there was no evidence of any fascist revival, 'there is at present no single fascist movement and no sign that one is about to emerge'.⁸ Second, it would be wrong to change the law, 'An attempt to suppress fascism would in the long run strengthen it by deepening the cleavage between left and right and throwing moderate people on the right into the sympathy with the extremists'.⁹ Third, the law as it stood was enough, 'the existing law affords adequate protection against the emergence of a strong and dangerous fascist movement in this country'.¹⁰

The report of the Committee of Ministers was accepted, Ede won the day. From 1946 onwards, therefore, the Labour government and the Labour Party outside parliament refused to act against fascism. In April 1946, responding to a question in the Commons, Ede insisted that 'the law is fully adequate to enable action to be taken against all really dangerous activities'.¹¹ In February 1947, the government considered taking action against Arnold Leese's pamphlet, *The Jewish War Of Survival*; but decided against.¹² In May 1947 the Cabinet agreed to grant Mosley a paper license so that he could resume the publication of a weekly paper.¹³ While the Cabinet was privately committed to doing nothing, ministers continued to argue in public that they did not rule out a change in the law. Following the collapse of the case for seditious libel that was brought against James Caunt, the editor of the *Morecambe and Heynsham Visitor*, the government came under pressure to introduce a tougher law against community libel. A number of Labour backbenchers wanted to introduce their own bills against anti-semitism. As the Home Office noted,

*The Secretary Of State has been asked several times to say what he proposes to do in the Caunt Case, and, although he has agreed privately, after consultation with the Lord Chancellor and the Law Officers, that no amendment of the law is called for, he has not publicly committed himself to this view; and his answer to the deputations which have been to see him has been that he is still considering the implications of the case.*¹⁴

Finally, in May 1949, the Cabinet agreed to return Mosley's passport. In effect Labour accepted Mosley's right to build up fascist groups on the Continent. Of course, Mosley never said that he wanted his passport to enable him to set up a new fascist international, he said he needed it in order to take trips to France for the sake of his health.¹⁵ Given the furore, however, which had surrounded Mosley's publication of a German newspaper, the *Deutsches Flugblatt* in 1947-8,¹⁶ it seems extraordinary that members of the Labour Cabinet took his request at face value.

The government refused to put pressure on the police to close fascist meetings, on the contrary, the police were encouraged to keep fascist meetings open against all protests. In February and September 1946, Oswald Mosley wrote to the Home Office, giving details of his private meetings and asking for the protection of the police. Out of this came the following instructions from Chuter Ede to Sir Harold Scott, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police:

In the Secretary of State's view if a group of Communists approached the place where a private meeting of this 'book club' was to be held with the obvious intention of preventing or breaking it up they would constitute an unlawful assembly and it would be the duty of the police to disperse them. He further thinks that if Communists succeeded in entering such a meeting and assault any of those taking part, the police, if they are called in, should take the names of those concerned and, if no proceedings are taken by the victims of the assault, should prosecute the offenders.¹⁷

Such instructions were tantamount to asking the police to give official protection to fascism. Mosley's meetings were to be kept open, no matter what.

From 1948, however, it seems that the policy did change, in April 1948, Chuter Ede imposed a temporary ban, under Section 3 of the Public Order Act, preventing all political marches in East London. This ban was a continuation of pre-war policy, the National Government had banned similar marches between Easter 1937 and the outbreak of war. It would seem this ban must have hindered the Union Movement who were obliged re-route their marches, but the fascists were still allowed to march from Dalston to Camden with 834 police protecting them, just days later. Then, in May 1948, the ban was extended to cover all political processions in London. It was re-imposed in March 1949 and again after Mosley threatened to hold a procession through east London. The restriction was finally allowed to fall in April 1950.

Table 1: Orders Banning Marches In London.¹⁸

When Order Made	Banned	Duration
29 April 1948	Marches in East End	April-May 1948
6 May 1948	All marches in London	May 1948-August 1948
6 August 1948	All marches in London	Lapsed 6 November 1948
22 March 1949	All marches in London	Lapsed June 1949
3 October 1949	All marches in London	October 1949-January 1950
3 January 1950	All marches in London	Lapsed April 1950

During this period, however, the left was far stronger than the right and accordingly most of the banned marches were left-wing marches. The most obvious result of the ban was that the London Trades Council was compelled to abandon its traditional

May Day procession, and consequently many members of the Communist Party believed that the ban was a set up designed to discredit the London Trades Council, which had elected a secretary, Julius Jacobs, from the CP, and which was to be disbanded in 1952, on the instructions of the TUC.¹⁹ The London Trades Council itself noted that 'Britain and Franco's Spain are to be the only countries in Europe where the workers will be banned from marching on May Day in their capital city'.²⁰ D. N. Pritt, the left Labour MP, wondered aloud 'whether the whole thing had not been arranged between the fascists and their sympathisers in the Home Office'.²¹

Abroad, and in the aftermath of the war, the Labour government also failed to take any active role in removing prominent German Nazis. Further, it acted in support of responsible elements, typically prominent members of the Catholic Church, who had profited from the Nazi era, and who opposed the socialists, communists and Jews who expected the Allies to punish the war criminals. The Cabinet also opposed Jewish emigration to Britain, preferring to meet labour shortages by taking in Latvians, Poles and Ukrainians, including former concentration camp guards. Christopher Mayhew, who was then a junior member of the government, later claimed that the Cabinet knew as early as 1947 that fascist war criminals were entering Britain.²²

The government's failure to act against domestic fascism was criticised from within the Labour Party. At the Cabinet discussion in December 1945, the Ministers for Labour (Isaacs), Health (Bevan) and Fuel and Power (Shinwell) each spoke in favour of a ban on fascism.²³ The main source of opposition to Ede seems to have come from the Foreign Office. At the same Cabinet meeting, the ministers arguing for a ban against fascism made the point that leaving Mosley free was bad for British prestige abroad:

*Many countries where the fascist movement had established a much stronger hold than it had ever secured in this country were now seeking to establish a democratic system; and public opinion in those countries would be greatly influenced by the attitude taken here towards the re-emergence of a fascist movement.*²⁴

Again, in September 1946, Piers Dixon, the private secretary to Ernest Bevin at the Foreign Office, wrote to the Home Office, advocating laws against British fascists publishing material abroad.²⁵ Even the Home Office was kept aware of the steady succession of articles in Russian newspapers including *Pravda*, *Red Star* and the *New Times*, which criticised the government for failing to take action.²⁶

Inside Parliament, several MPs pressed for more action to be taken. The National Council of Labour, the Haldane Society and the Legal and Judicial Group

within the Parliamentary Labour Party all supported bills against fascist activities.²⁷ A number of Labour MPs, including H. Austin, Tom Driberg, Woodrow Wyatt, L. J. Solley and John Platt-Mills, spoke out against fascism, supported anti-fascist demonstrators on the streets and in court and called for changes to the law. Tom Driberg wrote a valuable anti-fascist pamphlet, *Mosley? No!*, which was used by the National Council of Civil Liberties.²⁸ Woodrow Wyatt criticised the police for failing to implement existing laws against fascism, 'Tolerance and free speech are our birthright. But there is a law about incitement to violence which the police of Bethnal Green and Dalston have apparently not been told about'.²⁹ John Platt-Mills defended arrested anti-fascists in court,³⁰ while Emanuel Shinwell asked Ede to ban fascist loudspeaker vans.³¹ Platt-Mills and Solley were later expelled from the Labour Party in 1948 and 1949, ostensibly for sending a message of greeting to the wrong Socialist Party in Italy, but also as a warning to the rest of the Labour left.³² In January 1948, the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC), sent a delegation, including Morgan Phillips and Neville Laski, to meet Chuter Ede. Laski did not put pressure on Ede to reverse his soft line on fascism, but did express his 'alarm' at the result of the Caunt Case, and 'the apparent growth of the fascist movement in recent months'.³³

Meanwhile, trade unions pressed the Labour Party to take action. Between January 1945 and February 1946, 230 trade unions or trade councils, including 62 branches of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, sent resolutions calling for Ede to take action against fascism.³⁴ In January 1946, D. H. Snell, Secretary Of The Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, wrote to the Home Secretary,

*Freedom for these thugs means the gas chambers and concentration camps, also the destruction of trade unions and working class organisations. In order that we might grasp the fruits of victory, Mosley and his gang must be outlawed.*³⁵

The London Trades Council called for a ban on fascism, while Birmingham Trades Council went further. As well as calling for a ban, the Trades Council sent a circular letter to local unions asking their members to keep an eye out for fascist activities. It also proposed setting up a Birmingham 'anti-fascist league'.³⁶ Hounslow Trades Council called a joint meeting with Heston and Isleworth Labour Party, and other 'social, political and religious' organisations to discuss how fascism could be beaten.³⁷ Even the 1947 Congress of the TUC called upon Labour to use the law to stop fascism.³⁸

Ordinary members of the Labour Party also attempted to put pressure on their leaders. At the 1946 Labour Conference, delegates from the National Union of Railwaymen and the shopworkers' union proposed an amendment calling for the fascist parties to be banned.³⁹ In 1947, Bexley Divisional Labour Party, North Tottenham Divisional Labour Party, Kingston Divisional Labour Party, North Hendon Divisional Labour Party, Neasden No. 2 Ward Labour Party, Willesden East Labour Party, North Lambeth Divisional Labour Party, West Wickham Labour Party, Ramsgate Labour Party and Uxbridge Labour Party all wrote to the Home Office, calling on Ede to ban fascism.⁴⁰ Poale Zion, the Jewish Socialist Labour Party, also called for a ban on fascism.⁴¹ At the 1948 Labour Party Conference, Bernard Finlay of Harrow West Divisional Labour Party, Sibyl Prinski of Hartlepool Divisional Labour Party, Nat Whine of St. Marylebone Divisional Labour Party, and E. C. Smith of Tottenham North Divisional Labour Party all moved an amendment calling for the banning of 'defamatory statements concerning groups identifiable by race, creed or colour'. Harold Laski replying for the party's National Executive Committee, asked the individuals who had moved the amendment to accept his personal assurance that the government would act to destroy fascism, and Finlay then dropped the amendment.⁴² Also in 1948, Hornchurch Constituency Labour Party,⁴³ the General Management Committee of North Lambeth Labour Party,⁴⁴ and Southall Divisional Labour Party⁴⁵ all voted for resolutions calling for fascist marches to be banned and asking the London City Council not to let its halls to Mosley. The Romford Borough Labour Party also voted that:

*This meeting, while not prepared to demand new legislation infringing the principles of freedom of opinion and speech, regrets to note the apparent connivance of the police and courts in actions committed by fascist supporters which are provocative of breaches of the peace.*⁴⁶

Then, at the 1949 Labour Party Conference, a delegate from Hackney South asked why it was that despite the promises from the NEC, 'nothing has in fact been done' to stop Mosley. Laski replied that Chuter Ede had been 'continuous in the devoted attention that he has given to the control of any fascist menace in this country.' The delegate then called for the NEC report to be referred back to Conference, and he was defeated on the vote, which meant that the topic could not be discussed further.⁴⁷

Clearly, many ordinary members of the Labour Party were at odds with the leadership. Perhaps a majority wanted to see the law used against fascism, but a number of ordinary Labour supporters were content to follow the leadership; and in

many areas there were Labour Party members who defended the Cabinet line. Members of Rugby Trades Council tried, unsuccessfully, to oppose a motion calling for a ban on fascism,⁴⁸ while Labour supporters in the engineers' union tried to prevent their youth conference from passing a motion calling on the government to ban fascism.⁴⁹ Stepney Labour councillors voted to put Union Movement books in the council libraries.⁵⁰ The London Labour Party voted 964-140 against banning Mosley from its public halls.⁵¹ The London Labour newspaper, *London News*, said that there was no need for a law against fascism:

Every well-disposed man and woman will regret the present manifestation of hate and unreason at our street corners. But nuisance though this is; it would be wrong to attribute to the so-called British League of Ex-Servicemen any deep political significance ... They have come into the news simply because there are rumpuses at their meetings.

If fascism only came into the news because of the violence at the fascist meetings, then it followed that fascists and anti-fascists were equally to blame. All the trouble would end if only anti-fascist would stay at home:

The plain fact is, as many eye-witnesses agree, that it is open to the Communist Party to make the biggest single contribution to the abatement of the present nuisances at Ridley Road and elsewhere - simply by telling their followers to stay away from meetings which are organised mainly to give provocation.⁵²

Because the Labour Party did not take a lead either in organising against Mosley or opposing fascism abroad, there was plenty of room for other left-wing organisations to work in Labour's place. The Communist Party was by far the largest left wing group outside the Labour Party, with 45,000 members in 1945 and 35,000 in 1951.⁵³ It had a reputation for anti-fascist work going back to Cable Street and the campaign against Mosley's release in 1943. Between 1944 and mid-1947 the Communist Party took part in various anti-fascist initiatives. The party made a point of obtaining information on the various fascist groups,⁵⁴ while several communists spontaneously infiltrated the Union Movement, to gather information on it.⁵⁵ The *Daily Worker* published a series of anti-fascist reports. In December 1945, Harry Pollitt, a leading member of the party, wrote to Chuter Ede calling for legislation⁵⁶ and the London District of the Communist Party sent a letter to Attlee in January 1946, asking if they could send a delegation to see him and calling upon Labour to ban fascism.⁵⁷ The CP supported a demonstration of 10,000 people, calling for a change in the law to ban fascism.⁵⁸ As a national organisation active in 1944-7, however, the party

argued that fascism was not an immediate threat. The CP had more important tasks into which it threw most of its energy, including the Squatters Movement, its production drive and the campaign for colonial independence.⁵⁹

From 1947, as it seemed that Mosley posed a growing threat, the Communist Party again assumed a more active role in combating fascism. In Liverpool, the CP broke up three meetings organised by the Union Movement,⁶⁰ while in Manchester, the party organised joint anti-fascist demonstrations with the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and broke up the Union Movement's one public meeting.⁶¹ In Derby, Communists fought with members of the Union Movement,⁶² while in Leeds, the party organised a demonstration of 200 people, which closed a public meeting held by the Union Movement.⁶³ Members of the Hampstead branch of the CP found that the Union Movement were trying to muscle in on its normal public meeting pitch and 'there was considerable debate within the local party', but the branch finally swung into action and succeeded in forcing the Union Movement out of the area.⁶⁴

Also from 1947 onwards, the CP published a stream of anti-fascist pamphlets and leaflets, including an illustrated brochure, *It Can Happen Here*, D. N. Pritt's *The Mosley Case*, Edward (E. P.) Thompson's *Fascist Threat To Britain*, Phil Piratin's *Our Flag Stays Red*, and Louis Sampaix's *Beware Of the Dangers Of Anti-Semitism*.⁶⁵ The best known of these pamphlets was *Our Flag Stays Red*, a powerful, detailed history of anti-fascism in the East End since the 1930s. Meanwhile, members of the Communist Party's youth section, the Young Communist League (YCL), organised their own anti-fascist protests. In August 1947, three YCL speakers held Ridley Road for over three hours while fascists heckled and threw bottles at them,⁶⁶ while Hackney YCL held a march of 500 people in June 1948,⁶⁷ and in December 1948, YCL members were among a large crowd of people which tried to prevent Mosley from speaking in a school in east London. They occupied the hall, but were dragged off by police.⁶⁸

The CP very quickly came up against Labour's argument that any decisive action would represent an attack on freedom of speech. Of course, this argument worked better in the abstract than it did in practice. The Labour government expressed horror at the thought of using the law against the right, but was enthusiastic when it came to using the law against the left. The best example of this came when Labour set out to remove Communist civil servants after May 1948. As a result, 134 alleged Communists were either transferred or sacked for being 'extremists', while only one alleged fascist was asked to move.⁶⁹ Still, the argument that the state had to defend minorities, even fascist minorities, was important and

many people did take it seriously. Anti-fascists inside the Communist Party were forced to articulate a consistent response. In April, June and July 1946 Julius Jacobs, the Communist secretary of the London Trades Council, wrote to Ede asking him to make all forms of fascist activity illegal. Ede replied by stressing that any change in the law would be an attack on freedom of speech, if the state acted against one political party, it would end up taking rights away from others. Jacobs then argued that fascism was different, and that the law could be used to suppress fascism without taking away the rights of other parties:

The point is not whether some measures beyond the existing law should be taken, but rather whether or not organisations propagating fascism can rightly be considered as political bodies who should enjoy the wide freedom of expression of opinion without discrimination.⁷⁰

Similarly, in January 1948, the *Daily Worker* attacked the idea that it was 'democratic' to allow fascists to speak:

The fascists' own aims include the destruction of freedom of speech and of democracy itself. Whoever thought of suggesting that individuals should be left free to kill, or steal, on the ground that there must be no interference with the liberty of the subject to do what he wishes?⁷¹

Again, in March 1948, Rajani Palme Dutt took part in a public debate with Dingle Foot of the Liberal Party. Dingle Foot argued that any law against fascism would have to define what fascism was, but if it was left to the Home Office to decide who to ban, then the outcome would depend on the politics of the government. What, Foot asked, if the Home Secretary was a Tory, 'or someone much farther to the right?' Palme Dutt dismissed this idea. Instead, he pointed to evidence that a large majority of people wanted to see fascism banned, 57 per cent, according to a recent poll. Fascism, he argued, was different. Because fascism stood for the destruction of democracy, so 'the defence of democracy in Britain requires the prohibition of fascism and anti-semitic propaganda and the dissolution of fascist organisations'.⁷²

If anything, Palme Dutt's argument would have been even stronger if he had continued to use the evidence of opinion polls. Labour's argument was that if the Home Secretary began by outlawing fascism, then he would be forced by public opinion to continue by outlawing other unpopular minorities. However, when ordinary people were actually asked, they decisively rejected this approach. In July and August 1946, Mass Observation asked 180 people 'Are you for or against allowing people to make speeches in favour of fascism?' Thirty-four per cent were for, 58 per

cent were against, and the remainder did not know or were doubtful. After this question, Mass Observation then immediately asked another, 'Are you for or against allowing people to make speeches in favour of Communism?' The format of the questions was the same, and the order of the questions suggested that if you were going to ban one extreme then you should ban another. The structure could have made Ede's argument, but an astonishing 68 per cent of people were for allowing Communist speeches, and only 27 per cent were against. In other words, ordinary people wanted to see fascism banned and only fascism, they respected the Communists' right to free speech. The format of the poll should have lent itself to the liberal idea that it would be wrong to ban fascism, because any one ban would automatically lead to more bans. Yet the results of the poll worked in the opposite direction. If the wishes of the majority had been respected, then there would have been no thin end to the wedge.⁷³

The Communist Party worked mainly through the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL), which had anti-fascist groups or contacts in Bethnal Green, Brighton, Bristol, Crewe, Derby, Hackney, Hendon, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford and Scunthorpe.⁷⁴ The NCCL also had a solid anti-fascist pedigree, having published anti-fascist pamphlets even in 1940-1, and 1944-7, when the CP was more quiet.⁷⁵ The Council had even organised a national conference on the dangers of anti-semitism as early as April 1943, several months before Mosley's release. The National Council for Civil Liberties acted as a central repository for information and also a co-ordinating centre, it also held delegate conferences and town's meetings against fascism and supported arrested anti-fascists in court. The NCCL shared the CP's insistence on the need to ban fascism, indeed, at a local level, the NCCL relied on active Communist Party support to survive, but the Council's remit was broader than its anti-fascist stance suggested. In the words of its Secretary Elizabeth Allen, the NCCL was 'the only non-party non-sectarian organisation fighting anti-semitism and other forms of racial and religious discrimination'.⁷⁶ Its membership was made up of Liberals and Tories as well as Communists, thus when it came to drafting anti-fascist laws, or discussing with ministers, the Council was the appropriate body to carry through negotiations.⁷⁷

The largest NCCL anti-fascist campaign took place in Hackney. There, the National Council called a delegate conference, which was attended by forty-eight delegates, from seven trade union branches, five Communist Party branches, one Liberal Association, two Labour Party branches, and one Conservative Association.⁷⁸ The group collected statements, taking evidence of fascist anti-semitism and of police

attacks on anti-fascists. Three thousand people signed a Communist Party sponsored petition, calling for an NCCL town's meeting. Over a thousand people went to the town's meeting, and heard speeches from the local Liberal Party, Labour and the CP.⁷⁹ Eight thousand people signed a petition, coming out of the town's meeting, calling on the Home Secretary to ban fascism.⁸⁰ The NCCL campaign also pushed the Hackney Trades Council into activity and the Trades Council held its first anti-fascist march in June 1947. For the next six months, the Trades Council was busy, sponsoring at least six more large demonstrations against Mosley. As one of its members recalled: 'We did not accept the advice given by local critics to stay at home and hand Hackney over to the fascists ... because so long as fascism remains free and active to pursue its filthy ends, progress, peace and democracy are in mortal danger'.⁸¹ Finally, when the Union Movement planned to march through Hackney in 1949, the Hackney National Council of Civil Liberties organised a petition calling on the local council to ban the march. The petition was signed by four thousand people.⁸²

The language of the NCCL was usually loyal and patriotic. The NCCL and also the CP both stressed the anti-democratic nature of fascism and the unpatriotic role played by the various British fascists who had been interned during the second world war. There was very little emphasis on the class interests that lay behind fascism, or on the idea that racism and anti-semitism acted to disguise real economic inequalities in society. The NCCL pamphlet, *Look What's Crawling Out Again* attacked the BUF as a foreign import:

*The British Union of Fascists, founded by Sir Oswald Mosley in 1932, was modelled on the Nazi and Italian fascist parties. Mosley paid visits to Hitler and Mussolini, and the Home Secretary, Mr Chuter Ede, has stated in the House of Commons that in 1935 Mosley was receiving about £5,000 a month from Mussolini.*⁸³

In Hackney, emphasis was placed on the sacrifices that the people of Hackney had made during the war and the typical NCCL flier began, 'Today - after 6 years of war - fascists are marching through the streets of Hackney shouting "Heil Mosley" and "Heil Hitler". Remember what Hitler's Bombs did to Hackney.'⁸⁴

This patriotic anti-fascism may have been influenced by the increasingly nationalistic politics of the Communist Party. From the mid-1930s onward, the Communist Party accepted the need for popular fronts, alliances not only with working class parties, but even with capitalist parties. During the 1945 general election, for example, the CP called for an 'all party national government', to be made up of the

Communist Party, Labour, Liberals, and Churchill Tories.⁸⁵ Between 1945 and mid-1947, the party stressed the need to increase production, in order to build up the national economy, even if this meant worse conditions for workers.⁸⁶ After Stalin's annexation of Poland the CP opposed the immigration of so-called 'fascist Poles' and East Europeans, 'They should be sent home to work out their salvation.'⁸⁷ Harry Pollitt argued, in his book, *Looking Ahead*, 'Does it make sense that we allow 500,000 of our best men to put their names down for emigration abroad when at the same time we employ Poles who ought to be back in their own country?'⁸⁸ By 1951, and the first edition of the CP's new programme, *The British Road To Socialism*, this nationalism had become central to the political language of the party:

*The Communist Party declares that the leaders of the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties and their spokesmen in the press and on the BBC are betraying the interests of Britain to dollar imperialism. Our call is for the unity of all true patriots to defend British national interest and independence.*⁸⁹

The fact that the Communist Party used such nationalistic language did hamper it in its fight against fascism, the party was left standing like a boxer with one arm tied behind his back. Unable to attack the fascists for their nationalism, it was obliged to attack members of the Union Movement instead for their disloyalty to the nation. The CP could not attack the Union Movement when it opposed immigration, but had to attack the fascists for wanting to expel the wrong people. The CP did express one form of anti-fascism, but it was a partial anti-fascism, and weaker than it needed be.

As well as the Communist Party and the National Council for Civil Liberties, the rest of the left also took part in the anti-fascist campaigns. The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) published a long pamphlet, *The Racial Problem: A Socialist Analysis*, arguing that the only way to get rid of racism was to get rid of capitalism.⁹⁰ SPGB members also tried to take on fascist speakers, by heckling or challenging them. As a tactic, it did not always prove effective, when Desmond Fenwick of the SPGB started a debate with Victor Burgess at Trebovir Road in Earls Court, he was heckled by the audience for not criticising fascism enough.⁹¹ Meanwhile, Common Wealth was involved in the campaign at Ridley Road. Its members held fascist speaking sites, through the autumn and winter of 1947-8, to prevent the British League of Ex-Servicemen and then the Union Movement from taking their usual spots.⁹² The organisation held protest meetings in Kensington, Leeds and Nottingham, while Ernest Millington MP, who had left Common Wealth for Labour but remained in contact with the movement, joined anti-fascist marches down the Seven

Sisters Road.⁹³ Common Wealth also had supporters in Bristol and tried to set up a broad anti-fascist committee in that city. Unfortunately, the party chose to debate with the most prominent local fascist, John Webster, which offended the local Jewish Defence Committee and the local Labour Party, and lost the organisation some of the hard-won respect that its intervention had otherwise earned.⁹⁴ As for the Independent Labour Party, it had played a valiant role in Cable Street, supporting the huge 1936 demonstration even before the CP came on board.⁹⁵ As late as 1943, Walter Padley stood as an 'ILP Detain Mosley' candidate in the Acton by-election, winning the support of 320 workers at Napier's No. 1 Fitting Works.⁹⁶ In 1945, however, the ILP split, while a majority of delegates to ILP Conference voted to keep the party going, most of the ILP's ordinary members simply chose to re-join the Labour Party.⁹⁷ Members of the rump organisation then made the same mistake as the SPGB and Common Wealth. John McNair debated with the Union Movement, although the ILP was now so small that no-one seems to have noticed, apart from the fascists, who bragged loudly about their success in the meeting.⁹⁸

Outside the ranks of the CP and the NCCL the most significant anti-fascists on the left were the Trotskyists in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). Anti-fascism was a major part of the group's activity. The first RCP internal discussion bulletin in 1944 was a critique of the abstentionist approach taken by the party's parent groups, when faced by Mosley's release.⁹⁹ Likewise, the last RCP activity before the group collapsed in 1947 was to hold a platform, and thus to prevent Jeffrey Hamm from speaking to a public meeting in Ridley Road.¹⁰⁰ Individual Trotskyists played an important part in a joint campaign with Jewish anti-fascists in Manchester.¹⁰¹ In Hackney and east London the RCP's anti-fascist work was co-ordinated by Tommy Reilly, who spoke on joint anti-fascist platforms at Ridley Road, and called on the Communist Party to take a more active part in the campaign.¹⁰² The RCP collected money for the joint anti-fascist campaign, held platforms to prevent fascists speaking,¹⁰³ and brawled with the police, 'it was one of our main activities', one former member observes.¹⁰⁴

The RCP tried to offer an alternative to the patriotic anti-fascism of the Communist Party, thus when one anti-refugee group in Hampstead called for housing to be restricted to English families, the RCP replied by arguing that refugees had a right to be housed:

There is apparently no suggestion that English people who came into Hampstead during the war should be expelled. But these refugees are here, not because they wanted to leave their own countries, but because they were driven

*out for their opposition to fascism or because they happened to be Jews. Had they stopped, they should have been sent to Belsen or such places ... If we drive them out, we should sink to the level of the fascists ourselves.*¹⁰⁵

The party also put the argument that the best way to combat the Union Movement was to take to the streets, without waiting for the state, the law, or the police. The party published an important pamphlet, *The Menace Of Fascism: What It Is And How To Fight It*,¹⁰⁶ which insisted that the state would never act decisively against fascism. It was up to the workers' movement to take the lead and defeat fascism from below:

*In campaigning for the Labour movement to 'ban the fascists' the workers must bear in mind that history has taught that the enforcement of laws by a capitalist state inevitably acts to the disadvantage of the working class. The state rests upon the army, the police and the courts. And these are riddled with elements sympathetic to the aims of fascism, especially at the top ... Our demands can only be effective if backed by determined organised activity on the part of the workers.*¹⁰⁷

The great weakness of this campaign was that the Revolutionary Communist Party had so few resources to put into the anti-fascist struggle, at its peak, the party had no more than four hundred members.¹⁰⁸

Jewish Anti-Fascism

Anti-fascism was not the sole preserve of the socialist left. Jewish groups also opposed the fascist parties. Often these organisations were motivated by the fear which was shared by many Jews, that the growth of fascism was leading also to a revival of anti-semitism. This fear was joined to a sense of outrage that even after the war and Holocaust, anti-semitism still had to be fought. As one Jewish activist puts it:

*We had all witnessed the outdoor meetings where speakers shouted blatantly, 'Get rid of the Jews!' and 'Burn the synagogues!', and we had each seen the white-painted swastikas and the letters 'PJ' with the lightning-flash painted between on the walls of synagogues and other institutions.*¹⁰⁹

While standard left-wing anti-fascism was based on working class politics, the Jewish anti-fascists of the 1940s mixed class politics with a brand of communal solidarity. It was the different combinations of these two elements which explains the political divisions within the Jewish anti-fascist camp.

The most working class and least 'Jewish' group was made up of those Jews that were members of the Communist Party, or associated with it. Such Jewish Communists were activists, often members of the Jewish charity, the Workers' Circle, and their trade union.¹¹⁰ Typically, members of the Communist Party articulated sentiments close to those expressed in a CP pamphlet written by Issie Panner in 1942, 'Every Jewish man and woman, young or old, must be a convinced, unbreakable anti-fascist ... But they cannot face fascism alone. They must have allies. These the progressive organisations alone can provide.'¹¹¹ Jewish Communists outside the CP used a different language, better exemplified by Julius Jacobs' speech to the NCCL's 1943 conference against fascism and anti-semitism:

I tell you that the more a Jew takes his place in the general fight against fascism, the more vocal he becomes ... the greater co-operation he will get... Anywhere where Jews and non-Jews mix, it is the Jew who takes the most active part ... in the trade union, who gets elected by his non-Jewish fellow workers to represent them - not because he is a Jew, but because he is a fighter, and they like fighters.¹¹²

During the war, these Jewish Communists mobilised almost the entire Jewish East End in support of the Soviet war effort. They raised thousands of pounds for the Jewish Fund for Soviet Russia (JFSR),¹¹³ and helped the Stepney Communist Party become one of the most successful CP branches in Britain. This period of Jewish Communist success in the East End reached its peak in 1945, with Phil Piratin's election victory, based on the Jewish voters of Stepney. After 1945, the physical destruction of the East End during the blitz meant that there could be no return to the 1930s. Large numbers of Jewish people moved north and west, out of the East End, and away also from the areas where the BUF had been strongest. Often, former East End Jews took more middle-class jobs. As a result, the number of Jewish trade unions fell quickly, so that by 1953 there were only 10,000 Jews in clothing unions, and 500 in furniture unions,¹¹⁴ and after 1945, the Jewish Communist sub-culture went into rapid decline.¹¹⁵ However, in the period 1945-51, the Jewish Communists were still important, inside the CP and within the Jewish community.¹¹⁶

The National Jewish Committee (NJC) co-ordinated the Communist Party's work among Jews. Leading members of the NJC included Jack Gaster, Chimen Abramsky, Abe Lazarus, Bert Ramelson, Sam Alexander, Lazar Zaidman, and Issie Panner. For most of the 1940s, the NJC line was that Mosley was not a threat. According to Chimen Abramsky, who was the Secretary of the National Jewish Committee in 1948, anti-fascist work:

*Only affected the local groups in Stoke Newington, Whitechapel and Bethnal Green. It was not a national issue. The policy of the British Communist Party was more concerned with the danger of the Cold War, with the Marshall Plan, with the future of India, or the future of Palestine ... The Communist Party always had some articles on fascism, but we believed that Mosley was a spent force ... Fascism was not the main issue of the day.*¹¹⁷

This may have been the attitude of the NJC, but it was not the only opinion held by Jewish Communists. Members of the Workers' Circle, for example, put much more emphasis on the danger of the Union Movement. The Workers' Circle set up a Sub-Committee on Fascism and Anti-Semitism, which held a conference in July 1947 to plan the action it could take.¹¹⁸ The Glasgow branch of the Circle sold 10,000 anti-fascist pamphlets.¹¹⁹ In London, the Workers' Circle concentrated on putting pressure on the London City Council not to let halls to fascists,¹²⁰ and the Circle also called a large anti-fascist public meeting in Shoreditch Town Hall.¹²¹ Although the Circle was active, it was not complacent. Members of the Workers' Circle criticised the Circle itself and other Jewish organisations for not doing enough. As M. D. Rayner commented, 'At the fascist meetings at Hackney, Bethnal Green etc. individual Jews were present, and they were vocal and otherwise active but the communal organisations and leadership had fallen down'¹²² From August 1947, the NJC paper, the *Jewish Clarion* began to take fascism very seriously indeed. The opposition to fascism at Ridley Road made the lead news item for three months in a row.¹²³ The *Clarion* attacked the anti-semitic reporting which had encouraged the Bank Holidays riots.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, the CP's monthly Jewish magazine, *New Life*, also ran a series of articles on the battles in Ridley Road.¹²⁵

The most 'Jewish' and least working class of the Jewish anti-fascists were those middle class Jews who lived in the areas furthest from the anti-semitic flashpoints. They adopted a form of communal politics that was reflected in the anti-fascist work of the Board of Deputies. The Board clearly preferred the quiet persuasion of leading politicians, to any public campaigning role. The typical Board of Deputies' initiative was to publish a book of facts and statistics, planned to dispel anti-semitic myths, and aimed at businessmen, journalists and politicians. Even this action was done through a subsidiary body, the Board's traders' group, the Trades Advisory Council.¹²⁶ Because it was the most middle class of all the Jewish groups, the Board was the least actively anti-fascist. In 1943, the Board rejected calls for a law against anti-semitism, while the *Jewish Chronicle*, which shared the politics of the Deputies, raised no opposition to Mosley's release.¹²⁷

Through the period 1945-51, the Board's line did not change. The Deputies argued that it would be right to change the law and legislate against anti-semitism, but wrong to legislate against fascist parties. According to Sidney Salomon, a leading member of the Board's Jewish Defence Committee, any law against fascism would offend British 'decency', and be an insult to 'British tradition'. He continued,

*Those persons therefore who so glibly make accusations against this country for permitting Mosley and a few minor exponents of a similar type openly to preach fascism, forget that it is the conviction (and a conviction not ill-founded) that if England departed from this tradition in one way or another against a particular party it would be only the beginning of further restrictions.*¹²⁸

As far as Sidney Salomon was concerned, communism, not fascism was the greater threat, 'The Government, and indeed, a large section of the British public regard the Communist Party as more dangerous to the welfare of the state than the fascist ... The Government's policy...is in line with British tradition'.¹²⁹ The *Jewish Chronicle* stressed that, 'it is very far from our intention to advise our young people to ignore the dangerous potentialities of fascist anti-semitism'.¹³⁰ However, the Board's public statements made the very point that fascism should be left alone. As Salomon put it, 'Mosley is surrounded by what can be described quite fairly ... as corner-boys, who are, for the most part, illiterate ... The fascist movement would either die out or become negligible if it were persistently ignored'.¹³¹

Privately, the Board may have done more than its public utterances suggest. The Board of Deputies put some pressure on the authorities to tighten the law against anti-semitism, 'We wanted it to be an offence for anyone to stir up race hatred'.¹³² Members of the Board did give evidence to the Porter Committee on the Law of Defamation, which examined the law of libel and considered amending the law to make it possible for whole groups of people to bring libel cases, but the Porter Committee decided against changing the law and the Board did not have a strategy to continue this side of its campaign.¹³³ The Board of Deputies did organise a Central Lecture Committee, which ran its own speaking tours. The Committee gave around 500 lectures a year and distributed leaflets at indoor meetings of Rotary Clubs, Women's Guilds and other sympathetic non-Jewish organisations.¹³⁴ The Board also worked with the Council of Christians and Jews, which was made up of rabbis and Christian clergy of various persuasions. Members of the Council put out a statement denouncing the anti-Jewish riots of August 1947,¹³⁵ but the bulk of the Council's work was in publishing, or encouraging its members to publish, general works putting a positive message of religious fraternity.¹³⁶ Some of these publications, notably the

books of James Parkes, carried this message to a large audience.¹³⁷ No doubt this was useful work, which had to be done by someone, but it was certainly not designed to confront the virus of fascism on the streets.

The Board did have one further method of dealing with organised anti-semitism, it co-operated with the Special Branch in sending a small number of observers, to infiltrate particular fascist groups. In a private letter, to a member of the Board's Jewish Defence Committee, Sidney Salomon referred to their work, 'These observers work on a voluntary basis and in most cases on the understanding that their names will not be involved in any police action'.¹³⁸ In August 1949, Salomon confided to L. J. Hydleman, of the Jewish Defence Committee. He mentioned that two of the observers had recently died,

*My chief anxiety at the moment is of course to replace the two men who were inside agents ... A friend of mine who is an Assistant Under Secretary Of State at the Commonwealth Relations, Dept. B., formerly the India Office, sent me a list of men in the India Police who had retired under the new regime, but none of them were suitable because they were nearly all Inspector generals, in other words of a far higher grade than I wanted.*¹³⁹

No doubt these observers played a valuable role in compiling information on the various fascist groups. Soon, though, they were caught in a dilemma, what do to with the information they gathered. The police were unwilling to take action against fascist groups, while the Board would not work with militant anti-fascists. Much information it seems was collected, but to little effect.

L. J. Hydleman, chair of the Board's Defence Committee, believed that the Board had succeeded 'in insulating increasing numbers against the poison of anti-semitic propaganda'.¹⁴⁰ R. Spector, an elected Deputy, the National Vice-Chairman of AJEX, and a leading member of the Board's Defence Committee, felt differently. He maintained that the Board's work was next to useless:

*The majority of the members [of the Anti-Defamation Committee] had no knowledge of political affairs or the personalities of the extreme right and had no practical street experience but were "old time" representatives of factions on the floor of the Board.*¹⁴¹

One group which attempted to combine the politics of the Board of Deputies with the drive of the Jewish Communists was the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX), led by Major Lionel Rose. AJEX claimed to have ten thousand members and it was given the responsibility for organising the Board's outdoor

campaign after 1945.¹⁴² AJEX would gather reports of where fascists were speaking and then send their own speakers, either to steal the fascists' pitch¹⁴³ or to debate with them, in an attempt to answer their anti-semitic smears. A typical initiative was 'Operation Morale', which took place in 1948. On Sunday 4 April, AJEX stole five of the Union Movement's regular pitches in London. The fascists then showed up, only to find that members of AJEX were already there and prepared to argue against them.¹⁴⁴ The general tactic was to place philo-semitic speakers against anti-semites, according to Martin Savitt, then a member of the association:

*The idea was to find out what the hell they were talking about, so that we could evaluate their propaganda, so that we could then counter it ... If, for instance, they said that the press was controlled by the Jews, we could then come back and say, The Telegraph, The Express, who they were owned by.*¹⁴⁵

As well as holding outdoor meetings, AJEX pushed for a law against fascism and the Association also lobbied within the Board of Deputies, hoping to convince the Board to take fascism more seriously.¹⁴⁶ The Board reciprocated, by distributing three of Rose's pamphlets warning of the fascist danger.¹⁴⁷ However, what most Jews living in Hackney or the East End wanted was physical struggle against the immediate fascist threat, not a mellifluous campaign which stressed the positive virtues of the Jewish religion. For this reason, AJEX flourished in Manchester, where the fascist parties were very weak, rather than London, where the physical threat was far more immediate.¹⁴⁸ According to Morris Beckman, one of AJEX's Jewish anti-fascist rivals, 'The efforts of AJEX were gallant, but without any great influence. Their audiences mostly comprised the already converted, Jewish supporters; plus those jeering youths who were not to be converted.'¹⁴⁹

The last and best known of the Jewish anti-fascist groups was the 43 Group. The group was founded by Jewish ex-servicemen in March 1946 and by the end of 1946 it had three hundred members. By 1947 this number increased to around two thousand. They linked up with non-Jewish and left-wing anti-fascists, early sponsors of 43 Group literature included the Labour MP Tom Driberg, Frederick Mullally, and the Communist fellow travellers, D. N. Pritt and Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red' Dean of Canterbury.¹⁵⁰ The ordinary members of the group were young Jews, angry about the Holocaust and furious that fascism was being allowed to revive without the government taking any action to stop it, in the words of Martin Block,

I'd just come out of the Royal Air Force. I was in it for three and three-quarter years, and I was annoyed to see these people. If someone had asked me,

*"What is a fascist?", I couldn't have told you. All I knew was that they were anti-semites. That was good enough for me.*¹⁵¹

The group's main activity involved sending anti-fascist 'commandos' to heckle fascist speakers, or turn over fascist platforms. The idea was to use the minimum number of people and the maximum level of organisation, to disrupt fascist meetings, 'We had a lot of ex-paratroopers, commandos, green berets ... Their job was to physically out-violence the fascists'.¹⁵² Yet the 43 Group was not just made up of commandos. The group also printed leaflets, distributed petitions and painted anti-fascist slogans on walls. Members of the group, including Doris Kaye, James Cotter and Wendy Turner, infiltrated the Mosley book clubs and the Union Movement.¹⁵³ The group's Intelligence Section scored a great coup when Michael Maclean, the Union Movement's Birmingham organiser, agreed to quit.¹⁵⁴ He later worked with the 43 Group, in setting up an Anti-Fascist League, consisting of former members of the fascist movement.¹⁵⁵

In July 1947, the 43 Group set up its own newspaper, *On Guard*. At first, opinion inside the group was divided about the newspaper. Some members thought that setting up a paper would be a 'mistake'. Stanley Marks believed that, 'The more [the fascists] knew about us the worse, the more we struck quickly and secretly the better ... Also it revealed that we had information'.¹⁵⁶ Other members of the group thought that the paper was 'wonderful', because 'everything that was printed in that was 100 per cent correct ... You had to make the public aware'.¹⁵⁷ *On Guard* exposed the fascists' manoeuvres. Four months before Mosley even announced that he was planning to set up the Union Movement, *On Guard* warned that there was a plan, and that the fascist groups would link up.¹⁵⁸ The paper showed that the Union Movement would be little more than a reincarnation of the BUF. *On Guard* listed the number of BUF-fascists who had held one post under Mosley's BUF, and had now been given the same position again.¹⁵⁹ It highlighted Mosley's hopes to form a new fascist international¹⁶⁰ and the attack by Mosley fascists on a synagogue in Brighton.¹⁶¹ In addition the paper drew attention to the brutal attack by fascists on two Jewish schoolboys in April 1949.¹⁶² *On Guard* also tried to convey a politics that was opposed not only to fascism but also to all forms of racism and persecution. The newspaper ran a regular 'One World' column which described and opposed the American KKK, which criticised the nationalism of the Kuomintang in China and which welcomed the rise of Henry Wallace's movement in America, as a 'left wing party which includes among its aims ... the end of racial discrimination'.¹⁶³ *On Guard* interviewed the American singer, Paul Robeson and criticised the first sitting of the un-American Activities Committee in Washington.¹⁶⁴ When the 1947 Tory Party

Conference passed a resolution calling for a ban on both fascism and communism, *On Guard* condemned the motion, insisting that communism and fascism were not the same, 'the former is a political party, the latter a collection of moronic thugs'.¹⁶⁵

Because the 43 Group sided with left-wing groups internationally, the police decided that the group was a 'communist front'. Sir Harold Scott, then the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, described the group in his memoirs as 'a body of young Jewish communists'.¹⁶⁶ The surviving members of the 43 Group deny this vehemently, 'Three-quarters of the group's members were left wing, but we never brought up politics. If a right-wing Conservative joined us we were as happy to take him as anyone else ... We couldn't have afforded to be a left-wing organisation.'¹⁶⁷ 'We joined up with anybody who was on our side'.¹⁶⁸ 'If they say that because we had members of the Communist Party in the group - and we also had members of the Liberal Party and many members of the Conservative Party, and independents, and religious people - then why don't they say it was Conservative-inspired?'¹⁶⁹ 'Politics was taboo in the group. We had tunnel vision. We just wanted to knock out the fascists.'¹⁷⁰ There is some truth behind these memories. Although the politics of the group were similar to the politics of the Jewish Communists, much of the residual communism was taken out. The 43 Group as a whole believed primarily in community defence. A typical 43 Group leaflet, *Danger: Fascists At Work*, showed a bleeding Star of David on its cover.¹⁷¹ The group's message was that fascism was, above all, a threat to Jews. Although the 43 Group claimed at the time that it 'adopts a completely neutral view in relation to the Zionist question',¹⁷² many of the group's supporters were strongly Zionist and thirty group members actually went on to fight against the British in Palestine.¹⁷³ The group executive affiliated to the Zionist terrorist group, the Irgun,¹⁷⁴ and co-operated in Britain with Major Weiser, a founder of the Jewish Legion in Britain, and an arch Zionist.¹⁷⁵ At one stage, the 43 Group went as far as to propose Weiser as an alternative chairman for AJEX.¹⁷⁶ The group's first leaflet stressed its Jewish origins,

*Public sympathy, aggravated by the happenings in Palestine, turns against the Jew. Anti-Jewish signs appear in the streets, on our shop windows, our houses and Synagogues. Windows of Jewish properties have been broken; our sacred places of worship have been desecrated. The fascists openly, unchecked, state 'Clear out the Jews' - this is happening in England TO-DAY.*¹⁷⁷

Because the members of the 43 Group were keen to stress their Jewish identity, they felt vulnerable to the charge that they were splitting the forces of Jewish anti-fascism. It was always group policy to seek unity between the 43 Group and the Board of

Deputies and AJEX. This policy led the group to attempt a merger with the Board, in 1947, despite the differences separating the group from the Deputies.¹⁷⁸

Although the 43 Group was certainly not a front for the Communist Party, it did receive help from the CP. Douglas Hyde, a journalist on the *Daily Worker*, helped to write *On Guard*.¹⁷⁹ Also, a proportion of the 43 Group's members were members of the party. One of the founder members of the group was Maurice Essex, who had been Phil Piratin's election agent in 1945, another was Jack Perry, a well-known member of the party.¹⁸⁰ Other members of the 43 Group included Len Sherman, who was not a member of the Communist Party, but a supporter of its businessmen's group, the Progressive Businessmen's Forum.¹⁸¹ Gerry Sween,¹⁸² Julia Sloggen¹⁸³ and Stanley Marks were all members of the Communist Party at the time, as well as the 43 Group.¹⁸⁴ Len Rolnick, in particular, seems to have been taking advice from the CP hierarchy. Rolnick had been a Communist for some years, and was friendly with Harry Pollitt. When he heard about the formation of the 43 Group he joined them. As a member of the group, he organised an unofficial CP cell, consisting of himself, Wolf Wayne, and Tony Clayton. This collective had the tacit support of Geoffrey Bernard, one of the leaders of the 43 Group, who invited Rolnick onto the executive of the group in 1946.¹⁸⁵ Rolnick eventually took an active part in the discussions leading to the dissolution of the 43 Group.¹⁸⁶ Apart from Rolnick, however, these members of the group could hardly be described as orthodox Communists. Rebecca West observed that they seemed younger and more middle class than other members of the party.¹⁸⁷ The Communists within the 43 Group were also cut off from the main direction of CP politics. The Party's National Jewish committee, in particular, dismissed the 43 Group:

*National Politics eluded them. Their background was the fight against Mosley in the East End. They were still living in the 1930s in Cable Street. They were a marginal group within their Communist Party.*¹⁸⁸

Some members of the 43 Group were Communists, but most were not following the party line.

Anti-Fascism: One Single Movement?

Although the several anti-fascist groups had different strategies, they also had a great deal in common. Anti-fascist activists often had similar ideals and the same

experiences, they took part in anti-fascist work for similar reasons. Many anti-fascists were motivated by fear, according to surviving anti-fascists, 'The whole of the period was frightening. The fascists were really tough, violent people, armed to the teeth with their knuckle-dusters.'¹⁸⁹ 'It was very ugly. You saw hate in men's eyes and wondered why.'¹⁹⁰ 'I felt Dalston was a no-go area. I used to look over my shoulder.'¹⁹¹ 'The 43 Group were the generation of schoolboys of 1936. We'd seen anti-semitism before.'¹⁹² Mixed with this fear was a sense of anger. 'I thought, "This is crazy", I'd just given six years of my life fighting fascism.'¹⁹³ Many anti-fascists were shocked that Mosley could be allowed to speak, after what they believed had been an anti-fascist war. Alfred Cohen wrote to the Home Office, 'We have just concluded a war to wipe [out] similar despicable doctrines. Mrs. G. Lancer pointed out that the fascists 'were detained during the war whilst other young men were fighting and dying.'¹⁹⁴ Especially for Jewish anti-fascists, there was an enormous anger about the Holocaust. 'We couldn't understand why so many Jews went meekly to the gas chambers'.¹⁹⁵ 'You've got to be in 1945 where we were. It was only when we came back from the war that we saw the pictures ... It dominated your feelings ... It was all very frightening.'¹⁹⁶ Many anti-fascists were also motivated by hope, and by a sense that something better could come out of the struggle against fascism, 'The only thing we wanted to do was get better conditions for the people.'¹⁹⁷ 'The man in the street turned out in force to do what the government failed to do. We were defending democracy.'¹⁹⁸

Anti-fascists actively set out to confront fascist speakers, the most common form of confrontation being to disrupt fascist meetings by heckling speakers. In November 1944, Hamm tried to speak at Hyde Park. He was drowned out by shouts of,

*Heil Himmler. Where are your knuckle-dusters? Why don't you wear your Blackshirts? Don't insult ex-service men and women. Get down you rats get down'*¹⁹⁹

In April 1946, Hamm spoke to a meeting in Hereford Street. According to the Special Branch officer taking notes at the time, 'Hamm had only said his opening sentence when his voice was drowned in the sudden outburst of organised heckling'. Hecklers shouted:

*This is a fascist meeting. We will have no fascist meeting here. You were in goal for 18B. You cannot speak here. Where is the invincible army? You don't even live in Bethnal Green, you live in Arundel Gardens. Go back to the Isle of Man. Close this meeting. Who says close this meeting? Gairmany calling. What about 18B. Don't come back next week.*²⁰⁰

One month later, Hamm spoke at Bethnal Green. The crowd shouted at him, 'Germany calling'. He claimed he had not been anti-semitic. Hecklers replied, 'We heard you'.²⁰¹ In December 1946, Bertram Duke Pile attempted to speak to a meeting in Wimbolt Street, 'but could not be heard for some while because of the audience singing "Glory, Glory Alleluia" and "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag", and cries of "Down with fascism"'.²⁰² In August 1947, anti-fascists disrupted an Otto Abeysakera meeting in Kilburn, 'after the first ten minutes, heckling commenced which gradually increased and the speakers found it impossible to make any coherent statement'.²⁰³ In September 1947, Harold Robinson attempted to speak at Rushcroft Road in Brixton. He waited for forty-five minutes for the heckling to stop before he gave up. While he waited, he stood hands on hip, as hecklers shouted at him:

*Hello, Clark Gable. Are you waiting for a rotten tomato to be thrown at you? Take his photograph. Mussolini used to stand like this.*²⁰⁴

One former member of the Communist Party remembers heckling Jeffrey Hamm. A policemen protecting Hamm turned round to him and said, 'You know, that man was a member of the Army'. This young Communist replied, 'which one?'²⁰⁵

Sometimes, anti-fascists were obliged to confront fascist speakers in a situation where the former were in a minority. When anti-fascists were in such a position, they had to adopt violent tactics, though it should be stressed that normally this violence was defensive. Given that there was a broad situation in which Jewish men and women were being attacked by fascists in the streets, any successful anti-fascism would have to include some measure of violence. In the words of Dudley Barker, a journalist on the *Daily Herald*, 'The fascists, by going onto the streets with their inflammatory speeches, created the situation, and automatically created the opposition. The line of responsibility is clear.'²⁰⁶ Ordinary anti-fascists felt the same, 'You have to defend yourself. There was no other way'.²⁰⁷ 'It was crude. It was war.'²⁰⁸ Sometimes, though, the violence was offensive. 'We were tough. We were prepared to beat up anyone who was an anti-semite.'²⁰⁹ The most common violent tactic was to charge fascist platforms, 'The battle began when a speaker mounted a corner rostrum at Ridley Road and shouted "I am a fascist and proud of it". Forty members of the audience tried to storm the platform.'²¹⁰ At other times, anti-fascists would attack fascist speakers or their bodyguards, 'Eight or nine people would hurl themselves at the fascists. You would get fighting right across the fascist

meetings.²¹¹ Bill Moore, a former member of the Communist Party, remembers the one time that Jeffrey Hamm attempted to speak in Sheffield:

The meeting was an open-air one outside the City Hall, the top side of the City Hall in those days was a Speakers Corner. Hamm mounted a platform they brought and was surrounded by 10 or a dozen local fascists. A couple of policemen stood by. We all surrounded the platform and shouted him down, asking questions especially, 'What did you do in the war', all of which he ignored. Then suddenly Bill Ronskley asked us quietly to let him through. He made a dash, broke through the platform and knocked Hamm clean off the platform.²¹²

Sometimes, anti-fascists use violence, yet most anti-fascism was not violent. Even members of the 43 Group reject the idea that their anti-fascism relied simply on violent tactics, 'I don't like references to commandos. We weren't commandos'.²¹³ For the members of each one of these different anti-fascist groups, the most common forms of anti-fascist activity involved the mundane task of exposing fascism. Anti-fascists tried to educate non-fascists about the dangers of fascism, 'We wanted to expose the fascists and to give the people the truth.'²¹⁴ Anti-fascists organised paint-outs, 'We would paint over their slogans. "Mosley speaks here" would become "An insult to our dead".²¹⁵ Anti-fascists in Oxford removed slogans left on walls with chalk.²¹⁶ One of the main tasks for anti-fascists was to grab the important meeting platforms and prevent the fascists from speaking,

At Ridley Road, there was always a battle, at the end of every Saturday, to get the platform. The market would pack up and the first people there got the platform. It was either us or Mosley. If you got the platform, you had to stay with the platform till Sunday. If you left it the other lot would come in.²¹⁷

The routine of anti-fascism was the routine of all democratic politics, anti-fascists distributed leaflets, held meetings and demonstrations,²¹⁸ and sold anti-fascist newspapers and pamphlets. They went canvassing and petitioning. Lionel Rose described most anti-fascist work as 'arduous and unglamorous',²¹⁹ nonetheless it had to be done.

This chapter has stressed the extent to which anti-fascists co-operated, and worked together to similar effect. It would be wrong, though, to blur the differences between the different organisations and their members. Anti-fascists conducted polemics against each other, with members of the Communist Party critical of the elitist 43 Group, the Group hostile to the respectable negotiating tactics of the Deputies, and the Board of Deputies dismissive of the radical politics of the CP. Rival

parties employed different tactics, and to different effect. As the Conclusion will argue, the military tactics of the 43 Group were successful, as long as the fascists themselves were isolated and vulnerable to attack by small numbers of angry protesters. On the other hand, once fascism had grown, these tactics ceased to have the same success, and different organisations came to the fore, that were capable of mobilising much larger numbers. By the winter of 1947, the Communist Parties and its allies formed the heart of the anti-fascist camp - just as the Union Movement came to dominate within the fascist side. The contest between fascist and anti-fascist became simplified, with the two rival organisations facing each other, in what seemed to be a replay of the struggle of the 1930s. It was a conflict in which there was little place for the individual, and organisation was decisive.

¹ W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Volume Three: The Grand Alliance* (London, 1950), 640, 750.

² Q. Hogg, *The Case For Conservatism* (London, 1947), 77.

³ M. Beckman, *The Forty Three Group* (London, 1992), 21.

⁴ 'Fascists Crawl Out Again Here', *Daily Mirror*, 28 June 1945; 'Fascists Staging A Come-Back?', *The Star*, 27 June 1945. The fascists maintained at the time that these particular interviews were faked, this may or may not be true, but it does not affect the general argument, that the Labour Party was happy to be seen as the official party of anti-fascism.

⁵ See the Cabinet files (CAB), in the Public Record Office, CAB 128/2 (Cabinet Minutes (45) 63, 17) December 1945.

⁶ Miss Nunn, marginal notes in Home Office file (HO), in the Public Record Office: 22 January 1946, HO 45/25399/8.

⁷ Untitled draft paper for the Committee on Fascism, 22 January 1946, HO 45/25399/8.

⁸ CAB 129/8, 'Report By The Committee On Fascism', (Cabinet Paper (46) 137 (5 April 1946), 1.

⁹ 'Report By The Committee On Fascism', 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5; CAB 128/7 (Cabinet Minutes (46) 31, 8 April 1946).

¹¹ 421 *Hansard* H.C. Deb. 5s., 'Fascist Activities', 11 April 1946, 22.

¹² HO 45/24968/109.

¹³ CAB 128/7 (Cabinet Minutes (47) 47, 15 May 1947).

¹⁴ S. H. Burley, marginal notes in Home Office file, 13/4/48, HO 45/25124/26.

¹⁵ CAB 128/15 (Cabinet Minutes (49) 35, 16 May 1949).

¹⁶ The *Deutsches Flugbatt* incident, and the press coverage of it, is dissected in 'The International Of Anti-Democracy', *WLB* 2/6 (1948), 32.

¹⁷ Oswald Mosley, letter to Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, 26 February 1946, HO 45/24468/277; Oswald Mosley, letter to Chuter Ede, 11 September 1946, HO 45/24468/277; Chuter Ede to Sir Harold Scott, September 1946, HO 45/24468/277.

¹⁸ Sir H. Scott, *Scotland Yard* (London, 1970 edn), 142-4.

¹⁹ N. Branson, *History Of The Communist Party Of Great Britain 1941-51* (London, 1997), 203-4; the London Labour Party and the London Trades Council had been in bitter dispute for several years over the question of what to do on May Day, London Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 19 April 1945 and 22 May 1950, in Greater London Records Office (GLRO), GLRO/Acc/2417/A/3.

²⁰ London Trades Council, Press Statement, 1 May 1949, document in the Rose Lipman Library (RLL) in Hackney, RLL/D/S/24/5/3/IV.

²¹ D. N. Pritt, *The Labour Government 1945-51* (London, 1963), 308-9.

²² T. Bower, *Blind Eye To Murder: Britain, America And The Purging Of Nazi Germany: A Pledge Betrayed* (London, 1995 edn), 343.

- ²³ Norman Brook to Attlee, 18 December 1945, in the archives of the Prime Ministers Office (PREM), in the Public Record Office: PREM 8/1410.
- ²⁴ CAB 128/2 (Cabinet Minutes (45) 63, 17 December 1945.
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- ²⁶ *Pravda*, 4 January 1946, *Red Star*, 20 August 1947, copies in HO 45/24467/254; *New Times*, 28 March 1947, copy in HO 45/24469/374.
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- ¹⁸⁰ Interview with Chimen Abramsky, 18 February, 1997; 'Obituary: Jack Perry', *Times*, 21 January 1997; 'Red Guard Who Came From The East End', *Guardian*, 2 January 1997.
- ¹⁸¹ Interview with Len Sherman, 29 October 1996; other members of the Progressive Businessmen's Forum included Wolf Arnold, Maurice Essex, Tony Clayton and Bernard Buckman, so, although the Forum's members were mostly of a different generation to the members of the 43 Group, there was some overlap between the forum, the party and the 43 Group, interview with Len Rolnick, 9 December 1997.
- ¹⁸² Interview with Monty Goldman, former supporter of the 43 Group, 26 February 1997.
- ¹⁸³ Stanley Marks, interview with M. Burman, 22 September 1990, LMJL tape 202; Mrs. Nunn, 'Minutes', 25 June 1946, HO 45/24468/315.
- ¹⁸⁴ Interview with Stanley Marks, 28 October 1996.
- ¹⁸⁵ Interview with Len Rolnick, 9 December 1997.
- ¹⁸⁶ P. Piratin to L. Rolnick, 17 May 1950, LMJL/183/1990/4.
- ¹⁸⁷ R. West, 'A Reporter At Large: Heil Hamm! (1)', *New Yorker*, 7 August 1948, 24-45, 37.
- ¹⁸⁸ Interview with Chimen Abramsky, 18 February, 1997.
- ¹⁸⁹ Interview with Martin Savitt, 14 January 1997.
- ¹⁹⁰ Vidal Sassoon interview with M. Burman, 2 September 1990, LMJL tape 205a.
- ¹⁹¹ Interview with Monty Goldman, 26 February 1997.
- ¹⁹² Interview with Morris Beckman, 15 October 1996.
- ¹⁹³ Interview with Martin Savitt, 14 January 1997.
- ¹⁹⁴ A. Cohen to Home Office, 19 August 1947; G. Lancer to Home Office, 19 August 1947; both in HO 45/24470/457.
- ¹⁹⁵ Martin Block, interview with M. Burman, 24 September 1990, LMJL tape 200.
- ¹⁹⁶ Interview with Stanley Marks, 28 October 1996.
- ¹⁹⁷ Interview with Len Sherman, 29 October 1996.
- ¹⁹⁸ Interview with Morris Beckman, 15 October 1996.
- ¹⁹⁹ 'Park Shouts Of "Heil Himmler"', *Daily Herald*, 20 November 1944.
- ²⁰⁰ Special Branch, 'E. J. Hamm Meeting', April 1946, HO 45/24468/291.
- ²⁰¹ 'Crowd Stops Ex-Fascist's Meeting', *Daily Worker*, 27 May 1946.
- ²⁰² 'Shorthand Notes Taken By Detective Sergeant Fletcher', 9 December 1946, HO 45/24468/338.
- ²⁰³ Special Branch, 'Meeting', 29 August 1947, HO 45/24470/438.
- ²⁰⁴ Special Branch, 'Meeting', 5 September 1947, HO 45/24470/438.
- ²⁰⁵ Interview with Royden Harrison, 17 December 1996.
- ²⁰⁶ D. Barker, 'Are The Police Impartial?', *Daily Herald*, 28 October 1949.
- ²⁰⁷ Interview with Len Sherman, 29 October 1996.
- ²⁰⁸ Interview with Stanley Marks, 28 October 1996.
- ²⁰⁹ Interview with Martin Block, 1 November 1996.
- ²¹⁰ 'Battle Of Ridley Road', *Daily Mail*, 2 June 1947.
- ²¹¹ Interview with Morris Beckman, 15 October 1996.
- ²¹² Letter from Bill Moore to the author, 4 December 1995.
- ²¹³ Interview with Stanley Marks, 28 October 1996.
- ²¹⁴ Interview with Len Sherman, 29 October 1996.
- ²¹⁵ Interview with Martin Block, 1 November 1996.
- ²¹⁶ 'Fascist Slogans Removed', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1948.
- ²¹⁷ Interview with Chanie Rosenberg, 7 October 1996.
- ²¹⁸ For an account of a 43 Group public meeting, '43 Group Pledges "We Will Drive Out Fascists"', *Edgware Local*, 23 April 1947.
- ²¹⁹ Rose, 'Winning The Peace', 13.

An Unbiased Watch?

Fascism, Anti-Fascism And The State

When fascists and anti-fascists met each other on the streets, they came into conflict and there was a cycle of violence. The violence began with physical attacks carried out by fascists. Jews who lived in the areas in which the Union Movement was based, had to endure constant anti-semitic abuse and often violence. Fascists set fire to the Ark and Sacred Scrolls of the Dollis Hill Synagogue, and also attacked synagogues in Clapton, Bristol, and Willesden,¹ such was the climate of fear that Edgware and Burnt Oak synagogues were compelled to employ 24-hour security guards.² Moreover, the attacks were not always directed against the Jewish religion, fascists also attacked a number of individual Jews. In May 1947, a group called the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) sent hate mail to Mrs Ayrten Gould MP, and to the *Edgware Local*. Their letter referred to an attack on a 41 year old Jewish man, Mr. Lewis Lipstein, the group boasted that they had carried out the attack and threatened Mrs. Gould with the same treatment.³ In August 1947, H. Trainis and his wife were assaulted in the area around Colverstone Crescent in Hackney. In the same area, one month later, J. Kerstein was surrounded and attacked by a mob shouting 'Down with the Jews' and 'We'll put you in Belsen, where you belong.' Following a separate incident in October 1947, three fascists were given 28 days for a 'deliberate and unprovoked assault' on three Jews.⁴ In January 1948, individual fascists armed with a revolver attempted to raid the offices of the 43 Group. In March 1948, David Barrows, a fascist speaker, was arrested after he waved a pistol during one of his own meetings.⁵ The best known incident of fascist violence came in May 1949, on the same day that Mosley marched through Dalston. A gang of at least twenty fascists attacked two Jewish boys, Raymond Keen and Henry Freedman, with their boots and with beer bottles, and both were very badly hurt.⁶ Between October 1948 and October 1949, the Metropolitan Police estimated that there were 55 violent assaults on Jews, at least 14 of which were committed by fascists:

Table 1: Assaults On Jews October 1948-October 1949⁷

Total number of violent attacks on Jews	55
Arrests for violent attacks on Jews	33
Number of persons under 21 proved guilty for violent attacks on Jews	9
'Violent attacks on Jews having political significance'	14

The anti-semitic violence was met with counter-violence by anti-fascists. Sometimes it was possible to oppose the fascists peacefully, indeed most anti-fascist tactics were peaceful, they involved petitioning, canvassing and leafleting. Sometimes, however, anti-fascists did set out to confront fascist speakers. They would heckle them in the hope of drowning them out. When there were large numbers of anti-fascists, there would be demonstrations or protests, which involved a minimum of violence. At other times, groups of anti-fascists would be faced with large, hostile meetings. In this situation, many anti-fascists, and especially members of the 43 Group, would resort to violent methods to make up for their lack of numbers. Morris Beckman describes the typical tactics of the Group:

*In the larger meetings, our commandos would form 3 solid wedges of very hard men. At a given signal, sometimes a whistle, they would start to move slowly towards the fascist platform. And then they would pick up speed. When they hit the fascist cordons, then they would hit them at speed. Our boys went through to the platform. When the platform went over, the meeting was finished.*⁸

This inevitably fuelled further violence on the part of the fascists, as they defended their meetings, or sought to disrupt the meetings of their opponents. The members of the Union Movement fought like street thugs. Many carried knuckle-dusters, they attacked trade union and Communist Party meetings, with broken bottles, penknives and smoke bombs. Sometimes they would hire gangs of toughs, as in Romford, where the Movement paid a gang of Maltese to repel the 43 Group, throwing potatoes stuffed with razors.⁹ At other times, the fascists would do their own dirty work themselves. In June 1947, Jeffrey Hamm of the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women approached a Communist meeting, leading a gang of around one hundred followers. In the words of the police report, Hamm 'commenced an altercation', he started a fight.¹⁰ In October 1948, Hackney Trades Council organised a Peace Conference. This was attacked by over a hundred fascists, armed with broken bottles, pen knives, knuckle-dusters, and one imitation firearm.¹¹ In March 1948, after a Union Movement meeting was closed in Dalston, large numbers of fascists proceeded to attack a Common Wealth meeting at Ridley Road, shouting 'break up this meeting as well as ours'.¹² In October 1950, a gang of North London

fascists attacked two meetings, one Labour and one CP. At the Communist meeting, they surrounded and attacked a steward and smashed his table.¹³ In October 1951, Owen Holliwel, a clerk and a member of the Union Movement, threw smoke bombs at a Communist Party march in Dalston.¹⁴

The struggles between fascists and anti-fascists resulted in more pressure being applied to the Labour government to change the law and to act decisively against fascism. Yet, as Harold Laski pointed out, there was little need for new laws, 'the Government has a number of controls it can bring into use against any active efforts to revive fascism'.¹⁵ Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary argued the same:

*The law is fully adequate to enable action to be taken against all really dangerous activities. If believers in fascist doctrine engage either simply or in conspiracy in subversive activities, or disturb the peace, they can be, and will be, dealt with firmly as law breakers.*¹⁶

The police did have an extensive range of powers which they could have used against fascist organisations. They had the power under common law to close meetings, to move speakers on, or to arrest fascist paper sellers on grounds of obstruction. Under the terms of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, the police could arrest anyone using 'threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace'. They could also stop loudspeakers from being used to publicise an event, or for the purposes of collecting money. Under the 1936 Public Order Act, speakers could be arrested for intent to provoke a breach of the peace, and also if 'a breach of the peace [was] likely to be occasioned'. If a fascist speaker made anti-semitic comments, and if these led to protests, the speaker could be prosecuted for causing a breach of the peace. The police also had the authority to regulate or prohibit demonstrations. Following the case of *Thomas vs. Sawkins*, the police even had the power to enter private premises, or to prevent meetings if they thought a breach of the peace was likely. Fascist meetings could be closed down as unlawful assemblies. In *R. v. Graham and Burns*, Mr. Justice Charles defined an unlawful assembly as a meeting, 'giving firm and courageous persons in the neighbourhood of such assembly ground to apprehend a breach of the peace in the consequence of it'. In the case of *Duncan vs. Jones*, the then Lord Chief Justice Hewart backed this up, saying that 'it is the duty of the police officer to prevent apprehended breaches of the peace'. If any fascist activities were planned, at which any illegal activities did take place, the fascists could be charged with conspiracy. Even without new legislation,

the police had ample powers under the law with which to destroy the fascist movement, provided they had the will to use them.¹⁷

In practice, the police could have used the law in one of three ways. They could have acted either against the fascists, or with the fascists, or for themselves. The police could have used their powers positively, to close down anti-semitic papers, to ban racist or defamatory speeches and prevent fascist meetings. The state could have acted in the same way that it had in 1940, when up to 800 fascists were interned. Alternatively, the police could have used their powers negatively, intervening with the fascists and against the anti-fascists. Or they could have acted as an independent or neutral force, choosing between fascists and anti-fascists, intervening according to specific circumstances and always upholding the law.

The view of the great majority of anti-fascists was that the police took the side of their opponents. The police were not intervening against the fascists, nor were they striking a balance between the Union Movement and its opponents, rather, they were intervening repeatedly on the side of the fascists. Surviving anti-fascists Chanie Rosenberg, Monty Goldman and Royden Harrison, all agree on this point, 'The police were totally hostile to us and totally supporting the fascists',¹⁸ 'Hackney police were vicious against the anti-fascists',¹⁹ 'We were not favourably regarded by the police. The police protected the fascists.'²⁰ Many of the anti-fascists active around Ridley Road shared a particular dislike of Superintendent Satterthwaite, in charge of the Dalston police, according to Len Rolnick, 'he was a first class anti-semite who would have done a good job at Belsen'.²¹ Similar views were expressed at the time. In September 1947, at a Hackney Towns Meeting, Mr. S. Davidson, of the North Hackney Liberal Association, attacked the force, saying that 'the police were provoking assault'.²² In January 1948, Romford Borough Labour Party passed a resolution which noted, 'The apparent connivance of the police and courts in actions committed by fascist supporters which are provocative of breaches of the peace'.²³ An internal Communist Party report, written in August 1948, described 'open collaboration with the fascists against the people'. The fascists were receiving 'police protection on a lavish scale'.²⁴ The Labour MP, D. N. Pritt, complained that:

*The police ... would tell the organiser of meetings which they did not like - for example, peace meetings, or Communist ones, that in the judgement of the responsible police authorities ... it was not practicable to protect the meeting and that it must therefore not be held ... On the other hand if the police or their superiors did want a [fascist] meeting to take place, they could provide huge forces to protect it from mass indignation or opposition.*²⁵

A similar point was made by B. Rosen of the Manchester and Salford Union of Jewish Ex-Servicemen And Women, who spent April 1948 in London with AJEX. As part of the visit, he witnessed a Hamm meeting, which started with a march to Hereford Street, '[It was] not a fascist demonstration but a police demonstration ... The march was led by police on motor cycles, followed by more police on motor cycles, followed by a couple of vans of police, followed by foot police, then we had the band'.²⁶

David Weitzman, the Labour MP for Stoke Newington, complained in the Commons that he was receiving dozens of reports of anti-semitic speeches and yet the police were taking no action. Each time a fascist speaker made an anti-semitic comment, and this was noted by an anti-fascist observer, the police would reply that their short-hand writers had not heard it. At times, the MP argued, the police and the Home Office were downright dishonest. In December 1948, for example, a fascist made an anti-semitic speech at West Green in Tottenham, and was given a warning by the police officer attending the meeting. According to the Home Office, this warning had a 'sobering' effect. Even after the warning, however, the same speaker continued by saying that, 'Jews are filthy, parasitic vermin, feeding on the political body of this country'. The Home Office insisted that the speaker had not said anything which might have led his audience to break the peace. As Weitzman put it, 'Surely it cannot be believed that every statement ... by reliable observers is inaccurate and every statement from the police must be accepted as a matter of course'.²⁷ The most angry description of police bias came in a letter from L. J. Orman to the Home Secretary:

*I suppose it is perfectly in order for a lousy swine like Jeffrey Hamm to get up on a street corner in the East End of London and shout, 'Down with the Jews. Burn the synagogues. Kill the Aliens', and he gets away with it, but if a person tries to pull him up, what happens? The so-called keepers of law and order, the police, go up to this person and tell him he'd better move away before he gets hurt ... These guardians of the law and order from Commercial Street Police Station openly boast about being members of Jeffrey Hamm's fascist party.*²⁸

Among the fascists, by contrast, there was more praise for the police. When Mosley finished a meeting in November 1947, he was seen to thank the police for keeping order, 'While his followers were scuffling with anti-fascists, Sir Oswald, escorted by a bodyguard, left by a back door, where he shook hands with a police Superintendent, thanking him for keeping "such excellent precautions"'.²⁹ Meanwhile, Frederick Coxall was heard to remark, in June 1947, 'When I hear people criticise the

police, I say don't blame the police for they have their job to do ... but blame the government who have... allowed the dregs of Europe to come into this country'.³⁰

There were occasions on which the fascists chose to criticise the police. In January 1948, Victor Cestrelli and Albert Coates of the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women complained to the officers at Brixton Station that they had not had received protection against an attack by members of the 43 Group. John Warburton then wrote to the Metropolitan Police, saying that 'whilst my friends, have, in fact, reported this matter to the local police, I feel that more action might be taken by police to protect citizens from the violence of the 43 Group and persons associated with them'.³¹ It is significant that Warburton's complaint was of a different order to the complaints of the anti-fascists. While the latter believed that the police were protecting the fascists, fascists tended to think that the police were not defending them enough. In September 1947, Jeffrey Hamm offered his own advice to the force:

*Whenever I have spoken personally to [them] police officers have said 'Don't try to teach us our job'. Whereas as an outsider I would say, 'Give us that uniform and we would stop them mighty quick'. Whenever any little Jewish criminal opens his mouth, we would run him out of the audience very quickly. That is the way to stop it. That is the way we want it done at Ridley Road on Sunday.*³²

Hamm and Warburton's comments were untypical. It was far more common for the fascists to congratulate the police on their work. In September 1949, *Union* commended the police for defending a fascist march through Hackney:

*Considering the extreme provocation the police behaved with commendable restraint and efficiency and are very much to be congratulated on carrying out their important duties, of maintaining the constitutional rights of Englishmen and women to march in demonstration through their own streets, with impartial justice, and it is worthy of note that on this occasion not a single member of Union Movement was arrested, although the local police station was thronged with opponents who had been arrested and charged.*³³

The Home Office agreed that most anti-fascists regarded the police with suspicion. As Mr. Baker, who worked in section F4 of the Home Office, put it:

*Practically all the charges that have been levelled in recent months against the police for discrimination at political meetings have been accusations of discrimination against anti-fascists, and Jeffrey Hamm has often paid tribute to the police and said in so many words that he has no complaint about the manner in which they maintain order at his meetings.*³⁴

Even magistrates were prepared to criticise the police. Several maintained that if the police were seen to be partial in their defence of the fascists, then they might bring the law as a whole into disrepute. In June 1947, Mr. Daniel Hopkin heard the case of eight men arrested at a British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women meeting at Ridley Road. He commented on the fact that seven of the arrested men were Jews and observed that the police had not chosen to arrest any of the fascist speakers:

I am sorry that a few - or perhaps I had better say the platform - had not been brought in by the police, as well as the eight defendants. They are not here, therefore I am not entitled to say anything about them, except that I do say that I am quite satisfied that the words they used were highly provocative and that these words were intended to be provocative.³⁵

Similarly, in December 1947, Mr. Geoffrey Raphael dealt with a case of three anti-fascists, arrested at a British League meeting at Hereford Street:

It is not for me to give instructions to the police, but I can say, speaking for myself, I hope this particular form of offensiveness will be dealt with by the police ... I have no doubt at all, and I speak with some experience, that such an expression as 'fascist police' is a mischievous observation and completely false, but I realise in some cases it persists from an ill-conceived sense of grievance.³⁶

The Police

There were several reasons for this 'sense of grievance'. Anti-fascists were angry that the police allowed fascist speakers to make any sort of racist, hurtful or inflammatory speeches without taking action. It seemed that the police ignored fascist speakers who broke the law, and that it made no difference whether their speeches were inflammatory, libellous or just plain racist. In October 1946, Miss Nunn of the Home Office wrote that 'Hamm is deliberately trailing his coat in Bethnal Green, and when he and his friends make anti-semitic speeches ... they are inviting disorder,³⁷ but the police did not arrest fascist speakers. In December 1946, Hamm was reported as saying that there were no Jews except alien Jews, 'they may call themselves British Jews, but they are alien just the same and can never become British though they change their name by deed poll or become naturalised. It is an insult to British people that they are allowed to call themselves British.'³⁸ No police action was taken. In April 1947, Hamm accused Jews of running Britain as a dictatorship, 'There is the real dictatorship, the lying rotten Jewish dictatorship. How long are we going to stand for

this sort of thing?'³⁹ Hamm was not charged by the police, and not even warned. In June 1947, Hamm again made a deeply anti-semitic speech at Ridley Road, but this time the Special Branch happened not to be at his meeting, 'We rather took Hamm at his word when he said last Sunday that he would not be speaking again at Ridley Road, and, in the circumstances, no Special Branch attended.'⁴⁰ Because Special Branch was not there, no action could be taken. At a meeting in July 1947, a fascist speaker Pipkin, threatened to 'smash' one of his hecklers 'in the face'. For this remark, Pipkin was warned by Superintendent Satterthwaite, but not charged.⁴¹

In September 1947, G. D. Little of the British Action Party (BAP) spoke to a meeting in Harrow. He maintained that:

No member of the old parties can get a position in any capacity at all without obtaining permission from the Jewish secret society which has dominated policy in this country for the past 200 years ... Every professor is bound by oath to obey the orders of that Jewish secret society ... They are the instigators of strikes ... The Jew is corrupting every part of the empire, his aim is to destroy the Empire. We must respond by a declaration of war.

Sergeant W. Jones noted that this was 'a rabidly anti-Jewish speech', but he regarded it as unlikely to cause disorder. Jones considered charging Little under Section 5 of the Public Order Act, but chose not to.⁴² Twelve days later, David Barrow spoke from another BAP platform. He accused his 'Jewish' opponents of driving 'flash American cars' and wearing 'suits straight out of Savile Row'. PC Johnson, commenting on the meeting, came up with remarks similar to those of Sergeant Jones. The speech, he said, was 'undoubtedly abusive ... [but] the remarks were [not] likely to have caused a breach of the peace'.⁴³ In December 1948, one speaker went further:

Everywhere you scratch the surface of filth and corruption you find the Jew ... In the Talmud it says the marriage of gentiles is like the marriage of two horses; their dwelling places like cattle pens; their children illegitimate. The rape of a Gentile child of 3 years and 1 day by a Jewish male is excusable.

According to the Home Office, 'The police who attended these meetings heard nothing to justify the institution of proceedings.'⁴⁴

It was not just a matter of police officers ignoring racist speeches, or declining to use the law against inflammatory remarks, anti-fascists also noticed that the police were far more likely to arrest anti-fascists than fascists. Between April 1946 and October 1947, when the fascist meetings were at their height, the police arrested 23 fascists and 64 anti-fascists:

Table 2: Arrests April 1946-December 1947⁴⁵

Total number of cases	49
Total number of individuals separately charged	96
Pro-fascists	23
Anti-fascists	64
Undefined	7

There are no statistics for the years between 1945 and 1951 as a whole, but it is possible to construct figures for the period between December 1947 and June 1948. The anti-fascist newspaper *On Guard* had a regular 'Court Diary', detailing the numbers arrested on both sides. During this seven month period, the fascist and anti-fascist street conflicts were smaller and less regular than they had been in the autumn of 1947. Yet, the police still managed to arrest and charge a disproportionate number of anti-fascists. In December 1947 and January 1948 five fascists were arrested, and ten anti-fascists. In February 1948, three fascists and six anti-fascists. One month later, six were arrested from both sides. In April and May, three fascists were arrested and an astonishing thirty-three anti-fascists. In June, one fascist was arrested and two anti-fascists. While it ran, the diary recorded the arrest of 18 fascists and 57 anti-fascists.⁴⁶ This means that over the longer period from April 1946 to June 1948, the police arrested a total of 41 fascists and 121 of their opponents, they were therefore three times more likely to arrest anti-fascists than fascists.

Moreover, it seems that all these arrests, covering the period from mid-1946 to mid-1948, took place at fascist meetings. The police simply did not intervene when fascists heckled or attacked anti-fascist meetings. In August 1947, 60 fascists charged an AJEX platform in Buckfast street. None were arrested, none charged.⁴⁷ Later the same month, 300 fascists marched 'in formation' to attack a Frederick Mullally meeting in Sandringham Road, South Hackney. There they fought with the audience, and forced the meeting to close. No fascists were arrested.⁴⁸

Table 3: Organisations from whose meetings cases ensued,

April 1946-December 1947⁴⁹

Organisation	Number charged
British League of Ex-Servicemen	80
Mosley meetings (including Book Clubs)	8
Union of British Freedom	2
Britons Action Party	1
Unnamed (Hyde Park)	5

The failure of the police to arrest fascists disrupting anti-fascist meetings was extraordinary. Fascists and anti-fascists were competing for the same pitches. Popular meeting platforms would be taken, not only by the fascists, but often by the NCCL, Common Wealth, AJEX, or the Communist Party. Speakers from these groups would be just as likely to be attacked, physically or verbally; and yet it seems that the fascist hecklers were immune from arrest.

The collusion of police with fascists did not end here. It was not just that police were less likely to arrest fascists, it also seems that they supported them in court. In one case heard by Mr. Daniel Hopkin, the defendants claimed that they had been provoked by an anti-semitic speech, made by the fascist speaker R. Hargreaves. The defence asked for but were not given copies of the shorthand report taken by the police at the time:

*I went to prison twice, not because I was a snivelling Communist denying my King and calling for the liquidation of the British Empire, for which my forefathers fought and bled; I went to prison because I was anti-Jewish, not because I was not a patriot but because I committed the unforgivable sin to come out on the street to enlighten my fellow Britons on the menace of Jewish control of my country ... People's Justice (Here the speaker took a drink amid silence).
You fought the war for Jewish interests and Jewish interests alone, I make that statement because I know it to be true, and I go further and say that if Adolf Hitler had not been anti-Jewish there would have been no war between Germany and this country ... I don't accept that Jewish people in this country are entitled to the political franchise ... I will not admit the right of any alien to ask the questions or interfere with my meetings ... Britain for the British is the slogan which is going to sweep this country from end to end. PJ.⁵⁰*

Instead, the jury received the testimony of Inspector Innes:

Q. What was the worst provocation you heard from the platform?

A. I did not hear any particular provocation, the speaker was speaking in the most general terms on the subject of Palestine.

Q. Meetings are frequently held in that part which is a strong Jewish area.

A. Yes.

Q. The reason why meetings are held is to provoke the Jewish people.

A. I have no knowledge of that.

Q. Did you hear the words 'PJ' shouted from the platform?

A. I did not hear those words shouted from the platform but I heard someone in the crowd shout them.

Q. Did you not hear the speaker drink a glass of water and give the toast 'PJ'?

A. No.⁵¹

If Innes was not lying, he was certainly being economical with the truth.

Meanwhile, police hostility to anti-fascists continued even after their arrest. When Murray Silver was arrested, on 17 July 1947, the police called him a 'fucking Jew bastard' and beat him up. At the same meeting, the police arrested a Mr. Goldstein. When Silver first saw Goldstein in the police cells, 'his face [was] covered in a mass of blood and his glasses were broken at the bridge'. In court, the defence solicitor asked Superintendent Satterthwaite, 'You are quite sure that it is an unbiased watch you keep at these meetings?' He replied, 'As police officers it is always an unbiased watch'.⁵²

The key complaint of anti-fascists was that the police were being used to steward fascist meetings, or to keep them open even when a majority of those present were hostile. Again, there is no complete survey of fascist meetings over the whole period, but there was a survey of meetings held between April 1946 and October 1947. These took place at seven different venues throughout London, and the largest meetings were those held at Ridley Road. From mid-August to late October 1947, 200 police were used to keep the fascist meetings open, every week:

Table 4: Outcome Of Meetings At Ridley Road April-October 1947⁵³

Date	Audience	Police	Outcome Of Meeting
27.4	300	eight	kept open by police despite protests
4.5	400	'very few'	kept open by police despite protests
11.5	500	eight +	kept open by police despite protests
25.5	500	six + plainclothes	kept open by police despite protests
1.6	250	'considerable'	platform rushed by anti-fascists
8.6	800	over 50	kept open by police despite protests
15.6	1000	over 50	closed early by police after protests
22.6	650	35	hecklers removed by police
29.6	600	over 50	platform rushed by anti-fascists
6.7	750	over 50	kept open by police despite protests
13.7	500	over 30+ vans	1 anti-fascist arrested by police
20.7	800	over 30	kept open by police despite protests
17.8	1000	over 200	closed early by police after protests
24.8	1000	over 200	kept open by police despite protests
31.8	600	over 200	3 fascists, 5 anti-fascists arrested by police
7.9	700	over 300	closed early by police after protests
14.9	1500	over 300	closed early by police after protests
21.9	2000	over 300	closed early by police after protests
28.9	2000	over 300	anti-fascist hecklers arrested by police
5.10	3000	over 300	kept open by police despite protests
12.10	2000	over 300+ horses	kept open by police despite protests
26.10	1000	over 300+ horses	kept open by police despite protests

The Home Office records make it clear that the police regarded their central function as being to keep these meetings open. Typical reports read, 'adequate uniform police

were in attendance and the meeting closed without disorder',⁵⁴ or 'the presence of adequate uniform police prevented any disorder',⁵⁵ or again, 'only the fact that there were adequate uniform police present prevented disorder'.⁵⁶

Woodrow Wyatt, then a Labour MP, visited a fascist street meeting in Ridley Road, in August 1947. In the *New Statesman*, he described the police running the meeting, and guiding the speaker in the same way that a conductor would guide an orchestra:

*Five policemen stood in a row behind the speaker. Ten formed a cordon in the road in the twenty yards ahead of him. Others were on the pavements, and more were among the crowd beyond the cordon. Round the inside of the ring formed by the policemen walked the Chief Superintendent in a smart grey suit, wearing a black homburg, and with a cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth. Sometimes he directed a policeman towards an interrupter in the crowd. Sometimes he made a cautioning sign to the speaker.*⁵⁷

In February 1948, when the Union Movement was short of stewards to check the tickets of the audience at a meeting in Wilfred Street, members of the police were used to fill the gap. This arrangement was questioned in the House of Commons, with one MP asking the Home Secretary, 'does he not consider that this is a job for the stewards?' Chuter Ede replied, 'No sir, it is the duty of the police to prevent a breach of the peace. It was quite evident that there was a number of people who desired to get to this meeting to create a breach of the peace'.⁵⁸

At times, very large numbers of police were used at fascist meetings. Often there were nearly as many police as there were fascists. Clearly, these policemen, used in these numbers, were not there to prevent fascist disorders. Their purpose was to keep open fascist meetings, or to defend fascist demonstrations, against the larger numbers of their opponents. In March 1948, 62 ordinary police and six mounted police were used to guard a parade by 200 members of the Union Movement.⁵⁹ Again, in 1948, over 830 police protected Mosley's May Day march through North London.⁶⁰ Frederick Mullally described the fascist demonstration:

*Three police motorcyclists followed by two police vans and a wireless truck, led the procession. After them came nine mounted police preceding Mosley's drum band. Then came the main body of the parade, with two vans crammed with uniformed police and another batch of mounted police bringing up the rear.*⁶¹

Major Lionel Rose, of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, believed that 'there would have been no meeting and no march had not there been massive police protection for the Union Movement'.⁶² The Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*,

observed that 'had [the police] been under the direct orders of Mosley himself, they could not have made a better job of breaking the opposition to him'.⁶³ In December 1948, 72 police were used to prevent protests at a Mosley meeting at Roman Road School, attended by 120 fascists.⁶⁴ In September 1949, the Union Movement held a 'local march' through Hackney. The Union Movement estimated in advance that only one hundred demonstrators would be there.⁶⁵ On the day, there were around 110, roughly 300 anti-fascists, and 198 members of the police.⁶⁶

While they were extremely unwilling to stop fascist meetings, the police would nonetheless routinely close anti-fascist meetings. On 26 October 1947, at West Green Road, in Tottenham, the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen (AJEX) tried to pre-empt the British League of Ex-Servicemen by erecting their platform first. This tactic was accepted practice, whoever claimed a spot first could keep it. The police responded by moving the AJEX speaker on, before allowing the fascist speaker to take the spot.⁶⁷ In June 1948, the police closed down three non-fascist meetings being held by the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and even the Holborn Conservative Association, in order to make way for Jeffrey Hamm and the Union Movement.⁶⁸ At Crestfield Street in October 1950, the local Labour Party arrived to take their usual pitch, only to be told by the police that the Union Movement were planning to speak. The police then closed the Labour Party meeting, before allowing a fascist meeting at the same location. W. Tolerton complained to the acting officer, Superintendent Hood. Hood replied, threatening to arrest Tolerton, and telling him that 'there was too much frivolity in politics and trade unionism'.⁶⁹ In December 1948, the police closed down meetings of the Peace Union, telling the organisers that they could close such meetings 'because it [the Peace Union] was run by the Communist Party'. In 1950, there were at least ten occasions during which the police closed down the street meetings of the Communist Party, on the grounds that CP members were obstructing the highway, in this case by selling copies of the *Daily Worker*. In 1951, Sheffield policemen arrested Howard Hill, who was charged for obstruction while holding an election meeting.⁷⁰

When anti-fascists were physically attacked by fascists, the police seemed habitually to turn a blind eye. In August 1947, Henry Lipman, a young soldier on leave, heckled a fascist public meeting. He was attacked by a fascist who punched him with a knuckle-duster and knocked out two of his teeth. Several policemen witnessed the assault but took no action. In September 1947, C. H. Darke, the secretary of Hackney Trades Council, received threatening hate mail, but when approached by Darke for protection, Hackney police refused to countenance giving

him any.⁷¹ On 1 May 1948, Mosley marched through North London. Major Lionel Rose described how a press photographer was attacked by fascist thugs, 'his spectacles broken, his camera damaged and he himself beaten severely with the staves of the banners'. According to Rose, the police were present, watched, and did nothing.⁷² Later that month, anti-fascists heckled a Mosley speech at Hereford Street, 'A woman in her thirties was punched in the face; police nearby allowed the attacker to slide back into the ring of stewards.'⁷³ The organisers of the Hackney Peace Conference, held in October 1948, knew that there was a likelihood of it being attacked by fascists, and asked for police help. Several hundred fascists began to attack the conference at 7.15 pm, using a variety of weapons, including knuckle-dusters. The police arrived at 7.45 pm and withheld assistance from the besieged members of the Trades Council. They would not provide any delegates with an escort, not even the Dean of Canterbury. Afterwards, two fascists were charged with assault, though in the opinion of the Trades Council, the police deliberately destroyed the prosecution, by stating, falsely, that the meeting had been called by the Communist Party, and by implying that it should not have been held.⁷⁴ During Mosley's march from Dalston in October 1949, 32 police watched, doing nothing, as fascists beat up a young Jewish man. His glasses were smashed, his ribs were broken, one of his eye was closed, and his forehead was cut in three places. Then the police intervened, arresting the Jew. A police inspector defended his officer's actions, 'If a few more of the bleeders got this treatment, we'd be free of Jews along here.'⁷⁵ Later a journalist wrote up this incident, using the pseudonym, 'John Hadlow'. The police visited his editor and succeeded in getting the writer sacked.⁷⁶

When fascists were in physical danger, the police did give them their help. In June 1945, for example, Jeffrey Hamm attempted to heckle a socialist meeting in Hyde Park. The crowd turned on Hamm, and the police were only just able to rescue him, '[Hamm] was then chased into Oxford Street, where he was surrounded and menaced by about 1000 people. He was rescued with difficulty by police and conveyed in a police van to Marylebone station, where he stayed for over an hour for his own safety'.⁷⁷ In this case, it could be argued that the police were doing their job, but it seems that when anti-fascists were threatened, this protection was not available.

There are one or two examples of junior officers protesting at the amount of support that the fascists expected to receive. J. Lewin, an officer serving with the Brixton police force, was pushed by his superiors to come up with new ways to keep fascist meetings open. In turn, he rejected the idea that there was anything more that the police could do, 'to suggest that more police protection should be given is almost

beyond the bounds of practicability'. He went on to say that, 'but for the police preventing acts of disorder, these people would not be allowed to speak for even a few moments'.⁷⁸ R. Ferenson, also a police officer in Brixton, complained of the length of time it took to escort fascist speakers home:

*On every occasion after a meeting has been stopped, members of the League have had to be escorted away by police ... These people have had far more than their share of protection, considerably in excess of that to which any normal citizen is entitled, or would indeed require.*⁷⁹

These opinions were however very much the minority view.

Other police officers had a definite habit of giving the names of anti-fascist hecklers to the men who chaired the fascist meetings. J. S. Bennett, the Deputy Commander of the Metropolitan police insisted that this was not standard practice,⁸⁰ but in August 1947 there was a British Union of Freedom meeting at Hogarth Road in South West London, with Victor Burgess speaking. The police inspector supervising the meeting took the name of a heckler and gave it to the chair. When he was asked about this, the inspector replied by saying that he was acting in accordance with police instructions, 'as the police find it difficult in practice to decide whether any particular interruption constitutes an offence or not, they have made it a settled practice to take the names and addresses of all persons indicated by the chairman'.⁸¹ Chuter Ede denied that the police officer had used these words, but accepted that this was the appropriate way for the police to interpret the Public Order Act.⁸²

The police as an institution showed partiality when it came to the use of loudspeakers. In November 1947, a loudspeaker van advertising a Harry Hynd meeting against fascism was stopped by the police, and the driver was detained for several hours in a police cell. When the driver asked why he had been detained, one policeman told him that he 'thought the law on loudspeaker vans had been changed'.⁸³ Again, in December 1949, the British Peace Committee held a meeting at Upper Street in Islington. It was disrupted by two police officers, who told the speaker that he could not take a collection, as such collections were banned under the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act. This action prompted an angry letter from D. N. Pritt, who asked why it was that *fascists* were allowed to use loudspeakers for calling meetings and for soliciting money. The Home Office responded by investigating the implementation of the law. Their report demonstrated two things, first, it showed that the fascists did employ loudspeakers, between December 1948 and December 1949, the Union Movement used loudspeakers at 29 meetings, at Ridley Road alone; and

second, the inquiry revealed that the police were unwilling to enforce this law when it was the fascists who broke it. Between February 1948 and November 1949, there were 16 prosecutions under the 1839 Act, and in them the police were five times more likely to prosecute left-wingers than fascists. Twenty-six anti-fascists were prosecuted, compared to just five fascists:

Table 5: Prosecutions Under Section 14 of 1839 Metropolitan Police Act.⁸⁴

Number of cases	16
Total number of individuals separately charged	35
Politics of those charged	
Union Movement	5
Conservatives	3
Liberals	1
Independent Labour Party	3
Islington Trade Council	4
'Anti-Union Movement'	3
Communist	16

Normally, however, the police were able to exercise their preferences more quietly. Rather than arresting anti-fascist hecklers, it was usually sufficient to give them a warning, or simply to take their names and addresses, and pass them on to the chairman of the fascist meeting. Rather than closing down every anti-fascist platform, it was more common for the police simply to move on the anti-fascists, thus making it easier for the fascists to speak, but saving the police the bother of having to file an arrest. Thus, on 29 January 1946, there was a fascist meeting in Barnet Grove, which an observer from the NCCL described as 'definitely provocative'. Neither the speaker, nor any of his supporters in the crowd were arrested, but when a heckler described the fascist speaker as a traitor, he had his name taken by the police.⁸⁵ At a Jeffrey Hamm meeting in Bethnal Green during May 1946, a Jewish ex-paratrooper who had fought at Arnhem asked the platform for a right to reply, the police moved him on. In the case of a further Hamm meeting, held in Hackney in June 1947, hecklers disrupted the meeting, and police closed it early; afterwards, the police followed anti-fascists, searched them and took their names, but did not arrest them.⁸⁶ On 13 August 1947, a fascist cameraman took photographs of anti-fascists at a meeting of the Union of British Freedom. Mrs. Joan Oakham complained, and was ignored by the police. According to the supervising officer's report of the events, 'Mrs. Oakham was referred to her civil rights'.⁸⁷ In November 1947, Mosley spoke to a meeting in Wilmot School, Bethnal Green, outside which was a large anti-fascist picket. After the meeting, several fascists came out and fought the remaining anti-

fascists, using knuckle-dusters. Later, they attacked a car full of anti-fascists in Wilmot Street. The police watched and took no action.⁸⁸ On 18 January 1948, a Union Movement speaker claimed that Jews lived off brothels. A member of the audience asked him to repeat the comment, with the intention of bringing it to the attention of the official shorthand reporters present. The police intervened, not to arrest the speaker, but to warn the questioner, and forcing him to move on.⁸⁹ Three months later, in Derby, fascists attacked a CP meeting, broke the loudspeaker, and struck and kicked several people. The police intervened on behalf of the fascists and threatened the communists with arrest.⁹⁰

For its part, the Jewish Board of Deputies sought to work alongside the Home Office and the police, believing that these institutions could and should be used to bring action against the fascists. Accordingly, between January 1948 and November 1949, the Board made twenty-six separate appeals for the police to take action against fascist speakers.⁹¹ As time went on, and it became clear that the fascists would not be prosecuted, members of the Board grew increasingly despairing. Sidney Salomon wondered aloud why they bothered to keep their observers within the fascist parties:

*We have frequently asked the Home Office or the Commissioner of Police to investigate allegations made against police officers on information furnished by these observers ... Almost invariably the answer from the Home Office or the Commissioner [of the Metropolitan Police] has been that the allegations are found to be without foundation, or that they cannot proceed without further factual information.*⁹²

Once or twice, the police did play a more appropriate role. Following the anti-semitic riots in Liverpool, in August 1947, the British League of Ex-Servicemen attempted to set up several meetings in the city. Their local organiser, Joseph Morrissey, contacted the police for permission, which was granted. However, the Liverpool police, unlike their colleagues in London, seem to have been unwilling to exert themselves to keep fascist meetings open. Rather than sending uniformed police to defend the fascist meetings, they sent plainclothes police, whose function was to take a note of what was said. By the time Hamm actually stood on his platform, a hostile crowd had formed. Hamm was 'bundled off the rostrum by a number of young men ... The rostrum was then smashed.' Hamm closed the meeting, the crowd dispersed, and the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women decided not to hold any further public meetings in Liverpool.⁹³

Very occasionally, the police went further, taking action against the fascists. This happened on those occasions when fascists criticised the police. In July 1950, Arnold Leese's *Gothic Ripples* included in its regular section, 'Jews In The News', the comment that 'the Commissioner Of The Metropolitan Police, Sir Harold R. Scott, is an obvious Jew'.⁹⁴ In August 1950, Leese went further, claiming that Scott had instructed the police 'to knock off any street corner orator who dares to mention the word Jew in any derogatory sense'.⁹⁵ The Commissioner took offence, 'Apart from the effect of such a libel on the public I am very concerned by its possible effects on members of the force for which I am responsible.'⁹⁶ Scott ensured that Leese was prosecuted, but the judge suggested that the case was not very 'serious', and Leese was acquitted.⁹⁷ Sir Hartley Shawcross, the Attorney General, believed that the whole incident had been handled badly, 'It would be unfortunate if it were thought that it is only when the police are hit at that we bother to prosecute publications of this kind'.⁹⁸

The police, themselves, were always keen to stress that they came to the street conflicts from outside, and that when they arrived, they played a neutral part. If they missed anti-semitic comments, then this was an innocent error. Either the short-hand writers had misheard, or anti-fascists had invented the racism. When the police chose not to close meetings, this was because they did not want to provoke greater disorder, or to make martyrs out of the fascists. Sir Harold Scott used his memoirs, *Scotland Yard*, to put the case for the police. Defending Superintendent Satterthwaite, he stressed the inconvenience faced by ordinary policemen and women, as they saw their rosters upset by a series of political rallies. Scott insisted that the police as a whole 'called a plague down on both fascist and communist houses':

*The position of the police was an unenviable one, for the fascists complained that the police had failed to protect them in the exercise of their right of free speech, while the Jews and the Communists complained that the fascists were being protected by police while they organised grossly provocative and insulting meetings in areas where they were calculated to be most resented. These contradictory complaints were good evidence to me that the police were maintaining an impartial attitude.*⁹⁹

The sheer volume of evidence to the contrary makes it clear, however, that Scott's official account was wrong, the police were not neutral and their actions did have the effect of giving assistance to the fascists. It was not a matter of one or two bad apples, but of an institution which acted consistently and repeatedly in one way. The only question is why the police acted as they did.

At the time, many anti-fascists believed that the main reason was that individual policemen were anti-semitic. According to Frederick Mullally, the journalist, 'it is notorious that anti-semitic feeling flourishes amongst a large section of the police force, particularly in London and the larger towns'.¹⁰⁰ The police were mostly drawn from the local population, in which there was a great deal of anti-semitism, 'Ridley Road was a hot-bed of fascism, and a lot of the police officers were anti-semitic'.¹⁰¹ Anti-fascists believed that 'there were definitely anti-semitic police',¹⁰² according to Alec Carson, of the 43 Group, 'I don't recall a time when the police would take a side of the Jew'.¹⁰³ There certainly is some evidence of police anti-semitism. At the larger meetings, the opposition to Mosley came from ordinary trade unionists or socialists. Many, although not a majority, may have been Jewish. But in the minds of the police, every socialist and certainly every communist was a Jew. Their expectation that all anti-fascists must have been Jews, can be seen in their descriptions of the opposition at fascist meetings:

*Most of whom appeared to be of Jewish descent.*¹⁰⁴

*Less than half of the audience appeared to be Jewish.*¹⁰⁵

*About 100 were Jews.*¹⁰⁶

*The Jewish opposition.*¹⁰⁷

*About a quarter of those present appeared to be Jews.*¹⁰⁸

It is also true that from 1948 onwards, the Hackney police recruited a number of former policemen who had served with the authorities in Palestine. They may have contributed to what was already a racist sub-culture thriving within the police force. Anti-fascists alleged in May 1948 that some of these former Palestinian police, 'have already joined the fascist movement'.¹⁰⁹ In truth, there were only twenty-seven former Palestine police in the four key stations, Stepney, Hackney, Stoke Newington and Bethnal Green. This small number of officers can hardly have played a decisive role in shaping a police bias which had already existed for some time.¹¹⁰

The weakness of the argument that the police were infected by local racism, is that it explains police bias in terms of a culture of racism. However, this culture could not have come entirely from within. The police acted on orders from the government, and especially from the Home Office. D. N. Pritt argued at the time, that 'it is not the individual police officer - he gets orders from those above.'¹¹¹ The Home Office supervised the police, and the Home Secretary was held accountable for their actions in Parliament. If other sections of the state had wanted the police to deal firmly with fascism, then the police would have received their orders, and would probably have acted upon them. One alternative explanation, therefore, for the conduct of the police

is the idea that the police were only obeying orders, and that it was not the ordinary policemen, but their superiors who were ultimately responsible. In the words of Morris Beckman, 'The policeman has a difficult job to do and they didn't want to lose their job'.¹¹² From this perspective, it follows that the real culprits were in the Home Office, and it was the government and the civil service, that was responsible for collusion.

There is some evidence that Home Office policy did lead police action. For example, in February and September 1946, Oswald Mosley wrote to the Home Office, giving details of his private meetings. Mosley wrote in very euphemistic language, but what he wanted was the protection of the police. First, he complained of attacks on his meetings, and then he asked for help:

*It is plain, however, that organised attacks on private establishments, if private citizens, thus assailed, are left to themselves can soon produce conditions of anarchy. I accordingly fulfil my duty by giving you every facility to discharge your duty.*¹¹³

Later that month. Chuter Ede, the Labour Home Secretary, wrote to Sir Harold Scott, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, if the police were called in to a fascist meeting which had been disrupted, then the police, 'should take the names of those concerned and, if no proceedings are taken by the victims of the assault, should prosecute the offenders'.¹¹⁴

Mosley was not the only fascist to ask for police help. John Preen visited Scotland Yard in March 1946 to ask Special Branch to protect his meeting in the Albert Hall.¹¹⁵ Yet Mosley and his supporters were more persistent than Preen. In August 1947, Jeffrey Hamm wrote to the Home Office. He explained that the British League was 'anxious to hold an increasing number of public meetings', and that he would like the police, therefore, to deal with the League's opponents. He also dropped hints about what would happen if his meetings continued to be disrupted:

*I have always opposed from the platform and in private conversations, any suggestion of meeting violence with violence, but I cannot restrain any longer the growing public resentment ... I would therefore very respectfully invite you to give instructions that organised hooligan elements be removed from our meetings.*¹¹⁶

This time, the Home Office sent Hamm a formal reply.¹¹⁷ Members of the Union Movement met the authorities again in February 1948, to ask the police to protect a meeting in Wilfred Street school. No details have been released, but Ede did tell Phil Piratin in the Commons that the promoters of the meeting had contacted him in

advance.¹¹⁸ Again, in September 1949, Alf Flockhart of the Union Movement spoke to Superintendent Satterthwaite to negotiate a route for a fascist march through Hackney. After Flockhart approached the police, the Home Office this time reciprocated by granting him what he asked for. Following the discussions, the department sent 200 police to protect 100 fascist marchers, enough to keep the demonstration going, over the protests of the people who lived there.¹¹⁹

The Home Office faced a number of requests to act against fascist anti-semitism, as when Tom Driberg asked for action to be taken against the fascist speaker John Webster in Taunton,¹²⁰ and Professor Laski asked the police to investigate Victor Burgess of Corporate Utilities, a fascist book publisher.¹²¹ On several occasions, the Home Office agreed that the fascists were close to committing the crime of seditious libel. In November 1945, for example, Lt. Col. Burge warned that if Hamm continued to hold his public meetings, then the Home Office would be obliged to take action, 'If he carries on his intention to hold regular meetings they may give rise to disturbances, particularly if he doesn't curb his anti-semitic activities'.¹²² In 1945, the Home Office line was simple, a fascist could say whatever he wanted, provided nobody was offended and there was no disorder. In December 1946 Victor Burgess told a meeting of the Union of British Freedom that 'for every British service man who is flogged in Palestine by Jews, at least one hundred Jews should be flogged in the streets of Britain'. In response, Ms. Nunn wrote:

*Although the words used at the meeting in Edgware on 30th December were technically seditious, it was not worth prosecuting when they were addressed to a meeting of 25 persons with no violent consequences.*¹²³

Very quickly, however, fascist speeches did spark clashes. The Home Office line had to be extended, now the fascists would be permitted to say they wanted, provided that there was no real disorder. G. H. Baker attempted to distinguish between anti-semitism which was 'inciteful', and anti-semitism which was not. He arrived at the following distinction, 'The speakers at this meeting were anti-semitic and anti-communist in their manner, but their remarks did not come near to inciting'.¹²⁴ J. Burley, another member of the department, elaborated a similar distinction, 'Such disorder as has happened was due not so much to Hamm's speeches as to heckling by a Jewish or Communist opposition, bent on causing mischief'.¹²⁵ Individual policemen, acting with the support of the Home Office, attempted to extend the line again, now it did not matter to the police what the fascists said, so long as it only

offended Jews. H. P. Hind, the Chief Constable of the Bath City force described Edwin Horton's speeches in this way:

*Apparently there was nothing in Horton's speeches to which exception could be taken except by persons of the Jewish faith ... There was no conduct which was likely to cause a breach of the peace.*¹²⁶

The language of the Home Office became increasingly arbitrary. In August 1947, the fascist speaker Pipkin called for supporters of the Jewish terrorists in Palestine to be shot en masse. If the Irgun had supporters in Palestine, he said, 'take the whole family, shove them against the wall, and wipe them out'. If they had supporters in Britain, then the army should do 'exactly the same'.¹²⁷ On this occasion, it was the police officers, themselves, who suggested prosecution. Cornish, of the Home Office, replied by insisting that there should be no case:

*It is true that the speakers tend to mix up Communism and what they call 'Judaism' but the Communists are fairly easy targets for criticism and they probably resent having this criticism expressed so pungently in the East End. It is one matter to insist that the law relating to incitement should be enforced without fear or favour and quite another to suggest that nobody should be allowed to expound fascist doctrines or attack the Jews.*¹²⁸

Cornish appears not to have been interested in what fascists said or did, what mattered to him was their opponents. In Cornish's convoluted thinking, the fascists' enemies were the Home Office's enemies, therefore, he seems to have reasoned, the fascists were the Home Office's friends.

The prime difficulty with explaining the attitudes of the police in terms of Home Office policy is that it was not only the Home Office that responded positively to fascism. When it came to choosing who would or would not be prosecuted, many different departments were involved in making the decision. In May 1941, it was the Scottish Lord Advocate who decided not to prosecute Alexander Ratcliffe's paper, the *Vanguard*.¹²⁹ In October 1946, Bertram Duke Pile made a speech, accusing British Jews of helping terrorists in Palestine. He demanded that the police search Jewish homes and clubs and intern British Jews, 'Every Jewish club, every Jewish synagogue and every Jewish organisation should be searched for hidden arms and ammunition'.¹³⁰ Clearly this was an offensive and seditious speech. This time it was the Director of Public Prosecutions who decided that action could be taken in the future, though not in this particular case.¹³¹ It was Hartley Shawcross, the Attorney-General, who vetoed proposals to charge Victor Burgess for selling *The Protocols* in

1945.¹³² Again, following Burgess's racist speech in December 1946, it was Shawcross who decided against prosecution.¹³³ Shawcross also blocked plans to prosecute Leese for his pamphlet, *The Jewish War Of Survival*.¹³⁴ Then in 1947, an extraordinary meeting of several government departments unanimously agreed not to use the law against fascism. The Home Office the Lord Chancellor, the several law Officers, and Sir Alexander Maxwell of the Cabinet Office were all represented.¹³⁵ Similarly, the entire Cabinet was consulted on the decision to use 392 police to protect a Union Movement demonstration in March 1949, and the whole Cabinet agreed.¹³⁶

On those rare occasions when the Home Office, the law departments, and the police did agree to take action, magistrates were unwilling to convict anti-semites or fascists. When the *Morecambe and Heysham Visitor* described the Jews as 'a plague on Britain', its editor James Caunt was charged with seditious libel. The judge, Mr. Justice Birkett, strongly insisted that Caunt should be acquitted, as he duly was.¹³⁷ Harold Scott's case against Leese ended in much the same way.¹³⁸ When Jeffrey Hamm was arrested, following an insulting, racist and offensive speech, and taken to court in September 1947, Mr. Blake Odgers simply bound him over. He did not bar Hamm from speaking at Ridley Road, nor did he take Hamm's previous convictions into account. He accepted that Hamm was already bound over, but then ignored the fact. Odgers' final remarks ended with the advice that Hamm should encourage his followers to shout, 'Down with Communism', rather than, 'Down with Jewish Communism'. The former, Odgers suggested, would be less likely to cause offence.¹³⁹

The best way to understand the prejudices of the police and the Home Office is within the broader context of state behaviour. A whole number of state agencies enjoyed a cosy relationship with individual fascists. The clearest sign of this relationship is found within the dark corners of the state's activities, inside the secret services. MI5 employed a number of known fascists, including Maxwell Knight and James McGuirk Hughes. Such figures had often been long-standing members of fascist parties and continued to hold fascist ideas even after they joined MI5. In the 1930s, they had a dual function, to keep MI5 up with the latest moves within British fascism, and to use British fascists as agents or as sources of information for the far more important struggle against communism.¹⁴⁰ Some of these known fascists were still active in the period 1945-51. For example, after 1945 Max Knight became head of Section F4, the wing of MI5 with responsibility for placing agents within the Communist Party of Great Britain.¹⁴¹ Similarly, James Hughes may have continued to operate in the field as a fascist spying for the state on fascism. In the 1930s, his

code-name was 'P. G. Taylor'. In the 1940s, someone using the name, 'James Taylor', was described as the founder of the League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, later the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women. James Taylor remained on the executive of the British League of Ex-Servicemen from 1939 through to April 1945, when he disappeared.¹⁴²

With MI6, the post-war links were yet more distinct. The Secret Intelligence Service sponsored a body by the name of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN), which encouraged former Nazi sympathisers and other so-called freedom fighters from eastern Europe to spy and commit acts of sabotage behind the Iron Curtain. The Ukrainian delegation to the ABN proudly boasted to have been fighting the Russians since 1943.¹⁴³ The ABN, in turn, worked with the British League for European Freedom (BLEF), which was formally sponsored by at least four Tory MPs, including Victor Raikes.¹⁴⁴ Both bodies, in turn, co-operated with the Scottish League for European Freedom (SLEF), chaired by Earl Mansfield. In 1950, this body held a conference in Edinburgh, at which Nazi collaborators from the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the Baltic States and Yugoslavia, rubbed shoulders with spies, British fascists, and prominent Tories.¹⁴⁵ The conference was chaired by Major-General Fuller,¹⁴⁶ a long-standing and overt follower of Oswald Mosley, and the author of several books apologising for Franco,¹⁴⁷ together with a pamphlet arguing that the one way to defeat Russia was through a pre-emptive strike.¹⁴⁸ After the war, Fuller should have been marginalised, but instead, was given this prominent position by Tory patriots working with MI6. The clear preferences of MI6 are obvious also in the case of Kim Philby, who was known to have been a communist during his time as a student at Cambridge University. After the war, he claimed to have undergone a dramatic conversion and said that he had now become a fascist. He publicised his new admiration for Franco, and convinced MI6 that he was now a security asset.¹⁴⁹

During the Cold War, therefore, sections of the state were prepared to tolerate fascism and perhaps even encourage it, as a counter-weight to the more important threat of communism. Thus, in March 1948, Clement Attlee announced a purge of both communists and fascists. It was stressed that both ideologies were undemocratic and that extremists in the civil service, from whatever camp, would be removed. The sources reveal that there were fascists in the civil service, in the 1930s, the British Union of Fascists organised an educational group, specifically for senior civil servants,¹⁵⁰ while in the 1940s, fascist civil servants included Quentin Joyce, H. T. Brock-Griggs¹⁵¹ and Francis Attride, a seller of the fascist paper *Union*.¹⁵² Andrew Burn was detained as a member of the BUF in 1940, but then re-employed as

a civil servant after 1945.¹⁵³ A man named Kimber was a civil servant in the Ministry of Fuel and Power, where he gave out anti-semitic leaflets and tried to form a group of sympathisers.¹⁵⁴ As a result of the purge, between 1948 and 1955, 135 civil servants were either transferred, dismissed, or asked to move, on the grounds of their political sympathies. One hundred and thirty-four of those dismissed were alleged communists, and only one was an alleged fascist.¹⁵⁵ When the *Daily Worker* heard about the purge, it accused Attlee of starting his own Gestapo, 'the slide into fascism always take place firstly by easy stages. This violation of human rights is a step along the road to the denial of all rights'.¹⁵⁶ The argument may seem pointed, but the *Daily Worker* was right in one respect, fascists were welcome in the civil service and communists were not.

Given that the state as a whole was prepared to work with or tolerate fascism, it would have been surprising if the police had chosen to take a different path. The police, as an institution, had one determining function, to uphold the law. The law itself had one defining purpose, the protection of private property. The role of the police, in upholding the law, has been to protect property, and to obstruct anyone that threatened it. As Audrey Farrell has observed:

*Historically, the police force was developed to deal with a specific problem thrown up by capitalism. The working class [was] too powerful to be held in check by brute force alone; therefore something less cumbersome than the army [was] needed. On the other hand, coercion [could not] be neglected altogether, therefore the police need to be on hand to break up pickets and demonstrations when necessary.*¹⁵⁷

The police force was used throughout the 1930s and 1940s against hunger marches, and industrial disputes, and as a battering-ram against all forms of popular protest.¹⁵⁸ The same police that showed partiality to fascist speakers, were also used to break picket lines.¹⁵⁹ To quote Farrell again, 'The balance between persuasion and coercion has swung back and forward over time, but the police's central role as a body at the disposal of the ruling class has not changed.'¹⁶⁰ Because the police had this role of protecting private property, so they were forced to make certain choices. They had to decide which groups in society stood broadly for the same values that they did, and which other groups should be opposed. The police, as an institution, chose to defend the right, as they chose to oppose the left. In the words of Frederick Mullally, 'the British police were, and to a certain extent still are, imbued with a conventional antagonism towards left-wing elements.'¹⁶¹ The whole police culture was designed to reinforce this hostility. Even Labour newspapers, such as the *Daily Herald*, were not

seen in police mess-rooms. This is how C. H. Rolph, who was then a police clerk, explained police support for Mosley in the 1930s, 'Because the Blackshirts seemed disciplined and marched with military precision, they seemed at first preferable to the dreary rabble who opposed them.'¹⁶² What was true for the police force in Rolph's time, was true for the new generation of officers after 1945.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why the police favoured the fascists, they saw the anti-fascists as being connected them to the political left and therefore believed that they were a greater threat. The fascists, on the other hand, with their stress on law, order and discipline, were seen by the police as being on their side. In this as so much else, the police had a role and they played it.

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² NCCL File Report, December 1946, in the NCCL archive (DCL) in the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull: DCL/42/1; NCCL File Report, February 1948, DCL/42/2a.

³ "'Ku-Klux-Klan" Threat To Mrs Gould MP', *Edgware Local*, 9 May 1947.

⁴ J. Kerstein and H. Trainis. 'Statements', 21/9/47, DCL 42/2b; 'Assault Was Anti-Jewish', *Reynolds News*, 12 October 1947; W. Grunfeld. 'Mosley Makes A Comeback', *New Republic*, 9 February 1948.

⁵ 'Mosley Man Charged With Carrying Gun At Meeting', *Daily Worker*, 19 January 1948; *On Guard*, 9 April 1948.

⁶ *Ibid.*, May 1949.

⁷ Metropolitan Police Telegram, 13 October 1949, in Metropolitan Police archives (MEPO), in the Public Record Office: MEPO 3/3095/2.

⁸ Interview with Morris Beckman, 15 October 1996.

⁹ M. Beckman, *The Forty Three Group* (London, 1993), 119-20; C. H. Darke to NCCL, September 1948, DCL/48/5; 'Broke Up A Meeting: Two Men Fined', *Daily Worker*, 22 September 1951; *Daily Herald*, 9 October 1951; T. Grundy, 'My Childhood', *Independent*, 28 November 1996.

¹⁰ Tottenham Metropolitan Police, 'Public Meeting Resulting In Arrests', 1 June 1947, in the Home Office (HO) archive in the Public Record Office: HO 45/24469/384.

¹¹ C. H. Darke to NCCL, October 1948, DCL/48/5.

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¹⁸ Interview with Chanie Rosenberg, 7 October 1996.

¹⁹ Interview with Monty Goldman, 26 February 1997.

²⁰ Interview with Royden Harrison, 17 December 1996.

²¹ Interview with Len Rolnick, 9 December 1997.

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- ⁴² Special Branch, 'Meeting', 15 September 1947, HO 45/24470/415.
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Conclusion

It is customary to ask why it was that British fascism failed. This is a fair question, provided that the failure of fascism in the years from 1945 to 1951 is appropriately understood. The supporters of the Union Movement and other fascists were operating in a situation which was extremely unfavourable to them. There was never any likelihood that British fascism would follow the example of Italian or German fascism and seize power. The ground was sufficiently fertile, however, for British fascism to grow. Fascism could have won new recruits and could have developed new layers of activists, yet this did not happen. Fascism might have survived in Britain, passing its ideas on to a new generation, but it did not. The Union Movement might have grown to the size of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, but that did not happen either. Since the Union Movement failed to emulate even the limited successes of the BUF, it is useful to ask, why not? There were many reasons for the defeat of the Union Movement. The legacy of the war and the horrors of the Holocaust forced fascism onto the defensive. The ending of the British presence in Palestine meant that there was no longer a well-spring of popular anti-semitism for the fascists to draw on. Moreover, the revival of the Tory Party after 1947 meant that there was little political room remaining on the right in which the fascists could operate. Added to this, Britain enjoyed full employment between 1945 and 1951, and there was no economic crisis in sight. In hostile circumstances, Mosley's poor leadership, made life more difficult for the fascists, not less.

The fascists were isolated as a result of the second world war. From the mid-1930s onwards, it was clear to many fascists, as it was to many other people, that the next war would be fought between Britain and Germany. In such a situation, fascists were forced to choose whether to put their ideological affinities with German Nazism before their claim to uphold the traditions of British nationalism. Different fascists made different choices. A. K. Chesterton called for a British victory, while William Joyce and Edward Bowlby gave radio broadcasts for the German government,¹ and Oswald Mosley tried to find a point somewhere in between. After 1945, all fascists were isolated, whatever the role they had played in the war. Millions of people

believed that the war was a war against fascism. The central traditions of British nationalism were now inextricably linked to the anti-fascist war, accordingly to stand with fascists, was to stand against the official icons of the British nation, the established Church, the Conservative Party, the Royal Family and the war dead. According to Denis Eisenberg, 'It was too soon after the bombings of Coventry and London ... for even a modicum of success to come Mosley's way'.² From the point of view of the majority traditions of British patriotism, fascism was beyond the pale.

The Holocaust had a similar effect. This is how Nellie Driver explained the failure of the Union Movement, 'The evil memories of Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto ... made people look askance at National Socialism, whether German, Italian or British'.³ From the 1930s, British fascists had promised that they would 'deal with the Jews'. They could hardly be surprised, therefore, when Hitler did deal with the Jews. Some fascists, including Alexander Ratcliffe, responded to the Holocaust by denying that it had even taken place, while others attempted to make a partial explanation for the Holocaust, including the Duke of Bedford, 'As the war went on, bitterness increased. It would seem that conditions in concentration camps deteriorated ... The victims who perished were fewer than has often been suggested.'⁴ Mosley, as he had with the war, tried to find a middle position, between Bedford and Ratcliffe, but his problem was the same. Even if Britain's fascists had attempted to distance themselves from the Holocaust, which they did not, their attempts would have been unconvincing. The events of the Holocaust were inseparably bound together with the history of fascism, and the blood stuck. Moreover, one result of the Holocaust was to radicalise the younger generation of Jews who then fought the fascists with a ferocity that astonished them. For members of the 43 Group, in particular, it was their anger at the Holocaust which drove them into action, according to Stanley Marks and Morris Beckman, 'We had a tremendous motivation, because of the Holocaust,'⁵ 'Our fuel was anger ... The Holocaust injected us with an anger.'⁶

British fascists were further isolated by the success of left-wing ideas, which grew as a result of the very nature of the war. One of the reasons for which the Churchills and Halifaxes fought the war, was their sense that the war was the only way to defend the British empire. However, if the ruling classes had simply described the war as a war for capital, then they would not have been able to persuade millions to fight and die for them. It was therefore necessary to present the second world war as a war against fascism. A series of radical journalists, including George Orwell, Ritchie Calder, Tom Wintringham and Michael Foot, argued for a struggle against the

conditions of depression and misery which had enabled fascism to grow. They put forward the positive argument that things would be different, would have to be different, after the war. Harold Laski's *Where Do We Go From Here?* sold 80,000 copies in 1940, while Cassius' *The Trial Of Mussolini* sold over 100,000 copies in 1943. After June 1941, and Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, this popular radicalism was sanctioned by the ruling class and the state. Stalin's *Short Course* and the Webbs' *Soviet Communism* were introduced onto school reading lists. Churchill's wife Clementine organised an Aid Russia fund, and local Anglo-Soviet Committees were set up, often under the auspices of businessmen and Chambers of Commerce.⁷ This mood culminated in 1945, with Labour's election victory. Calling for nationalisation, and a transfer of wealth from the rich to ordinary workers, Labour won a majority of 146. The left was ascendant. Swamped by the popular exuberance of 1945, the fascists could only be marginalised.

The strength of the world economy after 1945 also contributed to the weakness of British fascism. Fascism is a crisis ideology, which regards its function as to intervene in defence of the nation in times of economic collapse. After 1945, fascist speakers constantly reiterated that the crisis of 'Old Gang' capitalism was just around the corner. In 1949, Raven Thomson argued that the introduction of bread rationing meant that the final crisis was imminent.⁸ Again in 1950, Charlie Watts defended permeation as a way for Mosleyites to seize power, 'when the crack up comes, and you and I know just how inevitable that is'.⁹ Between 1945 and 1951, however, there was no sustained crisis. There was a short-lived recession in 1947, but it followed by a boom beginning in 1948. Throughout the period of the Labour government, unemployment did not rise above 3 per cent of the labour force, amounting at its greatest to just 30,000 people.¹⁰ On the shop floor, full employment meant that these were good times for workers. If factory workers were angry with management, they could simply leave, and they would quickly find new, highly paid work. If need be, they could even strike. There were at least eight thousand unofficial strikes, mostly sectional walk-outs, between 1945 and 1951.¹¹ These were conditions in which ordinary people could improve their living standards, simply by taking action themselves. Mike Kidron has suggested that the absence of economic crisis in the 1940s and 1950s can be explained in terms of the extraordinary conditions of the cold war. Military budgets represented such a drain of capital, he suggests, that they temporarily solved the tendency for capitalism to go through crises of over-production.¹² Whether or not this explanation of economic stability in 1945-51 is

accepted, one thing is clear, the solidity of post-war capitalism made it even less likely that fascism would grow.

Changes in the broad political situation after 1947 also contributed to the demise of fascism. For example, from the winter of 1947-8 onwards, the Labour government shifted to the right, introducing wage freezes and ration cuts. After March 1948, real wages were static, and no new reforming bills were introduced on the scale of 1945-6. The government sent troops to crush dock strikes in London, power strikes in Belfast and London and striking porters in Smithfield market.¹³ Popular disillusionment with Labour could have helped the fascists, but did not. Instead, the Conservative Party reaped the rewards. In 1947, there were swings against Labour in by-elections in Liverpool, Edge Hill, West Islington and Gravesend.¹⁴ Between 1945 and 1948, according to one estimate, the number of Young Conservative branches rose from 51 to 2,246, and the number of Young Conservatives, from 2,000 to 150,000.¹⁵ From 1947, and the publication of a new program, the *Industrial Charter*, there was talk in the press of a new Conservatism, a more moderate ideology, taking up themes of planning in order to win the centre ground.¹⁶ In reality, as the Tories grew in confidence, they became more militant. One sign of this new confidence was the attitude of the Conservative Party and the business community to Labour's proposed nationalisations. In 1945 and 1946, Conservative MPs were overwhelmed by Labour's electoral majority, and chose to accept nationalisation. The Federation of British Industries (FBI) asked only that nationalised industries should be allowed to retain separate accounts.¹⁷ By 1948 or 1949, in a new context, with Labour's popularity in decline, the MPs and the FBI felt sufficiently confident to resist Labour's proposals. In 1949, the Labour cabinet considered nationalising sugar manufacture. Tate and Lyle, the Federation of British Industry, the Conservatives and Aims of Industry all responded with the 'Mr. Cube' campaign, attacking both nationalisation and the Labour Party.¹⁸ As it became more confident, the Conservative Party was able to exercise a total hegemony over the right, and fascism was not even a potential rival.¹⁹

The sheer scale of the Cold War meant that any successful reactionary force would have to command huge resources. When the Union Movement did attempt to tap into what they predicted would be a popular anti-communist mood, their initiatives were insignificant. The National Council of Labour was set up to counter Communist influence in the trade unions, but never really took off and lasted only three years, from 1949 to 1952. Similarly, Mosley's propaganda for Europe A Nation was dwarfed by Churchill's more respectable United Europe movement.²⁰ Other fascists had more

success with their pet schemes, including Major-General Fuller, who promoted the several Leagues of European Freedom, and exhorted the government to finance a guerrilla war against Russia. His pamphlet, *Russia Is Not Invincible*, fitted into an existing genre of Cold War literature. It was recommended by several respectable authors, including the historian Basil Liddell Hart²¹ and General Guderian of Germany.²² Moreover, Fuller's pamphlet was accorded the ultimate stamp of respectability, being printed by the government's publishing house, Eyre and Spottiswoode.²³ Fuller enjoyed this success because he was not a member of any fascist party. Had he been promoting the Union Movement, or any one of the other fascist groups as the solution to the Cold War, he would have been laughed at.

It was also important that the war in Palestine came to an end in 1948. Between 1945 and 1948, one tenth of the British army was stationed in Palestine, while the government spent over £100,000,000 financing this intervention and over 300 British subjects were killed.²⁴ The fascists milked events in Palestine for all they were worth. Throughout these years, when anti-fascists heckled fascist speakers, shouting 'We don't want fascists in the East End', fascists would shout back, 'Who killed the British soldiers in Palestine?'²⁵ On one occasion, half a dozen British soldiers from Palestine attended one of Hamm's meetings and took his side.²⁶ Throughout July and August 1947 in particular, fascist speakers made Palestine the centre of their agitation. Union of British Freedom speakers attached posters of the two murdered sergeants to their platforms,²⁷ while the British Action Party (BAP) warned darkly of 'a Jewish Party with its headquarters in Paddington [which] has declared war against our troops in Palestine',²⁸ and BAP speakers claimed that their meetings were called only 'to register a protest against the murdering and maiming of British soldiers in Palestine'.²⁹ Out of this agitation, the fascist parties achieved their one moment of real growth, but, in 1948, a state was formed in Israel. It might not have been a very fair or equal new society. However, from the perspective of fascists and anti-fascists in Britain in the 1940s, that did not matter. What was important, was that there were no more bomb attacks against British troops, 'Britain withdrew from Palestine, and the anti-Jewish campaign faded'.³⁰

The big political picture ensured that the Union Movement would have gone into some form of decline after 1948. There was nothing inevitable, however, about the speed with which fascism collapsed. Alongside the more objective factors, organised anti-fascism also played a major part in the Union Movement's defeat. It is clear that anti-fascists did not work in a vacuum and that the obstacles to fascism within broader society made their task easier. As one anti-fascist recalls, 'The war was just over.

We were in a unique position. We exploited the situation.³¹ Yet anti-fascist organisations did not just exploit the conditions, they directly contributed to the defeat of the Union Movement. Anti-fascists exposed and denounced the fascists' racism, they opposed and heckled fascist speakers and turned over fascist platforms. Anti-fascists overran the few areas, including south Hackney, where the Union Movement had a base, undermining the fascists even where they seemed strongest. This anti-fascism worked, as one anti-fascist recalls:

*If we had left them alone, Mosley would have had some brief blossoming of sorts, and he would have kept a nucleus there. But we didn't. We smashed them. The anti-fascist activity more or less eliminated any possibilities they had.*³²

There were many different anti-fascist organisations which did not actively co-ordinate their efforts, but their combined effect was the same as it would have been if they had worked in harness. What members of the Union Movement experienced was a single opposition. Members of the 43 Group would heckle fascist speakers or close down fascist meetings, while supporters of the Communist Party or the National Council of Civil Liberties would petition the local areas, under-cutting fascist support in the community. Both arms of the movement came together, without prior co-ordination, but with a common effect, to attack and undermine the Union Movement.

According to surviving members of the 43 Group, their organisation in particular played an important role in disrupting fascist organisations, 'They didn't know how to cope with us. From the first time we hit them, they never recovered.'³³ 'When Mosley saw that his power was slipping, even his own men started to desert him. You could see that he was a very beaten man. He knew that we had finished him off.'³⁴ 'We unhinged the fascists ... They never believed that the Jews would out-violence them.'³⁵ 'I think we achieved as much as we could get without knocking them off. We got them banned from marching, banned from schools.'³⁶ In retrospect, it does seem correct to say that in the period leading up to the summer of 1947, the commandos of the 43 Group succeeded in disrupting literally hundreds of fascist meetings. David Barrow was rattled enough to resort to threats, telling an audience in Queensway, 'We are going to chase the 43 Group from the streets of London'.³⁷ Jeffrey Hamm told the executive of his party that he had contacted the Home Office to ask for protection from the 43 Group,³⁸ while Alexander Raven Thomson was heard to say that 'If we don't find a way to finish off those bastards, they'll do for us.'³⁹ However, as Reuben

Falber of the Communist Party noted at the time, there was one weakness with the tactics of the 43 Group, they had no strategy to deal with large numbers of opponents:

The spontaneous counter-action of Jewish ex-servicemen and militant workers in some places does succeed in closing down attempted fascist meetings or preventing them from starting. This is quite a healthy thing but a different problem arises when organised police protection is present on a big scale.⁴⁰

A radical shift occurred in the street conflicts in the summer and autumn of 1947. Following the killing of the two sergeants in Palestine, and the resultant anti-semitic riots in Liverpool, there was a brief moment in which anti-semitism became popular. The size of the audience at fascist meetings increased rapidly. Between six and seven hundred people listened to fascist speakers at Ridley Road in July 1947, but by September this number had risen to fifteen hundred, and by October it had doubled to three thousand.⁴¹ Over the same period, the numbers attending fascist meetings at Hereford Street in Bethnal Green increased from two hundred and fifty to six hundred,⁴² while John Webster's audiences at Durdham Downs in Bristol shot up from three hundred to two thousand.⁴³ Partly because their movement was growing, and partly in response to the war of attrition waged by the 43 Group, the fascist groups changed tack. They began to set up one single fascist party, the Union Movement, while at the same time, the fascists stopped holding a series of small meetings in many areas and began instead to hold a small number of very large meetings in a few select areas. Now, the heroic activities of the 43 Group were no longer enough to disrupt fascist meetings. The 43 Group had the resources to mobilise a maximum of 200 or 300 commandos for any one action, not enough to close down Jeffrey Hamm's meetings, once his average audience had grown to 2000 or 3000 a week.

At this stage, the working-class left became more important. In the autumn and winter of 1947 to 1948, the working-class movement threw its full efforts into the fight against fascism. With six or seven thousand members in its heyday, the Union Movement had a clear numerical advantage over the 43 Group, whose courage alone could never suffice to redress the balance. However, with their numbers swelled by members of the London Trades Council, representing at least half a million workers, the 43 Group and other anti-fascists were able to turn the tables against the burgeoning fascist movement. From mid-1947 onwards, thousands of anti-fascists turned out to disrupt the fascist meetings. They seized fascist pitches, forcing the fascists to speak from less popular platforms. On 15 June 1947, the NCCL stole the

British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women platform in Ridley Road, and on 20 July, 17 August, 24 August, and 31 August 1947, this same platform was held successfully by the Communist Party and a succession of other anti-fascist groups. Again on 28 September and 5 October, anti-fascists succeeded in stopping the British League from taking their usual spot,⁴⁴ while by October 1947, the fascists were so desperate to hold on to their pitch in Ridley Road, they were forced to occupy the site for nineteen hours before they even started speaking.⁴⁵ At Rushcroft Road in Brixton, on 11 August, the fascists were badly outnumbered, and the 'local Communist Party meeting took the audience'.⁴⁶ In Brixton, again, on 22 August, there was 'strong local opposition' and 'negligible fascist support' and M. J. Ryan's meeting ended in 'disturbances and disorder'.⁴⁷ On 24 August, three thousand anti-fascists defended a meeting in Ridley Road from the attacks of the fascists,⁴⁸ while five days later Lambeth Trades Council led the opposition at Rushcroft Road. The audience was 'in sullen and tense mood, heckling, chanting, followed by disturbance'. There was some fighting, as anti-fascists rushed the platform.⁴⁹ On 31 August, Hargreaves, Pipkin and Duke Pile were drowned out in Hereford Street by 'persistent heckling by [a] number of Trade Unionists',⁵⁰ and 19 September saw a British League meeting in Brixton being heckled by the crowd for 2 hours before the speaker finally gave up.⁵¹ Nine days later, Hargreaves and Spicer were shouted down at Hereford Street, they could not get their message across against 'effective heckling, particularly by group of Communists from Brixton'.⁵² At Rushcroft Road on 15 October, the observers described 'organised heckling and chanting, speakers refused to take questions. [The m]ain opposition [coming] from [a] local working class element. Police closed the meeting and escorted speakers away'.⁵³

The most important anti-fascist protests were held on Sundays, at the site of the Ridley Road market. Throughout the autumn of 1947, there were violent clashes at Ridley Road. Up to 3000 people were in the audience each week, and the anti-fascists succeeded in disrupting, if not closing, almost every single fascist meeting. Lionel Rose described the activities of the Ridley Road anti-fascists. On 24 August 1947, there were 'huge crowds' of Jews and socialists, offering a 'violent opposition' to the fascist speakers, 'followed by disturbances and fighting'. One week later, 'Fights broke out, mobile units of police dispersed crowds'. On the first Sunday in September, 'Communist supporters and other anti-fascists arrived from demonstration at Hyde Park. Mounted police caused panic in certain instances.' On 14 September, there was 'heckling and opposition but no disorder'. One week later, the anti-fascists made a 'considerable vocal opposition', which was only drowned out by a powerful

loudspeaker. Anti-fascists responded to the fascist loudspeakers, by calling out the fire brigade. On 28 September, only a 'cordon of police prevented platform being rushed', while on 5 October 1947, the 'crowd began violent heckling. Disturbances ensued. The platform would have been turned over', but 'police reinforcements arrived and threw [a] cordon around [the] road'.⁵⁴

Into 1948, 'the street fighting continued',⁵⁵ with anti-fascists closed down a British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women meeting in Rushcroft Road on 9 January 1948.⁵⁶ At the same venue a week later, members of the audience 'which had been hostile throughout the meeting', chased members of the British League through the grounds of St. Matthew's Church in Brixton.⁵⁷ On 2 February, a Michael Ryan meeting at Clapham Common was closed by the police after forty members of the audience attempted to turn over the platform.⁵⁸ Six days later, Oswald Mosley held a public meeting at an LCC school in Wilmot Street. Several hundred police remained on duty for seven hours to protect the meeting. One observer noted that it was 'the largest number of police yet used for such an occasion'.⁵⁹ On the fifteenth of the month, fascists appeared and attempted to hold a street meeting in Manchester, where they were met by over four hundred protesters, from the Communist Party, the Manchester and Salford Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, and others. The fascist van was forced to flee, and the meeting 'lasted only four minutes'.⁶⁰ On 9 February, another British League meeting on Clapham Common ended in fighting, four anti-fascists were arrested, but the meeting was closed.⁶¹

In May 1948, Mosley announced the official formation of the Union Movement. Its first public action was the march which took place on May Day. According to Morris Beckman, this

*Was going to be the 'big one'. For weeks beforehand London's streets were flooded with posters and handbills announcing that the 'Leader' himself would address a most important meeting at Hereford Street in Dalston, from where he would lead great parade through the streets. It was intended that this march would bring in a shoal of new recruits and show the British public that the Union was a force to be reckoned with.*⁶²

The event began with a speech by Oswald Mosley at Hereford Street, after which the fascists made their own way to Highbury Corner, where they formed into a procession which attempted to march through to Camden Town. Around one thousand anti-fascists came into conflict with at least that many fascists and up to a thousand police officers. Along the route of the march, there was continual fighting, at Fieldway Crescent and Chillingworth Road anti-fascists formed themselves into wedges, and

attempted to drive a hole through the fascist march, while near Camden Road Parade, anti-fascists threw bricks and oranges at the fascists, and were then charged by the police.⁶³ Dozens of anti-fascists were injured and thirty-two people were arrested, but Mosley's march failed. The Union Movement finally ended its procession early, just outside Holloway Prison.⁶⁴ The parade turned out to be a very damp squib, and the expected generation of new recruits failed to materialise.

Major Lionel Rose, of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, commented on what he interpreted as Mosley's key weaknesses:

*Mosley has been forced into the open before his movement has any sound organisational structure or support. There is a considerable gap, almost wholly empty, between Mosley and his backers and entourage at the top, and the street corner gangs at the bottom.*⁶⁵

Louis Hydeleman, of the Jewish Board of Deputies, put a similar case, suggesting that well organised opposition had ultimately prevented Mosley from producing the Union Movement he wanted. Hoping to create a respectable network of fascist thinkers, Mosley instead remained mired in the realm of fascist street violence:

*It is our belief that Mosley had hoped that the numerous book-clubs and discussion groups would have provided cover for his re-appearance on a higher plane and in better company, than his former attempt; he hoped that the Jeffrey Hamms would succeed in stirring passions and feelings in the streets of London without Mosley himself being connected with this rabble-rousing. Instead, I believe we have succeeded in making sure Mosley is treated as part and parcel of this rabble-rousing.*⁶⁶

By mid-1948, it was clear that the Union Movement had stalled, and that the activities of the anti-fascists were taking their toll, as Charlie Watts admitted, 'We were being obstructed in every way'.⁶⁷ Accordingly, the fascists stopped holding regular meetings at Ridley Road.⁶⁸ Jeffrey Hamm later argued that the British League was forced to stop by the severe winter of 1947-8, but it was the winter of 1946-7 which was the coldest, and Hamm's theory also failed to explain why the members of the British League did not begin their meetings again after the spring of 1948.⁶⁹ In reality, the fascists did not have the numbers to keep their public meetings open, in the face of large anti-fascist protests. As the Union Movement's public activities were wound down, so numbers of Mosley's supporters became disillusioned, some leaving the Union Movement altogether. The best known of these was Michael Maclean, formerly Mosley's organiser in Birmingham. He left the Union Movement in June 1948, and set

up an Anti-Fascist League, recruiting from the ranks of Mosley's former admirers, who had since rejected fascism.⁷⁰

Maclean wrote an important document for Major Rose of AJEX, *Consideration Of Method In Anti-Fascist Struggle*, in which he drew on his 16 years of experience as a fascist to advise the anti-fascists on how Mosley could best be opposed. Maclean called for a change in the law and a ban on fascism, but also did not see the existing state as likely to bring any significant change. Maclean accepted the success of patient work among 'the local democratic bodies', while he also supported anti-fascist street meetings, to be held 'at different times to the fascist ones'. He stressed that heckling worked, so long as it was applied differently to each individual fascist speaker. He maintained that anti-fascists should never debate with fascists:

This is a cardinal error the only result of which can be profit for the enemy ... The leaders of the Union Movement welcome opportunities of this sort ... The main victory they achieve is that of being given an air of respectability.

Maclean also argued that anti-fascists needed a greater sense of unity, and hinted that anti-fascists could perhaps be professionally trained. As fascists had their speakers' classes, so should anti-fascists. Maclean urged anti-fascists to go into the areas where fascism seemed strongest, to distribute literature and petitions. According to Maclean, anti-fascists also needed to involve respected local figures in their struggle, especially those associated with Tenants' Associations. Above all, Maclean insisted that militant anti-fascism worked, especially in areas where fascists were already weak, 'I believe a united and bitter opposition amongst the audience is effective ... provided such opposition is sustained'.⁷¹

Faced by defeat and isolation, fascists needed to organise a major event, to claim a real success, so that Mosley would be able to hold his supporters together. Accordingly, in January 1949, the Union Movement staged a large rally at Kensington Town Hall, 'The rally was intended to ignite a resurgence of Union power',⁷² and seven hundred fascists attended. Again, though, the rally was disrupted by large numbers of anti-fascists, and between one thousand and three thousand people carrying torches and banners demonstrated outside the Town Hall.⁷³ Six divisions of London police were used to keep these anti-fascists from storming the meeting, but anti-fascists did get in, setting off tear gas canisters, which affected up to one hundred fascists and brought the meeting to a suitably chaotic end. The fascists then streamed out of the meeting and attacked the anti-fascist crowds. Mounted police also attacked the anti-

fascists and seventeen arrests were made. Again, however, a major Union Movement rally was disrupted; and Mosley failed to the break-through he desired.⁷⁴

By the spring of 1949, the Union Movement was in rout. In April, the organisation put up fifteen candidates in local elections, who between them, obtained fewer than 2000 votes. In Bethnal Green South Ward, three fascist candidates each polled fewer than 260 votes, while none of the eighteen other non-fascist candidates polled fewer than 1180. James Robb was then conducting a survey of racism in Bethnal Green. He described this vote as derisory, 'Only a small proportion of even the more extreme anti-semites can have voted fascist'.⁷⁵ One of the best signs of the decline of the movement at this time is the falling circulation of the fascist paper, *Union*. In June 1948 branches of the Union Movement sold *Union* on at least fifty different weekly sales, in London alone. By February 1949, however, the list of public sales had fallen from fifty to just thirteen.⁷⁶ Fascists left the Union Movement in droves, including Bertram Duke Pile and Ronald Hargreaves, who quit in January 1949, Tommy Moran and his wife, who resigned in February, and Alfred Norris and F. A. Young, who followed a few months later.⁷⁷ Moran gave a bitter interview to *Reynolds News*, '[Mosley's] conception of leadership is dictatorship and his idea of service is slavery'.⁷⁸ Dr. Margaret Vivian left in 1950, telling Robert Saunders, 'Please tell [Mosley] that I have not ratted ... But I fear that any chance we had was ruined by the disgraceful way we were treated in the war which makes the proletariat regard us as Quislings'.⁷⁹ Even many of Mosley's keenest supporters inside the Union Movement came to the conclusion that they were getting nowhere. If they did not actually leave the movement, they did drop out of all practical activity. Charlie Watts conveyed the mood of these former Mosley loyalists:

*We were now being held responsible for and answerable for all the vile Nazi atrocities ... I gradually but surely came to the conclusion that I was not wasting my life on people who were not worth the effort ... I was no longer going to knock my head against a brick wall.*⁸⁰

In March 1949, one hundred and fifty supporters of the Union Movement marched from Ridley Road to West Green Road in Tottenham. Anti-fascists knew about the march a week beforehand, giving them plenty of time to prepare their opposition. The Communist Party distributed 20,000 leaflets calling for the demonstration to be banned,⁸¹ and on the day five thousand anti-fascists and left-wingers turned out to oppose the fascists. The protesters threw bottles at the fascists, also buses were stopped and their tyres let down. For the first time, anti-fascists went

further and openly attacked the police. They used ball bearings and marbles to stop police horses from charging, 'One officer was dragged from his horse and his helmet thrown in the air'. In their attempt to protect the fascists, the police first redirected the march, and then forced them to call it off. 'Eventually the police decided not to let the marchers reach West Green Corner, as planned, but led them to the back of the Town Hall where they dispersed quietly'. It was a further humiliating defeat for the Union Movement.⁸²

Perhaps the final straw came in April 1949. A meeting was planned, where Mosley would speak in Ridley Road. However, the meeting was stopped by anti-fascists. Mosley showed up and attempted to speak, but the crowd heckled him, threw rubbish and prevented him from speaking. With Mosley silenced, Alexander Raven Thomson tried to speak. Immediately, he was met by a wall of noise, and also forced to stop.⁸³ Chanie Rosenberg, an anti-fascist then living in Hackney, remembers this, the Union Movement's last serious attempt to speak at Ridley Road:

There was a rather smaller crowd, but big enough. And his lorry came in. They came in their lorry. I think by this time, the fascists were not taking the platform overnight. They just came in. There must have been several dozen of these people. They all jumped out, and stood on something or other to speak. They were pelted with rubbish from Ridley Road market, and it was more than just rubbish, stones and all sorts of things and they were terrified. By this time, they didn't have their crowds of supporters and so on. The police gave them the wink, and they all jumped back into the lorry. They didn't have a meeting or anything. The lorry drove away with all of them cowering down. And you can just imagine the jubilation of the crowd. That was the end. It was the most brilliant end.⁸⁴

At a time when the fascists were already experiencing major difficulties, the intervention of anti-fascists proved decisive, their hostility effectively reduced Mosley's potential support, reinforced the political isolation of the Union Movement as a whole, and exposed the weakness of the fascists to their audiences and to themselves. Meanwhile, the Union Movement's shift from street meetings to weekly rallies in the winter of 1947-8, also made it easier for the united forces of the working-class left to disrupt and discredit the fascist party. From mid-1947, the most important conflicts between fascists and anti-fascists were the large confrontations at Ridley Road. The sizes of the audiences attending the meetings in Hackney suggest that there were at least three thousand, and maybe as many as many as six or seven thousand people nationally, who looked to the Union Movement for political leadership, but Hackney Trades Council could easily mobilise two thousand people on anti-fascist counter-demonstrations,⁸⁵ while the 43 Group had up to two thousand members and a great

many more supporters, and the Communist Party had over 40,000 members, 10,000 in London, and over 1000 in Hackney alone.⁸⁶ The combined resources of these anti-fascist groups were much greater than those of the fascist right. It may well be that the Union Movement was always destined to lose, but the active intervention of anti-fascists ensured that it was smashed, and it was twenty years before another sizeable fascist party could be formed.

It is perhaps useful to end this dissertation by reviewing the conclusions that have been reached. This thesis has advanced the argument that fascism enjoyed a brief and extraordinary bubble of success, taking advantage of a moment of popular anti-semitism, which was also expressed in the racist riots of August 1947. Given the widespread hatred of fascism which did exist after the war, it is extraordinary that fascism was able to force itself back into the headlines. Yet, in September and October 1947, huge numbers did attend fascist meetings each week in Ridley Road, with first seven hundred, then fifteen hundred, two thousand, two thousand again, and then three thousand people present. Other fascist meetings grew in size, from Brixton to Bristol. Fascism revived, as an organised force, capable of mobilising large numbers of people in its support. This dissertation has also argued that the British state exhibited a shockingly complacency, with Cabinet ministers ignoring the fascist threat, and policemen at the street level doing nothing to prevent its growth. There was a striking anti-anti-fascist continuity between the policies of the Conservative-dominated National governments of the 1930s, and the actions of the new Labour government led by Clement Attlee. For that reason, this dissertation has taken side with those historians of the 1940s who have suggested that the Labour government did not live up to the radical hopes of its supporters. Finally, this dissertation has also examined those forces that did attempt to prevent the growth of organised fascism. It has advanced the argument that anti-fascism was a popular and effective, and therefore *appropriate*, response to the rise of postwar fascism. If fascism were to return, then it follows that anti-fascism should itself need to be reborn, and for this reason the events of 1945-51 represent a period from which later generations can yet learn.

¹ The MI5 file on Bowlby is kept in the Home Office archive (HO) in the Public Record Office, HO 45/25789.

² D. Eisenberg, *The Re-Emergence Of Fascism* (London, 1967), 38.

³ N. Driver, 'From the Shadows Of Exile', manuscript in Bradford University library, 117.

⁴ Duke of Bedford, *The Years Of Transition* (London, 1949), 212-3.

⁵ Interview with Stanley Marks, 28 October 1996.

- ⁶ Interview with Morris Beckman, 15 October 1996.
- ⁷ A. Davies, *Where Did The Forties Go?* (London, 1984), 29-31.
- ⁸ Union Movement, 'Speakers Notes No. 5', 1949, in Saunders collection, file C12, University of Sheffield library.
- ⁹ C. Watts to R. Saunders, 7 January 1950, file C12 in Saunders collection.
- ¹⁰ Davies, 77.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ¹² M. Kidron, *Capitalism And Theory* (London, 1974), 19-23.
- ¹³ T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, *The Labour Party: A Marxist History* (London, 1988), 230-5; G. Ellen, 'Labour And Strikebreaking 1945-51', *ISJ* 24 (1984), 45-73; Davies, 120; for the London dock strikes, D. N. Pritt, *Law, Class And Society, Book One: Employers, Workers And Trade Unions* (London, 1970), 92-7; and J. Dash, *Good Morning Brothers!* (London, 1969), 74-81.
- ¹⁴ E. Trory, *Peace And The Cold War, Part One: 1945-51 Labour In Government* (Hove, 1996), 161.
- ¹⁵ *Truth*, 18 June 1948.
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