

**The Eternal Imperialists: Empire, Race and Gender on the British Radical Right, 1918-1968**

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**Abstract**

This thesis interrogates the imperial obsessions of the British Radical Right between 1918 and 1968. It surveys a series of groups from the inter-war period but also following the Second World War. From the Empire’s height following the First World War to decolonisation during the 1960s, Radical Right activists interpreted the political problems of their day, and formulated their proposed solutions, in imperial terms. They imagined a Jewish-directed conspiracy operating against the Empire, often envisioning this as an anti-colonial rebellion writ large. At the same time, the racist, authoritarian and masculine ‘ethos’ of Empire – derived from sources such as first-hand experience of colonial life, stories of imperial heroism, the poetry of Rudyard Kipling, and the ideas of Robert Baden-Powell – was to serve as the antidote to imperial and racial decline. Their plans did not only consist of a return to a more draconian form of colonial rule but also for the imperialisation of the metropole – that is, for British politicians at home to act with the same resolute ruthlessness as Britain’s mythologised ‘Empire Builders’.

In interrogating Radical Right activists’ obsession with the Empire, it joins a small but steadily growing group of studies. Where this thesis differs, both from the established historiography and these newer studies, is in its desire to reconnect the British Radical Right with the main course of British history. The British Radical Right’s imperialism has so often gone overlooked or ignored in the literature. Scholars have largely regarded its adherents as a politically extreme sideshow to be studied in isolation by specialists in a separate field. This thesis argues that in their imperial obsessions, in particular, the Radical Right belong to a broader utopian-imperialist British political tradition.

**Declaration**

*I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University’s Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (*[*www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means*](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)*). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

**Publications arising from the thesis:**

Portions of the material on the British Union of Fascists used in Chapters 2 and 3 has been published in L. J. Liburd, ‘Beyond the Pale: Whiteness, Masculinity and Empire in the British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940’, *Fascism:* *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 7: 2, 2018, pp. 275-296.

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# **List of Abbreviations**

BF British Fascisti/British Fascists

BBP British People’s Party

BNC Birmingham Nationalist Club

BUF/BU British Union of Fascists/British Union of Fascists and National Socialists

BNP British National Party

CAF Central African Federation

FOM The Friends of Oswald Mosley

GBM Greater Britain Movement

IDL India Defence League

IES Indian Empire Society

IFL Imperial Fascist League

LEL League of Empire Loyalists

MCF Movement for Colonial Freedom

NF National Front

NFAV National Front After Victory

NLP National Labour Party

NDSAP National Socialist German Workers Party

NSL National Socialist League

NSM National Socialist Movement

UCAA United Central Africa Association

UM Union Movement

RHS Royal Historical Society

RPS Racial Preservation Society

WDL White Defence League

# Introduction:

# Reconnecting the ‘Radical Right’

This then is the goal, perhaps the supreme mission, of our generation: to sound across the oceans and across the air waves the clarion call of racial kinship, bringing together the scattered elements of our wandering tribes in a mighty movement of regeneration through which we may combine as one to develop the great heritage handed down to us by our seafaring ancestors. Will this call be heeded? […] Or will we duck the challenge, preferring instead the small and mean destiny of an effete people that has resigned from greatness? […] [T]he British Race is now at its supreme hour of decision: to be or not to be, to live again in splendour – or to die the death of the senile and the exhausted.[[1]](#footnote-1)

John Tyndall’s part-political memoir, part-manifesto *The Eleventh Hour* concludes with the above neo-colonialist call to action. Published in 1988 and written while he was in prison on charges of incitement to racial hatred, Tyndall wrote *The Eleventh Hour* as part of a campaign to revive his ailing British National Party (the third of a number of groups in British political history to use this name).[[2]](#footnote-2) By this point, Tyndall had had a long career on the Radical Right and drew inspiration from the ideas of Oswald Mosley, Arnold Leese and, above all, Arthur Kenneth ‘A. K.’ Chesterton. He began his political career as an activist in Chesterton’s League of Empire Loyalists before moving through leadership positions in various Radical Right groups including the National Front. As the passage illustrates, he retained a life-long faith in the – by that time, former – British Empire. Still gripped by delusions of imperial grandeur in the late eighties, it was his deeply held conviction that Britain faced two options: a return to imperial greatness or continued decline.

This belief was not simply Tyndall’s personal credo but a passionate conviction held by the activists and ideologues of the British Radical Right throughout the twentieth century. This thesis contends that those on the British Radical Right were obsessed with Empire and built their worldview out of the ideological raw material of British imperialism. As well as being gripped by imperialist fantasies of potential dystopian decline or glorious utopian revival, they drew inspiration from the Empire’s mythologised past and were deeply preoccupied by the circumstances of its present. For them, the Empire provided a frame of reference through which Britain’s problems could be diagnosed as well as the means by which they could be cured. As the following chapters demonstrate, in their crusade to reclaim imperial grandeur and prevent the nation from falling into decadence, they drew on first-hand experiences of Empire, imperial race discourse, constructions of imperial masculinity, and the authoritarian ethos of colonial rule.

Alan Sykes defined the ‘Radical Right’ as a political tendency characterised by fervent imperialism, aristocratic elitism, authoritarianism, and a belief in the preservation of racial “purity” and national sovereignty.[[3]](#footnote-3) For Sykes, ‘[t]he Radical Right in Britain was very much bound up with… what might be called the white legend of empire’.[[4]](#footnote-4) Alongside this messianic faith in Empire, went an obsession with an imminent decline in British international power.[[5]](#footnote-5) Those on the Radical Right believed in the need for ‘a continual struggle to arrest decline’ as ‘catastrophe, the point at which decline became irreversible, was always visible on the horizon.’[[6]](#footnote-6) Sykes’ history of the Radical Right spans across the twentieth century, from the Edwardian period to the early 2000s. Under the Radical Right umbrella, he includes dissident conservatives as well as British fascists. Throughout this period, the Radical Right failed to get beyond the political fringes, unable to gain political influence or electoral support sufficient to shape the political agenda.[[7]](#footnote-7) This thesis uses the term ‘Radical Right’ to refer to the groups and individuals it surveys, rather than simply ‘fascist’. It does so because it is interested more in the ‘common ideological terrain’ they shared, particularly when it comes to conceptions of Empire, than whether each group or individual corresponds to a theoretical definition of fascism.[[8]](#footnote-8) As this introduction goes on to discuss, an obsession with definition and classification has constrained the field of fascist studies.

Beginning in 1918, with the Empire swelled by the addition of League of Nations mandates, the thesis charts the development of Radical Right activists’ imperial faith across the inter-war period and after 1945 up to wave of decolonisation during the 1960s. In the 1920s, the British Radical Right consisted of movements whose members advocated a highly authoritarian rendering of die-hard Conservatism. These included The Britons; the group of writers around *The Patriot* journal; the Loyalty League; and Britain’s first self-identifying fascist group, the British Fascisti (BF). During the 1930s, new movements emerged in the form of Arnold Leese’s obsessively antisemitic Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and the best-known fascist movement of the inter-war period, Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF).

The 1940s was a decade of decline and attempted revival for the British Radical Right. By the outbreak of war in 1939, some earlier movements had foundered, while others were proscribed the following year under wartime regulations. However, even before the War’s end, Radical Right ideologues began peddling their ideas in semi-respectable publications. Soon after 1945, they attempted to reorganise their followers. Over the course of the late 1940s and into the 1950s, Mosley and his disciples regrouped to found the Union Movement (UM) while Chesterton abandoned the label ‘fascism’ to preach the cause of ‘Blimpish’ imperialism with his League of Empire Loyalists (LEL). They were joined during the late 1950s and 1960s, by a series of groups inspired by the ideas of Chesterton and Leese such as the White Defence League (WDL), the National Labour Party (NLP), the British National Party (BNP), and the Greater Britain Movement (GBM).

Historians have very rarely acknowledged the above groups’ debt to the legacy of Empire. Where they have done so, they have consistently underestimated the significance of that legacy’s impact and the extent of its influence. My work aims to challenge the neglect of the British Radical Right’s relationship with the British Empire as a system and British imperialism as an ideology. From the end of the First World War to the height of formal decolonisation during the 1960s, there existed within Britain an identifiable collection of individuals, societies, pressure groups, and political movements united in the belief that Britain’s salvation lay in a grand imperial revival of both nation and Empire. When it came to colonial policy, this motley conglomeration envisioned that revival in terms of a return to the unashamedly belligerent and repressive imperialism of the nineteenth century. However, their vision also contained a revolutionary aspect. By suffusing the ‘Mother Country’ with a heavy dose of the imperial ‘spirit’, particularly in terms of masculinity, Radical Right activists aimed to remake Britain itself along authoritarian, white supremacist lines. At the centre of the Radical Right’s political project lay the utopian belief in the transformative power of an imagined, idealised imperial way of doing things. Their imperial faith remained undimmed, though not unchanged, from the Empire’s height to its decline. In pursuing this line of argument, my work seeks to address the omissions both of historians of fascism and those of Empire and race, and reconnect the Radical Right with the main course of British history.

Like Sykes, this study applies the term ‘Radical Right’ beyond its original Edwardian confines. Historians of the Edwardian period originally used the term to refer to a body of opinion consisting of partly of disaffected members of the Conservative Party as well as elements among the memberships of militant patriotic groups such as the National Service League and the Navy League.[[9]](#footnote-9) The malcontents grouped under this heading were alarmed by the Conservative Party’s poor electoral performance in the early years of the twentieth century, the weaknesses of the British Empire as revealed by the Anglo-Boer War, fears of war with Germany, and the progressive legislation of the Liberal government between 1906 and 1914. In response, they sought to revitalise Britain by strengthening the Empire, drawing Britain and its Dominions into an ever closer economic union through schemes like tariff reform.

Authoritarian, anti-socialist and opposed to organised labour, those on the Edwardian ‘Radical Right’ were also obsessed with political corruption, their denunciations of which often veered into antisemitism.[[10]](#footnote-10) Convinced of the existence of an ‘enemy within’, not only in politics but in wider society, they ‘seemed to be positively eager for a blood-letting that would put an end to sentimentality and humanitarian humbug and restore the British nation to its former manhood.’[[11]](#footnote-11) Those on the Radical Right were haunted by fevered imaginings of ‘[s]treet fighting in London, bloody insurrection in India, the yellow peril, civil war in Ireland, [and] a German Army rampaging through the eastern countries looting and destroying’.[[12]](#footnote-12) Their fears, their violent and alarmist rhetoric, and the radicalism of their proposed solutions put them ‘outside of the pale of Conservatism’.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Geoffrey Searle noted that in their outlook and their concerns, the Edwardian Radical Right seemed ‘to foreshadow the fascism of a later generation’ but he added that terms like ‘fascism’ and the ‘Radical Right’ should remain fixed in specific historical contexts.[[14]](#footnote-14) Regardless of Searle’s reticence, a number of historians have noted the obvious affinities between these Edwardian imperialists and inter-war British fascists. In contrast to much of the later historiography on British fascism, what is striking about the literature from the 1960s, 1970s, and, to a lesser extent, the 1980s was scholars’ readiness to accept British fascism as an extreme manifestation of a *British* right-wing political tradition. In 1960, Bernard Semmel wrote a history of Edwardian social imperialism later hailed by historians of empire as innovative in its consideration of the Empire’s impact on politics within Britain.[[15]](#footnote-15) Semmel anticipated Searle’s comments, seeing in Mosley ‘the intellectual heir’ of the Edwardian Britons who sought to revive and enrich Britain by economically uniting the Empire.[[16]](#footnote-16)

A few years later, in a collection of essays on the ‘European Right’, J. R. Jones referred to Mosley and his followers as ‘the reincarnation of the pre-1914 [British] Right’.[[17]](#footnote-17) In 1969, Robert Skidelsky, later Mosley’s biographer, analysed the development of Mosley’s political thinking from support for the Empire to support for a united Europe. For Skidelsky, Mosley embodied ‘a tradition that has successively attempted to use both Empire and Europe as a shield against economic and political decline’ also associated with social-imperialist statesman Joseph Chamberlain.[[18]](#footnote-18) In one of the earliest studies of the BUF’s ideas, Neil Nugent argued that they ‘had their roots firmly embedded in British soil’ and, citing Semmel, pointed to their similarities with the Edwardian social imperialists.[[19]](#footnote-19) In 1986, G. C. Webber included British fascism in his study of ‘the British Right’, ‘a collection of anti-liberals’ who shared a ‘family resemblance’ in terms of their dislike of socialism and frustration with the moderation of the Conservative Party leadership, and who had their roots in a radical conception of imperialism.[[20]](#footnote-20) To cite Edwardian radical imperialists as the forerunners of Britain’s fascists became commonplace, a feature of later major studies of British fascism including Richard Thurlow’s *Fascism in Britain* and Thomas Linehan’s *British Fascism*.[[21]](#footnote-21)

However, analysis of the possible influence of imperialism went no further than the question of the ideological affinities between the Edwardian Radical Right and inter-war British fascism. Even Sykes’ study, which emphasised the importance of Empire for the Radical Right, did not deal specifically or thoroughly with imperialism. Sykes’ book constitutes a ‘whistle-stop’ tour of the British Radical Right, a general setting-out of the history and permutations of the political tendency across almost a century. This thesis focuses specifically on the Radical Right’s imperialism within a shorter period. Where other studies have failed to do so, it stresses and analyses the centrality of imperialism to the Radical Right political project.

# **Empire Overlooked?**

The historiography of British fascism dates back to the 1960s. The following review of this vast literature is thus not exhaustive. [[22]](#footnote-22) Instead, it deals with the four aspects of the historiography in particular. These include the neglect of the Radical Right’s relationship with imperialism, the development of studies of British fascist ideology, the scholarly focus on the Radical Right in the 1930s and the resulting neglect of the 1920s and the period between 1945 and 1967, and the impact of the ‘cultural turn’ on the study of British fascism. Until the late 1980s, most studies of British fascism adopted what Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan refer to as the ‘empirical approach’.[[23]](#footnote-23) These studies were chiefly concerned with things like ascertaining the reasons for fascism’s political failure, surveying local support for fascist groups, discussions of how British fascists and their ‘fellow travellers’ related to their continental counterparts, and the details of the lives of the movement’s leading figures. There was little room in such studies for detailed considerations of the ideology of the British Radical Right much less the place of imperialism within it.

Even in some of these pioneering studies, the question of the Empire’s significance for those on the Radical Right proved unavoidable. However, the collection of empirical evidence of the Radical Right’s relationship with Empire was often not followed up with sustained analysis. In an article published in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* in 1966, W. F. Mandle set out to compose a composite profile of the average member of the BUF ‘elite’ – its leading activists, candidates and party functionaries. He found that the ranks of the BUF ‘elite’ consisted of a significant number of individuals with extensive experience of living, working or serving in Britain’s colonies and Dominions. [[24]](#footnote-24) For Mandle, though, this evidence suggested little more than the average BUF member’s restless propensity for travel.[[25]](#footnote-25)

One notable and oft-overlooked exception to these early empirical studies was Barry Cosmin’s brilliantly titled ‘Colonial Careers for Marginal Fascists’. Cosmin detailed the life of Henry Hamilton Beamish, founder of The Britons, opening with a highly provocative thesis. He posited that fascism failed in Britain because the ‘marginal’ and ‘authoritarian’ personalities who elsewhere in inter-war Europe formed the leadership and rank-and-file of fascist parties were farmed out to the colonies under various imperial settlement schemes. Out in the Empire, they were free to indulge ‘[their] proclivities in a society where to be British was to be at the top and to have power and influence unattainable at home.’[[26]](#footnote-26) While provocative, Cosmin’s argument missed the fact that some of these ‘marginal’ individuals returned to Britain and embraced fascism. Nevertheless, Cosmin’s piece stands out in the early literature. Firstly, the article constitutes a rare investigation of the relationship between the Radical Right and imperialism, and, secondly, Cosmin focuses on a figure from the Radical Right of the 1920s, a decade regularly overlooked in the study of British fascism in favour of the 1930s.

For many decades after Cosmin’s article, the relationship between imperialism and Radical Right politics remained the subject of passing remarks rather than detailed studies. In *Political Antisemitism in Britain* (1979), Gisela Lebzelter noted that Beamish and other members of The Britons had had direct contact with the British Empire and suggested that their colonial encounters acted as a formative influence on their virulently racist worldview.[[27]](#footnote-27) In another essay, Lebzelter also highlighted the intersection of antisemitism and imperialism on the Radical Right during the 1920s.[[28]](#footnote-28) For the most part, however, historians have tended to look for the ideological precursors of British fascist antisemitism not among imperialists but in the journalism of Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and Cecil Chesterton on political scandals such as the Marconi affair.[[29]](#footnote-29) Elsewhere, John Morell speculated that the lengthy period Arnold Leese spent living and working in India and East Africa influenced his later turn to extreme racism as an early British fascist and later founder of the IFL.[[30]](#footnote-30) Morell also noted the influence of Colonel L. A. Waddell, a British amateur archaeologist, on Leese’s ideas.[[31]](#footnote-31) He failed to mention, however, that Waddell’s work was partly derived from that of Anglo-Indian ‘Orientalist’ scholars.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The late 1980s witnessed the publication of further studies of British fascist ideology building on the earlier work of Neil Nugent. D. S. Lewis’ *Illusions of Grandeur* (1987) examined the ideology of Oswald Mosley. He found that ‘the empire formed an intrinsic part’ of Mosley’s political programme as a means of reviving Britain but went no further than this. [[33]](#footnote-33) Nor did he attempt to place Mosley’s ideas into a tradition of crisis-obsessed British imperialism. Stephen Cullen published an analysis of the BUF’s ideas and policies in the same year.[[34]](#footnote-34) Cullen concluded that ‘the Empire was a vital cornerstone in Mosley’s economic plans’ and that imperialism was a significant part of the ‘emotional’ appeal of BUF ideology.[[35]](#footnote-35) As far as imperialism was concerned, like Lewis, Cullen confined his analysis to the BUF’s economic ideas. Lewis and Cullen also offered little analysis of the ideas of the British fascists who proceeded the BUF or of those who came afterwards.

Kenneth Lunn broke new ground in the late eighties with the first serious consideration of the ideology of the British Fascisti. While noting the large ‘naval and military’ presence among the BF’s ranks and its members’ racism towards Jews and colonial ‘coloured students’, Lunn omitted almost entirely a discussion of the BF’s vocal support for the Empire.[[36]](#footnote-36) In contrast, Barbara Farr’s often overlooked *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain* (1987) stands out for the attention it pays to the pre-BUF Radical Right and for its insistence on the powerful influence imperialism exerted on groups such as the BF. Farr argued that British fascism in the 1920s was the successor of ‘the new imperialism’ – an anti-democratic, anti-socialist vision of ‘a brotherhood of white Anlgo-Saxons of the British Empire’ – that developed following the Boer War.[[37]](#footnote-37) Farr’s only misstep was her bizarre categorisation of Mosley’s BUF as a movement with ‘its origins in socialism’ rather than as a part of the ‘Radical Right’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The following decade saw the publication of some of the first studies of British fascism and women as well as a number of local and regional studies of British fascism.[[39]](#footnote-39) Among these were two pieces on British fascism and Ireland that touched on the Radical Right’s relationship with British imperialism. R. M. Douglas examined the stance of a number of Radical Right organisations and publications on the ‘Irish Question’ during the inter-war period. However, Douglas focused mostly on the racialisation of Irish people by British fascists and not on the connections between British fascists and Ireland. For some individuals, these connections included direct involvement in the violence of the Irish revolutionary period.[[40]](#footnote-40) While in his article on British fascism and Ireland, James Loughlin addresses these Irish connections, he makes some notable omissions.[[41]](#footnote-41) He neglects to discuss individuals such as Brigadier-General Cyril Prescott Decie and the BF’s Brigadier-General Sir Ormonde Winter, both of whom served in high-ranking positions in the police and intelligence services during the Irish War of Independence (and figure in this study). Loughlin also gave little consideration to the impact that direct participation in this bloody colonial conflict might have had on the political psychology of the British Radical Right more broadly.

The issue of the influence of Empire on the Radical Right is evident in David Baker’s *Ideology of Obsession* (1996), a biography of A. K. Chesterton. Chesterton was a prominent activist in the BUF, official biographer of Oswald Mosley, later founder of the League of Empire Loyalists, and the first chairman of the National Front. Born to British settlers in South Africa, Chesterton’s obsession with Empire defined his politics throughout his life. While noting the influence of colonial racism on the young Chesterton, Baker’s book is principally an attempt to think about Chesterton’s life through Roger Griffin’s work on ‘generic’ fascism.[[42]](#footnote-42) As a result of this, it is less interested about what Chesterton’s life has to say about British history beyond the field of fascist studies. Baker also deals primarily with Chesterton’s inter-war political activism. Chesterton’s rise after 1945 to the position of the one of the most influential ideologues on the British Radical Right is relegated to the book’s epilogue.

As well as largely ignoring imperialism, studies of British fascism have tended to focus either on the 1930s or on the period after 1967 and the rise of the National Front.[[43]](#footnote-43) Considerations of British fascism in the 1920s and between 1945 and 1967 have been relatively few and usually brief.[[44]](#footnote-44) Some of the earliest studies to defy this trend also emerged in the mid-1990s. *The Failure of British Fascism* (1996) featured essays re-evaluating the history of British fascism in the 1920s and one the earliest historical studies of Mosley’s post-war group, the Union Movement.[[45]](#footnote-45) In the latter essay, Anne Poole focused on the UM’s political failure and not their ideas. Her essay thus exhibited little interest in Mosley’s enduring faith in Empire, illustrated by the UM’s plans for a grand European recolonisation of Africa.[[46]](#footnote-46) Poole also pays very little attention to UM activists’ involvement in anti-immigration activism during the 1950s and 1960s or to Mosley’s related enthusiasm and support for apartheid South Africa. Two years later, Richard Thurlow also turned his attention to Mosley’s attempted political resurrection after 1945, similarly omitting a detailed discussion of the persistence of Mosley’s utopian conception of Empire.[[47]](#footnote-47) Despite noting that the UM ‘was the first significant political organization in Britain to attack the “coloured invasion”’, Thurlow had very little to say about the group’s vocal opposition to Commonwealth immigration.[[48]](#footnote-48)

During this time, the ‘cultural turn’ in fascist studies, influenced by the work of George Mosse, began to transform the study of British fascism.[[49]](#footnote-49) The ‘turn’ inspired studies both of fascism’s relation to various cultural phenomena and of the attempt of fascist movements to construct an all-encompassing political culture of their own. Both Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan examined British fascists’ interaction with wider British culture and their attempts to construct a fascist way of life. Gottlieb’s *Feminine Fascism* (2000) analysed British fascist movements’ stance towards women and gendered women’s involvement in British fascism.[[50]](#footnote-50) Gottlieb found that the BUF’s female recruits crafted their own conception of an activist role for women – a ‘*feminine fascism*’.[[51]](#footnote-51) In his *British Fascism* (2000), Linehan argued that ‘British fascism was a cultural phenomenon as much as it was a movement of political or economic change’.[[52]](#footnote-52) He maintained that, as well as continental influences, ‘fascist culture had its roots in cultural traditions and concerns which were distinctly British’. While acknowledging that British fascism was bound up with British traditions, Linehan devoted little attention to imperial tradition.

Gottlieb and Linehan elaborated on the ‘cultural approach’ to the study of British fascism in their edited collection *The Culture of Fascism* (2004). They argued that ‘however unsuccessful the British extreme Right has been in the course of the twentieth century by the measure of political gain, it has nonetheless often been a reflector and recycler of wider cultural phenomena, and in grudging dialogue with current cultural discourses.’ [[53]](#footnote-53) They added ‘[t]he far Right has not developed in a cultural vacuum.’ In spite of the commitment of the editors and contributors to situating British fascism within ‘larger debates within the field of… contemporary British history’, the pieces in this collection had little to say about the Radical Right and Empire.[[54]](#footnote-54) Even in Richard Thurlow’s detailed analysis of British fascist racial ideology the focus was on the influence Mosley and Leese derived from the subterranean world of pseudo-scientific racists and conspiracy theorists rather than from sources closer to the mainstream such as colonial racial discourse. [[55]](#footnote-55) Furthermore, later historians of British fascism have paid little heed to cultural historians’ insistence on embedding British fascism in the broader political and cultural context.

Outside of the work of those historians pioneering the ‘cultural approach’ to the study of British fascism, others were beginning to reach beyond the 1930s and to investigate British fascism’s origins in the 1920s and its afterlife following the Second World War. Markku Ruotsila examined the political lives of conspiracy theorist, Nesta Webster; the former colonial governor turned fascist, Lord Sydenham of Combe; and the aristocratic, former imperial soldier and Radical Right publisher, the 8th Duke of Northumberland.[[56]](#footnote-56) Breaking with the tradition in much of the literature, particularly in his pieces on Sydenham and Northumberland, Ruotsila emphasised the role imperial anxiety played in influencing the paranoid fantasies of those on the Radical Right.[[57]](#footnote-57)

At around the same time, David Renton, Nicholas Hillman and Graham Macklin published studies of British fascism after the Second World War. Their work constituted pioneering empirical studies in this area, but featured only limited engagement with post-1945 British fascist ideology. Renton, whose main historical interest is in anti-fascism, called on historians to more or less ignore the Radical Right’s ideology altogether and to focus instead on fascist movements and their actions.[[58]](#footnote-58) Nicholas Hillman later surveyed the history and ideas of the British Radical Right between 1945 and 1967, and called on scholars to carry out further detailed research into Radical Right activity and ideology during this period.[[59]](#footnote-59) Graham Macklin’s *Very Deeply Dyed in Black* constitutes an impressively detailed study on which my research hopes to build.[[60]](#footnote-60) However, Macklin’s interest lay in uncovering Mosley’s connections to the murky world of European neo-fascism. He devoted little relatively attention to Mosley’s neo-colonial visions of ‘Europe-Africa’ and the UM’s opposition to Commonwealth immigration, which they frequently framed with reference to events across the decolonising British Empire.

Historians have begun to answer Hillman’s call for more research on the Radical Right of the 1950s and 1960s. Macklin investigated Chesterton’s post-war political career and his work on Chesterton’s links to apartheid South Africa constitutes one of the few scholarly investigations into the Radical Right’s imperial networks.[[61]](#footnote-61) Mark Pitchford included a discussion of Chesterton’s LEL in his *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right* (2011), though his interest lay the group’s antagonistic relationship with the Conservative Party establishment and not on their imperialist ideology in itself.[[62]](#footnote-62) Nigel Copsey and John E. Richardson applied the ‘cultural approach’ to the history of British fascism after 1945 in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism* (2015).[[63]](#footnote-63) The collection included a chapter by Janet Dack on the UM’s ideas about culture. However, Dack mentions Empire only briefly in relation to the influence of Oswald Spengler’s ideas about ‘decline’ and barely discusses the UM’s opposition to immigration at all.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Elsewhere, Richardson has examined fascist ideology across the twentieth century employing methods of critical discourse analysis. In doing so, he has also devoted attention to the neglected Radical Right of the 1950s and 1960s, and in particular to the British National Party (1958-1967).[[65]](#footnote-65) However, Richardson’s interest was primarily in whether or not the BNP was technically a fascist party and on how they expressed their neo-Nazi views rather than on their relationship with the Empire and decolonisation. Also looking at the Radical Right across the twentieth century, Nick Toczek’s *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators* (2016) explores the subculture of British political antisemitism. In establishing the biographical details of a series of obscure Radical Right activists from the 1920s to the 1970s, Toczek also highlighted the prominence of those with a record of ‘empire service’.[[66]](#footnote-66) More recently, Luke LeCras explored the attitudes of the British ‘extreme right’, as he refers to them, and their views on European integration between 1945 and 1975 with reference to Mosley’s Union Movement, Chesterton’s LEL, and the National Front.[[67]](#footnote-67) The Radical Right’s thinking on European integration – which, broadly speaking, Mosley supported and Chesterton opposed – was bound up with their views on the declining British Empire. Despite this, LeCras alludes to imperialism only briefly and in reference to the LEL’s ‘core ideology’.[[68]](#footnote-68)

This state of affairs – where Empire-obsessed British fascists are mostly considered separately from the history and legacy of the British Empire – has persisted in spite of calls for a new research agenda by both Julie Gottlieb and Martin Pugh. Back in 2004, Gottlieb encouraged the ‘historian of Empire’ to investigate the British fascist preoccupation with ‘imperial policy’, ‘fantasies of racial purity and the hierarchies of nations’ and ‘visions of British imperial decline and its attendant cultural decadence’.[[69]](#footnote-69) Moreover, she observed that ‘[t]he leadership and personnel of these movements have been disproportionately drawn from sections of society with direct experience of the Empire, both men and women’.[[70]](#footnote-70) Gottlieb wondered about the influence of ‘personal “colonial encounters”’ on the development of British fascism and also whether historians might fruitfully ‘gender the BUF’s imperial consciousness’.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Martin Pugh made similar observations in his *Hurrah for the Blackshirts* (2006) and in his entry on British fascism for *The* *Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (2009). Pugh placed emphasis on the need to put British fascism in context and to demonstrate its centrality to the history of inter-war Britain. Part of his approach involved considering the development of British fascism against the backdrop of inter-war imperial crises over Ireland and, especially, India.[[72]](#footnote-72) In addition, he suggested that the existence of an ‘alternative, autocratic mode of government… in the empire’ provided a British ‘anti-democratic tradition’ for the Radical Right to follow.[[73]](#footnote-73) In *The* *Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, Pugh speculated that the British imperial enclaves, isolated from the comparatively liberal atmosphere of the British Isles, provided the perfect breeding ground for fascism. Individuals returning from careers as soldiers, settlers, farmers and miners quickly grew disillusioned with Britain and easily succumbed to Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy theories and so on.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Despite Gottlieb and Pugh’s exhortations, there remained a conspicuous shortage of studies on the Radical Right and Empire. Meanwhile, the ‘cultural approach’ to British fascism inspired a range of studies, examining subjects including British fascist subculture and British fascists’ relationship with sports, gambling, celebrity and the consumption of popular culture, Hollywood films, music, religion, ecology, and portraiture.[[75]](#footnote-75) Adding to these, in recent years, belated studies of its relationship with British imperialism have also begun to emerge. In 2015, Paul Stocker published two articles on British fascism and Empire in the inter-war and post-1945 period respectively.[[76]](#footnote-76) While Stocker emphasised the BF, IFL and BUF’s ‘consistent’ and ‘unequivocal’ support for Empire, he argues that their imperialism was subordinate to fascist ideology, with the former essentially a rhetorical tool for the propagation of the latter. Joe Mulhall’s work on the ‘British far right’ and imperial decline similarly downplays the significance of Empire to the Radical Right in the context of decolonisation.[[77]](#footnote-77) My research has led me to a different conclusion, namely, that imperialism was a formative influence on British fascism, influencing not only the political solutions proposed by those on the Radical Right but also the very nature of the problems they perceived. To say that imperialism functioned merely as a linguistic and stylistic trapping for fascist ideology is to miss the way that the legacy of British imperialism shaped the very construction of British fascist ideology in the first place.

My approach is much more in line with that of historians working outside of the field of fascist studies. In 2016, Kate Imy, a historian of war and empire, examined the lives of two Radical Right figures associated with the BUF, Major-General J. F. C. Fuller and Francis Yeats-Brown. Imy made a number of insightful observations about the influence of imperial military service on their later adoption of radical right-wing politics. As well as the xenophobia and authoritarianism inherent in the life of an imperial soldier, she noted the role played by the feelings of impotence that often plagued imperial soldiers ‘frustrated by bureaucratic incompetence and isolated from the top-level decision making of imperial rule in London’.[[78]](#footnote-78) Such feelings left them with a desire for a radical reshaping of politics, a desire to recapture lost strength and the ability to act decisively. In Imy’s view, these desires led Fuller and Yeats-Brown to an interest in yoga and physical culture but also, later on, to fascism. Imy’s article stands out for its innovative approach to the history of British fascism, and attentiveness to the political impact of imperial experience and the influence of ideals of imperial masculinity.

Alongside Imy’s work, this thesis builds on Evan Smith’s recent article on the British Union of Fascists and Australia. Smith takes the question of the ideological influence of British imperialism on British fascism seriously. He considered the BUF’s reverence for Australian racial policy, and the influence they drew from the idealised masculine figure of the imperial pioneer. Smith found that ‘the BUF was fascinated by Australia because of what it offered in its present condition, namely a loyal and largely white settler colony with a seeming abundance of empty land for agrarian “development”’.[[79]](#footnote-79) For Smith, this illustrated the transnational influences acting on British fascism *beyond* those exerted by continental fascist regimes. He argued that the BUF ‘were… heavily indebted to the legacy of British colonialism’.[[80]](#footnote-80) British fascism, wrote Smith, was really ‘an *imperial* form of fascism’, with the British Empire acting as the foundation for its political and economic designs, and the inspiration for both its racial ideology and its ‘new man’.[[81]](#footnote-81)

# **A parallel academic universe**

Few scholars have appreciated the ways in which British imperialism conditioned the ideology of the British Radical Right. Where they have done so, they tend to be historians working *outside* the field of fascist studies, such as Imy and Smith. Historians of fascism have mostly neglected to consider British fascism in light of the history of the British Empire and the influence of the legacy of imperialism. This omission is the result of the tendency of those working in the field of fascist studies to treat fascism as an exceptional ideology. Scholars have treated British fascism as if it were more or less divorced from the rest of the course of British history and, beyond occasional acknowledgement of its Edwardian forebears, hermetically sealed off from indigenous political traditions. The emphasis on fascism’s purported uniqueness is partly the indirect result of the long search for a succinct and distinct definition of the term.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Over the course of the 1990s, from a mess of competing definitions a broad and loose consensus developed in Anglophone scholarship around something resembling Roger Griffin’s definition of fascism as ‘a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism’.[[83]](#footnote-83) By this, Griffin meant that fascism was a radical nationalism that rejected liberal institutions and Enlightenment humanism, and appealed to ‘people power’ in its quest for societal rebirth and the creation of a new order. The identification of an ideological core shared by various national incarnations of fascism offered ‘a thread of Ariadne’ leading out of the labyrinth of competing, and sometimes unwieldy, definitions, facilitating in-depth studies of fascist ideology and comparison between variations of fascism.[[84]](#footnote-84) However, the desperate struggle to distinguish fascism has had the unintended consequence of driving the field of fascist studies into a cul-de-sac. For too long, the field was bogged down in a clash of classifications from which it has only relatively recently begun to emerge. The eagerness to establish fascism as distinct, almost as exceptional, has limited the contribution that historians of fascism have been able to make beyond their own field. The field now constitutes a kind of parallel academic universe in which its practitioners reach beyond their own specialism only to address the neighbouring field of the study of political extremism.

In articles, books and contributions to edited collections over the last several years, a number of scholars have expressed a desire to move beyond ‘the frenzy of conceptually sophisticated definitions and classifications that [has] dominated the fray of fascism studies’.[[85]](#footnote-85) Scholars like Aristotle Kallis, António Costa Pinto and others have turned their attentions instead to the interactions between fascist movements and regimes and other contemporaneous movements of the non-fascist right.[[86]](#footnote-86) As part of this there have been calls to ‘deflate’ fascism and to study it as part of a ‘wider universe on the Right’ rather than as ‘a species apart’.[[87]](#footnote-87) Historians of fascism’s ‘transnational entanglements’ have played a leading role in these innovations.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Sharing their eagerness to expand in new directions, the following study proposes an additional step. Rather than looking at interactions between fascists across national boundaries and between fascists and authoritarian conservatives during the inter-war period, it seeks to investigate fascist interactions with British imperialism across the twentieth century. Interactions such as these also place British fascism into a Radical Right political tradition. In this sense, it draws on the work of Reto Hofmann on Axis imperialism. Hofmann’s work builds on transnational histories of fascism, adopting a ‘trans-imperial perspective’.[[89]](#footnote-89) Hofmann argued that while German, Italian and Japanese colonialism did not directly cause the later rise of fascism, ‘the ideas, discourse, and experience of imperialism’ were crucial to the development of fascism.[[90]](#footnote-90) Fascism, he adds, subsumed imperialism, taking up its struggle against the destabilising impact of capitalism on the nation-state.[[91]](#footnote-91) In addition, Hofmann writes, German, Italian and Japanese fascists ‘thought imperially’ and, when it came to their territorial ambitions, drew heavily on a pan-European ‘imperial imaginary’.[[92]](#footnote-92) This thesis takes a similar line, arguing that British imperialism provided a critical source of ideological nourishment for Britain’s Radical Right.

# **The ‘new’ imperial history meets the ‘old’ fascist historiography**

By placing the British Radical Right in the context of British imperial history, this study argues that the Radical Right represented an extreme manifestation of the Empire’s influence on the metropole, rather than merely a failed, marginal political tendency. This argument is inspired by the work of imperial historians, such as John MacKenzie and other contributors to Manchester University Press’ ‘Studies in Imperialism’ series, who have emphasised the impact that the experience of building and maintaining the Empire had on Britain itself. Founded in the mid-1980s by MacKenzie, from its earliest instalments, contributors to the series have insisted on the centrality of the Empire to Britain’s history. Initially researching and writing against backdrop of the 1982 Falklands War and the ‘many echoes of the earlier period of popular imperialism’ it aroused, MacKenzie was interested in the British Empire’s deep and lasting influence on British society.[[93]](#footnote-93) In his *Propaganda and Empire*, he maintained that ‘imperialism and its related reverence for… established authority, its racial ideas, its national complacency and conceit’ was ‘a core ideology in British society between the 1880s and the 1950s.’[[94]](#footnote-94) The series has proceeded ‘in the belief that imperialism as a cultural phenomenon had as significant an effect on the dominant as on the subordinate societies’.[[95]](#footnote-95) Now standing at over one hundred volumes and still growing, the ‘Studies of Imperialism’ series has expanded beyond British imperial history and features considerations of empire in relation to subjects as diverse as cartoons, the Bible, and photography.[[96]](#footnote-96)

As well as the insights drawn from the ‘Studies of Imperialism’ series, the following thesis owes a debt to the overlapping field of what was once called the ‘new imperial history’. Stephen Howe defined the ‘new imperial history’ as:

approaches to imperial history centred on ideas culture and, often of discourse; ones with strong attention to gender relations and/or racial imaginings; ones which emphasise the impact of colonialism’s cultures on metropole as well as on the colonised, and tend also to urge its continuing effects after the end of formal colonial rule.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Born during the 1990s, this approach to imperial history has its roots in ‘the accelerated attention to the impact of histories of imperialism on metropolitan societies in the wake of decolonization’ as well as the anti-racist and feminist struggles of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.[[98]](#footnote-98) Antoinette Burton places the development of the ‘new imperial history’ into the context of an ‘imperial turn’, alongside the work of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said and others who cast a critical eye over ‘the connections between metropole and colony, race and nation’.[[99]](#footnote-99) Burton, Catherine Hall, Kathleen Wilson and Mrinalini Sinha are just some of the scholars who have applied this approach in various ways to the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British history.[[100]](#footnote-100) The ‘new’ imperial historians were united by their determination to bring ‘metropole and colony in[to] a single analytical field’, and by their contention that both colonised and coloniser were made by the act of colonisation.[[101]](#footnote-101) As Burton asserted, ‘Empire was, in short, not just a phenomenon “out there”, but a fundamental part of English culture and national identity at home’.[[102]](#footnote-102) My conclusions about the Radical Right’s relationship with British imperialism are inspired by the work of the (now not so) ‘new’ imperial historians, and those scholars thinking in the same direction, who insist on the long-lasting effects of imperialism in terms of its influence on constructions of race and gender.

A ‘new man’ – based on an imperial, authoritarian ideal of the ‘white man’ – was to be the engine of the Radical Right’s hoped-for revival. Though historians rarely acknowledge its later links with the politics of the Radical Right, this ideal has a long history, which Catherine Hall and Bill Schwarz have traced back into the nineteenth century. In *White, Male, Middle-Class*, Hall traces the history of an idealised construction of white masculinity ‘associated with strength, with independence and with action’.[[103]](#footnote-103) An early codifier and exponent of this violent, authoritarian, chauvinistic worldview was the nineteenth-century philosopher Thomas Carlyle, a strident defender of the British right to colonise, oppress and repress. In Hall’s view, Carlyle articulated a ‘heroic’ ideal that went on to become the cornerstone of the ‘New Imperialism’ of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, and later fuelled ‘a new popular imperialism’ mobilised by Joseph Chamberlain and the Edwardian Radical Right.[[104]](#footnote-104) Hall even saw echoes of Carlyle’s racialised, masculine ideal in the post-imperial racism of Enoch Powell.

Bill Schwarz has expanded on this idea in a series of articles, contributions to edited collections, and in the first volume of his three-volume *Memories of Empire* series. With the end of the British Empire and the arrival of growing numbers of ‘new’ Commonwealth migrants during the 1950s and 1960s, Schwarz argued that the vocabulary, tropes and racial/racist consciousness of the long history of British imperial conquest reasserted themselves in the metropole.[[105]](#footnote-105) As the Empire ended, what Schwarz refers to as the ‘frontier ethos’ was transplanted to the metropole. Derived from the experience of empire – experiences later retold, dramatized and mythologised – this ‘frontier ethos’ was based on an ideal of white masculinity starkly defined against its supposed racial inferiors, forged in the unforgiving conditions of colonial climes, and propelled by the self-assured authoritarianism of colonial government. For Schwarz, this ethos had a long history, stemming back to the writing of Victorian imperialists.[[106]](#footnote-106) Throughout the twentieth century, he added, it inspired the grand imperial designs of Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Alfred Milner; a host of colonial politicians such as Jan Smuts, Roy Welensky and Ian Smith; and, later, the eloquent racism of Enoch Powell. The ‘frontier ethos’ was predicated on the conviction that the rigours of life on the imperial frontier and the muscular attitude such a lifestyle inspired represented ‘the antidote to the collapse of the centre, England itself’. [[107]](#footnote-107)

Though Schwarz’s work on race, Empire and decolonisation does not address the Radical Right directly, his discussion of the long history of a white, imperial masculinity has shaped the approach taken here towards the Radical Right’s relationship with imperialism.[[108]](#footnote-108) The conviction that the ethos of Empire constituted the antidote to the problems of the metropole was also at the very centre of British Radical Right ideology in the period covered. Radical Right activists consistently framed their political aims as a desire for the British government to conduct itself in the eminently ‘sensible’, violent, authoritarian and racist manner of the governments and settler communities of the colonial frontier. During the inter-war period, in terms of imperial policy, this translated into calls for Britain to return to the ‘old’ and unabashedly repressive methods of colonial government in India and elsewhere. In terms of domestic politics, they called for the fostering of an imperial ‘spirit’ and for a British leader prepared to govern with the single-mindedness of Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, ‘Clive of India’, and other ‘Empire-builders’. After 1945, as the Empire was reconfigured in an attempt to preserve it as a looser and theoretically more liberal association, Radical Right activists idolised countries like South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. With the advent of decolonisation, they looked to the white settlers of the frontier, now divorced or in the act of divorcing from the Empire in the name of white supremacy.

Despite all this, the Radical Right rarely features in the writings of postcolonial scholars interested in the metropolitan political reverberations of the British Empire during the twentieth century. The absence of the Radical Right in such studies is all the stranger given that considerations of the possible relationship between European colonialism and fascism are present in one of the key texts of proto-postcolonial literature. First published in 1950 by Martinquan poet Aimé Cesairé, *Discourse on Colonialism* anticipated some of the arguments later made by Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*.[[109]](#footnote-109) Cesairé wrote accusingly that Nazism constituted the application *in Europe* of ‘colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa’.[[110]](#footnote-110) Predating not only Arendt’s *The* *Origins of Totalitarianism* but also Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Cesairé’s *Discourse on Colonialism* demonstrates that the idea that fascism and imperialism are intimately related is older than the field of postcolonial studies itself.

Undoubtedly, the self-inflicted marginalisation of fascist studies has impeded the emergence of work on this relationship by imperial historians. The cloistered field of fascist studies has shown little interest in stressing the broader relevance of British fascism to British history. This has served to reinforce the received wisdom that, beyond its specialists, the history of British fascism can be safely ignored. Alongside this, historians who insist on the Empire’s enduring impact on Britain must contend with their critics, those who argue that the Empire had a minimal impact on Britain itself. Scholars who take this view, such as Bernard Porter or Peter Marshall, would like nothing more than to write off enthusiasm for Empire as the preserve of a negligible Radical Right minority. [[111]](#footnote-111) It is not the aim of this thesis to argue that enthusiastic support for the Empire ceased to exist beyond the small memberships of the politically unsuccessful Radical Right groups examined in the following chapters. However, it also refuses to disown the Radical Right. As John E. Richardson recently urged his fellow scholars to remember, those on the British Radical Right ‘are *British*’and their ideas ‘reflect British history and British political problematics’.[[112]](#footnote-112) Tellingly, as supporting evidence of the Radical Right’s Britishness, Richardson noted their often-overlooked ardent support for Empire, support that lasted into the era of decolonisation.

What follows is the story of the Radical Right’s relationship with the British Empire written as a segment of a broader history of the British Empire, race and decolonisation in the twentieth century. It proceeds in the spirit of similar studies by historians such as Schwarz, Barbara Bush, Wendy Webster, Marc Matera, Kathleen Paul, Laura Tabili, Lucy Bland, Kennetta Hammond Perry and Jordanna Bailkin.[[113]](#footnote-113) For these scholars, the history of the British Empire is not simply the history of interactions between two poles, metropole and colony. Instead, they regard British imperialism as a shifting collection of laws; ideas about democracy, government and the maintenance of public order; and discourses of race, gender and class. They approach imperialism instead as a force that encompassed and could suddenly intrude upon both metropole and colony, shaping institutions, individuals, social attitudes, and political ideologies.

# **Thinking Imperially**

When those on the Radical Right thought, they thought ‘imperially’ and it is worth asking how, why, and what this meant. In doing so, this thesis employs a ‘history of ideas’ approach similar to that used by Dan Stone in his work on extreme English ‘proto-fascists’.[[114]](#footnote-114) Stone argued that even though his subjects were ‘never remotely likely to storm the bastions of power’, by their very existence they reveal ‘certain strands of thought in Britain’ during the inter-war period.[[115]](#footnote-115) While the subjects of Stone’s study were a collection of esoteric Nietzschean intellectuals – he disregards the actually existing fascist movements in Britain as overrated imitators – his approach has nonetheless informed my work. That Radical Right activists so often expressed their ideas and aims in an imperial idiom is significant, even though those same activists belonged to small, fractious groups who never came remotely close to winning political power. The British Radical Right’s relevance lies in its abysmal and, thankfully, failed ideas. The ideas of the Radical Right activists discussed herein link them to a utopian-imperialist ‘strand of thought’ with deep roots in Britain’s history.[[116]](#footnote-116) That their thinking was so thoroughly imbricated with imperialism establishes the Radical Right as an undeniable part of the history of Britain and its Empire.

In examining these groups and their ideas, my research returns also to the ‘cultural approach’ to the history of fascism. In this sense, I try to see the Radical Right as its adherents saw themselves, attempting ‘to understand the movement on its own terms’.[[117]](#footnote-117) In doing so, a degree of methodological ‘empathy’ is necessary.[[118]](#footnote-118) Those on the Radical Right sought not simply to rise to political office but to transform the world, they desired a new and ‘total’ political environment, based the ‘ethos’ of Empire. It is not enough to say simply that Radical Right activists were imperialists; it is necessary to reconstruct their worldview in order to highlight the essential role of imperialism within it. Moreover, in its desire to situate the Radical Right within a broader historical context, this thesis returns to the original intention of cultural historians of fascism unfortunately forgotten by many later scholars.

Approaching the British Radical Right armed with insights drawn from intellectual and cultural history has led this study to inevitably privilege some sources over others. The following chapters draw mostly on material created by Radical Right activists in order to propagate their ideas and further their goals. This includes newspapers, journals, pamphlets and books produced by Radical Right groups. Much of the material used within belongs to the various collections of fascist documents held by the University of Sheffield’s Special Collections with additional similar material from the British Library, the Wiener Holocaust Library and the University of Northampton’s Searchlight Archive.

Such an approach comes with its own methodological issues and its critics. Part of this project involved attempts to acquire new material in order to expand the University of Sheffield’s archives. My efforts to do so provided an illustration of some of these issues. In an attempt to expand the archive, I was involved a correspondence with Jeffrey Wallder, the resident amateur historian of the Friends of Oswald Mosley (FOM).[[119]](#footnote-119) The FOM is an organisation composed of veteran Mosleyite activists dedicated to preserving and, crucially, rehabilitating the memory of Oswald Mosley. Wallder possessed his own vast (though now depleted) collection of Mosleyite material, some of which he has donated to the University’s Special Collections on previous occasions. Through my contact with him, I was successful in securing the acquisition of further material on post-war British fascism, some of it very rare and now available in the University’s ‘British Union Collection’. However, my interactions with Wallder were a stark reminder that this is a contested history. While adopting a degree of methodological ‘empathy’ has proved essential, my experiences have also served as a warning that there are individuals and organisations out to rose-tint the history of British fascism, to bring it in line with the way that fascists saw themselves. Those interested in repairing British fascism’s reputation focus on its grand political visions, denying or downplaying the authoritarian ambitions and violent racism of past British fascists.

Given the continuing efforts of right-wing extremists rewrite their pasts, some historians have called for combative and explicitly anti-fascist histories of fascism. David Renton notably argued that historians should write ‘critical’, ‘antagonistic’ and even ‘hostile’ histories of fascism.[[120]](#footnote-120) He criticised what he perceived as the disproportionate ‘emphasis on the central role of ideas’ by other historians of fascism, in particular warning of uncritically privileging ‘the fascist view of itself’.[[121]](#footnote-121) For Renton, approaches focused on fascist culture and ideas sanitised fascism, divorcing fascist ideology from the violent racism of fascist practice. A number of other historians including have echoed Renton’s criticisms.[[122]](#footnote-122) While Renton and his fellow critics have made a series of important points, especially regarding the importance of emphasising that violence and racism lay at the heart of fascist thinking, their criticisms of intellectual and cultural histories of fascism are overstated.[[123]](#footnote-123)

In the first instance, where possible, I have supplemented Radical Right material with non-fascist material held by the National Archives and even explicitly anti-fascist material from sources such as the archives of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In addition, the very nature of the project militates against any possible sanitisation of the Radical Right’s past. Analysing the Radical Right’s relationship with the legacy of British colonialism illuminates its links to a long and violent history of racism, conquest, and oppression. Those on the Radical Right imagined carrying out violence against Jews, people of colour and other minorities in the same spirit as the British Empire inflicted violence upon colonised peoples. Equally, they imagined wielding unrestrained political authority at home in the same casually inhumane manner in which British imperial adventurers did abroad. Examining the place of imperialism within their ideology, and the influence of imperialism on their ideas, sheds light on the principles that guided the practice of Radical Right activists in the present and shaped their intentions for the future. A future that, it is worth mentioning, Radical Right activists envisioned in terms of the British Raj or apartheid South Africa writ large; a new world order predicated on the violence, racism and repression of colonialism.

More than this, it would have been impossible, as the son of a West Indian immigrant, to write about the Radical Right uncritically, without hostility or antagonism. Carrying out research for chapters on the 1950s and 1960s provoked regular reminders that when my historical subjects attacked the ‘coloured invasion’ in print or perpetrated violence against people of colour on the streets of Britain, their vitriolic racism was aimed at people like *me*. What follows, then, is a necessarily *critical* intellectual and cultural history of the Radical Right’s obsession with the past, present and potential future of the British Empire.[[124]](#footnote-124)

# **Chapter outline**

The thesis opens with two chapters that reconstruct how Radical Right activists saw Britain and the world during the inter-war period and consider the influence that imperial race discourse and other imperially derived racial ideas had on these perceptions. Chapter 1 deals with the British Radical Right during the 1920s, beginning with a brief consideration of the pre-1918 history of antisemitic conspiracy theories in Britain. It examines the previously unacknowledged way that contributors to *The Patriot* journal and the members of The Britons, the Loyalty League and the BF consistently interpreted these theories, such as the one infamously outlined in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, in imperial terms. In addition, it explores the central role played by first-hand imperial experiences in determining Radical Right activists’ imaginings of a nightmarish Jewish-Bolshevik uprising both in Britain and throughout the Empire.

Chapter 2 examines the persistent influence of imperial race discourse on the IFL and the BUF during the 1930s. Such ideas continued to shape the worldview of Radical Right activists despite the ideological influence exerted on them by consolidated continental fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. This chapter also discusses how the British Radical Right’s imperial fascism developed against the backdrop of negotiations about the future of British rule in India, rising international tensions played out through the League of Nations, and the appeasement of Nazi Germany’s territorial ambitions. The end of the chapter deals with the BUF’s visions of a fascist world order – a system of international diplomacy based on an alliance of British, German and Italian empires – the illiberal counter-argument to the liberal-imperialist ideals which underwrote the League of Nations’ mandate system.

Chapter 3 discusses the imperial antidote proposed by those on the British Radical Right as a means of halting supposedly Jewish-directed national and imperial decline. Against the plot afoot against the Empire, Radical Right activists called for a revival of imperial masculinity throughout the Empire and within Britain itself. By this, they meant a return to an ideal of masculinity formulated and propagated during the height of British imperial expansion during the late Victorian and Edwardian period. The chapter examines attempts by The Britons, BF, IFL and BUF to create ‘new’ men based on older, imperial constructions of masculinity. They looked to the so-called ‘man on the spot’ as the antidote to the problems of the metropole and the colony. Decrying British imperial policy and political leadership during the 1920s and 1930s, they argued for the revival of the ‘spirit’ of the Empire-builders, of Drake, Raleigh, and even the Amritsar massacre’s General Dyer.

Moving ahead to the last few years of the Second World War and into the early 1950s, Chapter 4 covers Radical Right activists’ attempts at political revival. In the context of plans to revive a war-torn Britain and Europe, as well as in reacting against a half-hearted post-war liberalisation of colonial policy, the Radical Right continued to enthuse over Empire. The chapter demonstrates that grandiose imperialist designs were at centre of Mosley’s UM; the journalism of ex-Mosleyite A.K. Chesterton, now writing in respectable Conservative publications; and the so-called ‘Aryan Imperialism’ advocated by former leader of the IFL, Arnold Leese, and his remaining followers. During this period, the British Radical Right’s obsession with white settlers in southern Africa, which largely replaced their fixation with inter-war fascist regimes, became more and more a feature of their politics.

As decolonisation progressed faster and more dramatically than British politicians had expected or planned for, the Radical Right’s relationship with Empire was transformed. Drawing on the literature on Enoch Powell and his relationship with the British Empire, Chapter 5 discusses the growing sense of imperial disillusionment among Mosley, Chesterton, Leese and their respective followers during a period of decolonisation and Commonwealth immigration. In the context of these phenomena, those on the Radical Right expressed their opposition to immigration with reference to events in the decolonising African continent. Beyond the streets of Britain, colonial policymakers during this time sought to reformulate the Empire as a (theoretically) multi-racial Commonwealth. Those on the Radical Right rejected this arrangement, and increasingly identified with countries like South Africa and, especially after 1965, Southern Rhodesia.

They idolised white settler countries who also rejected Britain’s liberal aspirations for the Commonwealth and forged links with white supremacists across southern Africa. Disappointed and disillusioned with the Commonwealth remnants of Empire, the UM and the LEL, joined by new groups including the BNP and GBM, even proposed alternative alliances with the ‘white’ sections of the former Empire. Radical Right activists further blurred the line between colony and metropole, imagining Britain itself as a white settler community besieged by vast numbers of black immigrants led by shadowy ‘Jewish’ forces. The chapters ends with a discussion of the abortive attempts by the newly-formed National Front – a merger of the LEL, BNP, GBM and others – and the declining UM to exploit the furore following Powell’s infamous expression of a nightmarish inversion of colonialism in his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech.

My intention is to write the history of the British Radical Right as a previously neglected part of British imperial history. By charting the long-running imperial obsessions of those on the Radical Right, obsessions that outlasted the Empire’s existence, my hope is to contribute to a wider discussion of the political effects and after-effects of the British Empire.

# 1 Empire Imperilled: Imperialism and Race on the British Radical Right, 1918-1930

# **Introduction**

One day in the autumn of 1919, a typewritten manuscript arrived at the office of H. A. Gwynne, the editor of the die-hard Conservative daily newspaper, the *Morning Post*.[[125]](#footnote-125) It consisted of the text of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an antisemitic document purporting to detail a Jewish plot for ‘World Government’. Gwynne sent copies of the manuscript to Lady Bathurst, the *Morning* Post’s proprietor, and his friend and mentor, Rudyard Kipling, as well as to several others.[[126]](#footnote-126) No one knows what language or form the manuscript was in or, indeed, who delivered it. *The Protocols* became the basis for a series of articles published under the title ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ in the *Morning* *Post* in the early summer of the following year. Published anonymously, the series’ authors included Gwynne; Ian Colvin, another journalist on the *Morning Post*; the conspiracy theorist Nesta Webster; and several others.[[127]](#footnote-127) Published also in the midst of a crisis of empire between 1919 and 1922, the series’ authors interpreted *The Protocols* in imperial terms and claimed that the Jewish world plot it described ‘intimately’ concerned the British Empire.[[128]](#footnote-128) Jewish plotters were said to be the prime mover behind every anti-colonial intrigue from Ireland to Egypt and India. ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ expressed a worldview characterised by imperialism, imperially-influenced racism and antisemitic conspiracy theory.

The following chapter constitutes an analysis of this worldview. It posits that in order to understand the ardent faith that those on the British Radical Right had in the Empire as an antidote to Britain’s problems, it is first necessary to understand the ways in which they conceived of the Empire as a body menaced by a deadly disease. The disease in question was a Jewish world plot, operating through a series of proxies including colonial nationalists, politicians and colonial administrators bent on progressive reforms, immigrants, Bolsheviks, and more. The chapter begins with an examination of the roots of this racist, imperialist, and antisemitic worldview that predate the appearance of the aforementioned paranoid series of articles in the *Morning Post*. From a consideration of its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the chapter moves on to analyse of the central place occupied by imperialism, and in particular imperialist race discourse, in the British Radical Right’s worldview during the 1920s. In the wake of the Russian Revolution and the *Morning Post*’s publicising of *The Protocols*, the perceived need to combat Jewish-directed anti-imperialist schemes became the motivation for a number of Radical Right of activists and ideologues. Writers like Nesta Webster and groups like the Loyalty League, the British Fascisti, and The Britons all pledged to fight Jewish designs against the Empire. As this chapter goes on to show, while each individual or group’s conception of such designs differed, all were coloured by direct experience of Empire and the influence of imperial race discourse.

# **Imperial anxiety and antisemitism**

Writing in the *Wiener Library Bulletin* in 1981, Geoffrey Field speculated on the existence of an English ‘tradition’ of antisemitism. A possible list, he mused, might include such figures as Arnold White, Joseph Banister, Nesta Webster, William Joyce, Ian Colvin, J. H. Clarke, and ‘possibly’ Oswald Mosley.[[129]](#footnote-129) All of the names on Field’s speculative list appear in this or later chapters. All of these individuals conceived of organised Jewish ‘power’ as a unique threat to the existence of the British Empire. Despite this, scholars have overlooked the thoroughly imperialist terms in which this British ‘tradition’ of antisemitism interpreted and expressed ideas of Jewish world conspiracy. As well as neglecting to examine the ways in which antisemitism was expressed through the medium of concerns about the Empire, historians have also overlooked the intertwined nature of colonial racism and antisemitism in the British context.

As David Feldman and Abigail Green remarked a number of years ago, studies on the relationship between Jews and the British Empire are scarce, and they remain so.[[130]](#footnote-130) There has been a tendency to take the two subjects, the history of Jews in Britain and the history of the British Empire, separately. When it comes to the history of British racism, for instance, Tony Kushner has presented racism against Eastern European Jewish immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as distinct from colonially-influenced racism.[[131]](#footnote-131) In its consideration of the Radical Right’s imperialist antisemitism, this chapter uses as a springboard studies by Bryan Cheyette and Daniel Renshaw that contradict this tendency and consider Jews as imperial subjects, one of many ‘others’ in the British Empire.

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of what Gisela Lebzelter has referred to as a new, ‘modern’ antisemitism related to but distinct from the ‘age-old hostility against a Jewish minority’.[[132]](#footnote-132) This modern incarnation of anti-Jewish prejudice as it manifested in Britain reflected anxieties about national identity in the context of Jewish emancipation, immigration, and the Empire.[[133]](#footnote-133) In particular, the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) unleashed an imperial panic in Britain. It had taken the British Empire nearly three years to subdue ‘an army of farmer-soldiers’.[[134]](#footnote-134) These and other revelations in the conflict’s aftermath culminated in a moral panic about the deterioration of the standard physical health among Britain’s urban population and the implications this had for the safety and strength of the Empire.[[135]](#footnote-135) ‘National efficiency’ became the watchword. Some efficiency-obsessed commentators like Arnold White, looked about for someone to blame for Britain’s decline. What Bryan Cheyette has called the ‘radical ambivalence of Jewish racial representations’ provided a well-established narrative for antisemitic conspiracy theories.[[136]](#footnote-136)

The racialisation of Jewish people in Britain took place against the backdrop of colonial expansion. In Daniel Renshaw’s view, the growing presence of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Britain during the 1880s caused a ‘conflation of “colonial” and “domestic” forms of racial prejudice’.[[137]](#footnote-137) The Jewish community was depicted as both ‘fundamentally alien to British society, culture, and the body politic’ but also simultaneously ‘*resident* in British towns and cities’.[[138]](#footnote-138) That Jewish people fell between British racial categories ‘conferred a peculiar combination of strength and vulnerability’.[[139]](#footnote-139) In the febrile atmosphere following a protracted colonial war, this marked Britain’s Jewish population out as a target for national/imperial anxieties. A number of writers and social commentators on both the right and the left portrayed Jews not only as a nation within a nation, but as an empire within the Empire.

At first, antisemitic conspiracy theories were deployed by liberal and left-wing opponents of the Anglo-Boer War. Economist J. A. Hobson and the leader of the Social Democratic Federation, Henry M. Hyndman, both argued that the war was being fought at the behest of a small group of Jewish financiers.[[140]](#footnote-140) From the opposite end of the political spectrum, Arnold White made similar antisemitic allegations. White was a champion of the cause of ‘national efficiency’ and took part in a number of groups dedicated to strengthening the race, nation and Empire including the Navy League, the National Service League and the Eugenics Education Society.[[141]](#footnote-141) He originally made his name as a campaigning journalist during the 1880s through his preoccupations with urban degeneration and Jewish immigration.[[142]](#footnote-142)

Dan Stone dubbed *Efficiency and Empire* (1901), White’s analysis of the British Empire’s ailments, the ‘central text’ of the ‘national efficiency’ movement.[[143]](#footnote-143) In *Efficiency and Empire*, White blamed British national decline and imperial weakness on what he called the ‘bad smart society’, an element of the governing class composed of aristocrats and ‘the scions of new money’ who had bought their elevated positions.[[144]](#footnote-144) Wealthy ‘bad foreign Jews’, according to White, formed a key part of ‘bad smart society’. [[145]](#footnote-145) For White, these elements represented ‘a danger to the Empire’ but had so far managed to cloak the threat they posed through control of the press.[[146]](#footnote-146)

White was not simply an isolated journalist writing about his pet issues. His views ‘resonated quite strongly’ in the political atmosphere of late Victorian and early Edwardian Britain.[[147]](#footnote-147) Outside of his journalism, he was also a member of the anti-immigration movement the British Brothers League (BBL). The BBL were in favour of immigration restriction, and though they tried to avoid overt antisemitism, regularly employed antisemitic euphemisms and targeted Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.[[148]](#footnote-148) The group was led by Indian Army veteran and Conservative MP for Stepney, Captain William Evans Gordon.[[149]](#footnote-149) White addressed the BBL’s ‘most successful public meeting’ on 14 January 1902 at the People’s Palace, Mile End Road.[[150]](#footnote-150) Like White, the BBL considered the struggle against Jewish immigration as part of an overall drive for national and imperial efficiency.[[151]](#footnote-151) They were ultimately successful in their goal as the BBL’s campaigning played a considerable role in the passing of the 1905 Aliens Act, the first British legislation to restrict immigration.[[152]](#footnote-152) As with White, the BBL’s opposition to immigration was rooted in broader imperialist ideology. Bernard Gainer noted that immigration ‘restrictionists’, as he called them, looked to the example of strict colonial restrictions on immigration in Canada, Australia and the United States.[[153]](#footnote-153) Furthermore, Daniel Pick and David Feldman both presented the anti-alienism of the early twentieth century as an attempt to form a Conservative cross-class union in British society against internal and external threats to the nation and Empire.[[154]](#footnote-154)

At the extreme end of the anti-alien movement was the prolific antisemitic writer Joseph Banister. One of Banister’s early books, *England Under the Jews* (1901), articulated much of what White had said in far less restrained terms. Like White, Banister accused the Jews of instigating a conflict with the Boers and profiting out of the ensuing war.[[155]](#footnote-155) In addition, he accused Jewish forces of pursuing a particularly materialistic, financial form of imperialism devoid of the sense of the racial mission apparently possessed by ‘true’ British imperialism.[[156]](#footnote-156) Like White, Banister believed that the Jews were behind the ‘invasion’ of Britain by immigration.[[157]](#footnote-157) In particular, he accused them of importing ‘Chinese laundry-men into England’.[[158]](#footnote-158) He advanced the idea, later stock-in-trade for much of the Radical Right, that Jews wanted to dilute British ‘race feeling’, supposedly the only obstacle to their megalomaniacal aspirations, using immigration.

The imperialist antisemitism of Banister and White cast a long shadow. Their ideas were influential on a later generation of British antisemites. For instance, the argument that the Jews were behind the Anglo-Boer War was continually cited in the publications of many Radical Right groups in the 1920s and 1930s, including The Britons, the Imperial Fascist League, and the British Union of Fascists.[[159]](#footnote-159) Banister also continued to write in Radical Right publications until the late 1930s.[[160]](#footnote-160) Both he and White were later involved with the antisemitic group The Britons.[[161]](#footnote-161) The antisemitic conspiracy theories used by White and Banister to explain the imperial crises of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became the template for the next mutation of British Radical Right conspiracy theory: the idea that the Jews were behind the Great War.

Earlier antisemitic tropes were worked into theories of a German (and later German-Jewish) ‘hidden hand’ by authors such as J. H. Clarke, a prominent London-based homeopath and fanatical antisemite. His book *England Under the Heel of the Jew* was published in 1918 and the influence of earlier antisemitic imperialists on the work is evident. Clarke referred to the Great War as ‘a war of Jewish finance’ and to lend substance to these racist allegations, repeated claims about the Jewish origins of the Anglo-Boer War.[[162]](#footnote-162) Alongside this, he accused the agents of what he called Jewish ‘Money-power’ of embracing and enlarging ‘Irish rebels’ and of increasing ‘politico-commercial German influence’ from ‘India and Persia, through Turkey, Egypt and North Africa generally southwards’ against the British Empire.[[163]](#footnote-163) Clarke went on to become the vice-president of The Britons, whose history and ideas are dealt with later in this chapter, and effectively led the group until his death in 1931.[[164]](#footnote-164)

# **The Empire and *the Elders***

With the end of the First World War, the British Empire was at its height. The demands of war resulted in the knitting together of the Empire as a ‘coherent political, military and strategic unit’. In the aftermath of the conflict, the British Empire expanded with the addition of Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq as League of Nations’ mandated territories.[[165]](#footnote-165) At the same time, the war generated further colonial unrest. Initially buoyed by the Wilsonian-inspired vogue for ‘self-determination’ immediately following the war, colonial nationalists in Ireland, India and Egypt took up their old grievances.[[166]](#footnote-166) In Ireland, throughout 1919, Irish nationalist guerrillas gradually increased their militant campaign, at first directed at the Royal Irish Constabulary but later also at the British Army.[[167]](#footnote-167) From 1920 until his arrest in 1922, Gandhi led his first non-cooperation campaign against the British Raj.[[168]](#footnote-168) Meanwhile, Egypt was in open revolt against the interference of British ‘advisers’ in domestic affairs, unrest that ultimately led to the declaration of Egyptian independence in 1922.[[169]](#footnote-169) The conjunction of anti-colonial unrest between 1919 and 1922 has been termed a ‘crisis of empire’.[[170]](#footnote-170)

Adding to colonial troubles was a series of domestic concerns. Britain was host to a ‘disconcerting’ number of strikes between 1919 and 1921.[[171]](#footnote-171) Increasing industrial militancy culminated in 1921 in a thwarted general strike. Glasgow, London and other major British cities served as sites of conflict between striking workers and the police. As in the case of the ‘battle of George Square’ in Glasgow in late February 1919, the government resorted to the deployment of tanks and soldiers wielding machine guns to restore order.[[172]](#footnote-172) This was not just an isolated incident but reflected the fears of leading politicians and military officials who were busy drafting plans to use the armed forces to quell a potential national revolutionary strike.[[173]](#footnote-173) The increasingly political nature of industrial unrest and the example of the recent revolutionary activity in Russia and Germany inspired fears that Britain was on the brink of open red revolt.

It was in the midst of this mixture of imperial crises, industrial unrest and fears over the spectre of communism that an English translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* landed in Britain. The arrival of an English edition of *The Protocols* coincided with British intervention on the ‘White’ side of the Russian Civil War and fanned the flames of anti-Bolshevik antisemitism. The turbulent events of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war constituted the ‘crucial event’ in the development of antisemitism in Britain after 1918.[[174]](#footnote-174) From the fact that Jews were overrepresented within the ranks of European left and especially the Leninist revolutionaries, both official government propagandists and sections of the right-wing press in Britain promoted antisemitic theories about ‘Jewish-Bolshevism’.[[175]](#footnote-175) For instance, one 1917 editorial in *The Times* thundered ‘that Lenin and several of his confederates are adventurers of German-Jewish blood and in German pay’.[[176]](#footnote-176) With the Moscow-based Communist International (CI) issuing proclamations of solidarity with movements of national liberation throughout the colonised world, the imagined enemy of ‘Jewish-Bolshevism’ appeared as a specific threat to the Empire.[[177]](#footnote-177)

Though later revealed to be little more than plagiarised extracts from nineteenth century novels and political pamphlets, *The Protocols* purported to be the blueprint for the establishment of a Jewish ‘super-government’. [[178]](#footnote-178) The document outlined the plan of the so-called ‘Elders’ to use almost every progressive cause and policy as a smokescreen to disguise their plot. *The Times* more or less promoted *The Protocols* in May 1920, while the *Morning Post* favourably interpreted them in its aforementioned ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series a few months later. That same year, Eyre & Spottiswoode, His Majesty’s Printers and the publishers of the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Anglican Prayer Book, published *The Protocols* in book form.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Missing from earlier historiographical discussions of *The Protocols*’ reception in Britain is the way that they were interpreted with specific reference to the British Empire. Theyprovided a narrative through which those anxious about the Empire could weave their separate concerns into a general thesis of conspiracy. For instance, British imperialists quickly seized on the sections detailing plans to use ‘self-government’ to turn the populace into ‘a disorganised rabble’.[[180]](#footnote-180) For certain extreme sections of ‘die-hard’ Conservative opinion in Britain, it mattered little that *The Protocols* were exposed as bogus; for them, they explained the changes and challenges the British Empire faced following the First World War.

The term ‘die-hard’ was originally applied to the Conservative peers who opposed the 1911 Parliament Act.[[181]](#footnote-181) By the 1920s, it referred to a ‘fragmented movement of opinion’ comprised of Conservative MPs, peers and party supporters who were concerned, among other things, with the preservation of Empire.[[182]](#footnote-182) They were paranoid about the survival of the Empire and supported the ‘repressive policing’ of colonised peoples.[[183]](#footnote-183) As well as the crises of Empire during this time, they were also reacting against what they perceived as the British government’s conciliatory approach towards colonial nationalism. The die-hards were vociferously opposed to the colonial policies of the coalition government of Lloyd George following the First World War. The coalition government formulated their colonial policy on the basis that Britain could not afford to become embroiled in costly or potentially politically embarrassing clashes to reassert imperial authority.[[184]](#footnote-184) Instead, they tried to outmanoeuvre colonial nationalist movements primarily using concessions rather than with force.

The *Report on Indian Constitutional Reform* by Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India (1917-1922), and Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India (1916-1921), crystallised the new liberal-sounding intentions of British colonial policy following the First World War. The Montagu-Chelmsford *Report* and subsequent Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms established the principle ‘that imperial subjects should henceforth regard their self-determination as an entirely legitimate goal which British governments would welcome rather than resist.’[[185]](#footnote-185) The British Empire did not suddenly abandon violent or repressive methods; during the 1920s, Britain unleashed the full force of recent technological innovations in aerial warfare on rebellious colonial populations.[[186]](#footnote-186) However, this new approach did lead a series of changes including the cessation of Britain’s extraterritorial rights in Turkey, Persia and Siam, and the granting of formal independence to Egypt in 1922.[[187]](#footnote-187) The same year also saw the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the product of many years of bloody conflict between coloniser and colonised, which created the Irish Free State as a self-governing Dominion, with Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom. Imperial policymakers saw all this as a means of preserving and extending, rather than surrendering, imperial rule. The die-hards saw it very differently.

The *Morning Post*’s ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series represented a fusion of die-hard imperial anxieties and antisemitic conspiracy theory. In terms of its political line, the *Morning Post* was die-hard to its core. A few days before the first instalment of ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series, the paper launched a funding-raising campaign in support of General Reginald E. H. Dyer.[[188]](#footnote-188) Dyer was a British Indian Army officer censured and later dismissed by the British government after ordering his soldiers to fire on a crowd of civilians during protests in the Punjab on 13 April 1919. According to conservative official estimates, his actions resulted in the deaths of 379 people and the wounding of around 1,200 in what became known as the Amritsar massacre.[[189]](#footnote-189) The *Morning Post*’s fund raised £1,500 in support of Dyer during its first twenty-four hours, £5,917 in less than a week, and a total of £26,317 1*s.* 10*d.* overall.[[190]](#footnote-190)

The pieces in ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ attacked the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu. As well as pioneering progressive-sounding Indian constitutional reform, in the wake of the Amritsar massacre Montagu criticised both Dyer and the conduct of the colonial government in the Punjab.[[191]](#footnote-191) For this, and his role in securing Dyer’s dismissal from the army, Montagu became the *bête noire* of the die-hards. He was later forced to resign partly under pressure from die-hard Conservative MPs.[[192]](#footnote-192) In their attacks on Montagu, his die-hard critics in Parliament and in the press regularly referred to his Jewish background.[[193]](#footnote-193) Despite its anti-Dyer stance, even *The Times* made antisemitic allusions to Montagu’s Jewish background in their lukewarm review of his speech during the Commons debate over the Amritsar massacre. The ‘fault’ of his speech lay, in their reporter’s view, lay in the fact that ‘he is… a Jew and… has the mental idiom of the East’.[[194]](#footnote-194)

The authors of ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series interpreted the presence of statesmen from Jewish backgrounds working in the upper echelons of British colonial administration as proof of the ‘dangerous’ and ‘subtle’ forces operating against the Empire.[[195]](#footnote-195) They attacked not only Montagu but also Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India (1921-1926), and Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner of Palestine (1920-1925). Many of the causes dear to the die-hards, such as the struggle against nationalism in Ireland, India and Egypt, were incorporated into their interpretation of *The Protocols*.[[196]](#footnote-196) They alleged that a concerted campaign aimed at the ‘destruction of the British Empire’ was allegedly being waged in ‘every country of the East… throughout North Africa from Morocco to Egypt, in Turkey, Arabia, and the whole of Asia’. [[197]](#footnote-197) The British Empire had been marked out in this way because it was the one global force, according to the series’ authors, that stood in the way of the aims outlined in *The Protocols*.[[198]](#footnote-198)

Nesta Webster, one of the writers behind the *Morning Post*’s ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series, made the idea of a plot against the British imperial ‘civilization’ the major theme of her literary career. Dubbed the ‘grand dame of British conspiracy theory’, Webster spent most of the 1920s and the early 1930s elaborating on the history of this conspiracy and its many agents in a series of lengthy tomes and journal articles.[[199]](#footnote-199) Webster also wrote for *The Patriot*, a journal founded in February 1922 and financed by Alan Ian Percy, the eighth Duke of Northumberland.[[200]](#footnote-200) Northumberland was a signatory of the 1922 ‘Die-Hard’ manifesto and ‘the alternative leader of the Die-hards’ next to Lord Salisbury and John Gretton MP.[[201]](#footnote-201) Like Webster, Northumberland believed that unseen forces were operating against the British Empire and used *The Patriot* as a mouthpiece for these views. His paranoia was undergirded by his imperial experiences as a soldier in the Anglo-Boer War, in the Egyptian Army, and as an additional aide-de-camp to the governor-general of Canada.[[202]](#footnote-202) Northumberland’s Boswell Press also published many of Webster’s books. For the Radical Right groups of the 1920s, her writings linked together the subterranean world of occult secret societies with challenges to the imperial power and traditional authority in the ‘surface’ world. Other proconsular contributors to *The Patriot* such as Lord Sydenham of Combe (Governor of Victoria, Australia from 1901-1903; Governor of Bombay, 1907-1913; and also a signatory of the ‘Die-Hard’ manifesto) and Sir Michael O’Dwyer (Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, from 1912 to 1919) aided her in this.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Webster revived a tradition of conspiracy theory dating back to the French reactionaries of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. [[204]](#footnote-204) She became interested in eighteenth century France after undergoing ‘a profound mystical experience’ on a visit to Switzerland in 1910. This led Webster to believe that she was the reincarnation of late eighteenth century French aristocrat whose family fell victim to the revolutionary ‘Terror’.[[205]](#footnote-205) She was drawn to the writings of those who presented the Revolution as the work of occult secret societies rather than the product of legitimate political, social or economic grievances. Much like Augustin Barruel and John Robison before her, Webster blamed the French Revolution on the Freemasons and the members of Adam Weishaupt’s Bavarian Illuminati.[[206]](#footnote-206) According to Webster, inspired by Enlightenment philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Freemasons and the Illuminati wanted ‘*to destroy civilization*’ which they saw as an artificial constraint on mankind.[[207]](#footnote-207) Webster believed that precisely the same forces threatened the British nation and Empire in the 1920s as had toppled the French aristocracy in the 1790s.[[208]](#footnote-208)

The Jews played a special role within the conspiracy Webster claimed to have exposed. She attributed to Jewish people the twin roles of the directors of international socialism and the agents of ‘the German Imperial machine’.[[209]](#footnote-209) *The Protocols* emanated from the same tradition of conspiracy theory as Webster’s reactionary fantasies about Freemasonry and Illuminism.[[210]](#footnote-210) While she claimed she was unsure of their authority, Webster concluded that ‘If… the Protocols are genuine, *they are the revised programme of illuminized Freemasonry formulated by a Jewish lodge of the Order*.’[[211]](#footnote-211) Clinging to vestiges of wartime anti-Germanism, Webster also argued that the Jewish world conspirators were specifically ‘German-Jews’.[[212]](#footnote-212)

What little we know of Webster’s background and private life sheds important light on her conspiracy theories. To an extent though, her life is shrouded in mystery. Webster’s papers remain in private collections and the second volume of her autobiography, which covered the years of her political activism, went missing from the offices of the Britons Publishing Company in the early 1970s.[[213]](#footnote-213) What little we know of her early years is derived from the published first volume of her autobiography, *Spacious Days*, and a self-published biography written by Richard Gillman.

She was born Nesta Helen Bevan in 1876 and her father, Richard Bevan, was the Director of Barclays Bank.[[214]](#footnote-214) After leaving college in 1897, Webster toured the Empire taking in Africa, India, Ceylon, and Canada.[[215]](#footnote-215) After briefly returning to Britain, she set off again in 1901 for Egypt and in the following year travelled back to Ceylon and India, and also to Australia. On her second trip to India, she met her future husband, Arthur Webster. Gillman describes Arthur as ‘[t]he son of a well-established Anglo-Indian family’ who had spent ‘nearly 20 years’ as superintendent of police in Fatehgarh.[[216]](#footnote-216)

As Joan Byford writes, conspiracy theorists project ‘their fears and discontents into a general thesis of conspiracy’.[[217]](#footnote-217) Webster’s conspiracist worldview was built on a foundation of imperial patriotism and reinforced by her colonial encounters. A century earlier, supporters of the rule of the French aristocracy had reached for dramatic explanations for the dramatic changes they had witnessed. Similarly, in the early 1920s, Webster reached for conspiracy theories about Jews, Freemasons and the Illuminati in an attempt to rationalise Britain’s waning imperial power and delegitimise the political challenge of colonial nationalism.

As a wealthy young woman denied career opportunities because of her gender, Webster occupied her time with travel.[[218]](#footnote-218) Her resulting encounters with Empire constitute a formative influence on her later writings. Before travelling to the further reaches of the Empire, Webster took in Ireland where she observed that its population were ‘a simple kindly people’.[[219]](#footnote-219) So simple and kind, in fact, that she could not believe that they ‘were ever really inflamed by the hatred of England attributed to them by their self-appointed representatives’, laying early on the seeds of the idea that there was some other force behind anti-imperial unrest.[[220]](#footnote-220) Webster had similar revelations when she spent some months in India after meeting her future husband. During this time, she appears to have absorbed the views of an ‘old India hand’.

She wrote of how in her husband’s twenty years’ service in India, ‘Arthur told me that he had never once heard a murmur against the British Raj’.[[221]](#footnote-221) He also enlightened Webster as to the respect that the Indian ‘native’ had for the ‘impartial’ hand of their white rulers.[[222]](#footnote-222) Webster experienced the Empire first as an affluent white woman and then, after her marriage to Arthur, as the wife of veteran Anglo-Indian official. Her view of the Empire and its inhabitants was necessarily paternalistic; it mirrored her own experience of a grand institution populated by outwardly contented and obliging ‘natives’. Taking into consideration her imperial patriotism and her close relationship with an ‘old India hand’, Webster’s paranoid fantasies connect to a long tradition of British fears of anti-imperial conspiracy dating back at least as far as the 1857 Indian Mutiny.

Kim Wagner has argued that British imperial ‘knowledge’ of its colonial subjects often served to fuel fearful rumours of conspiracy.[[223]](#footnote-223) The faulty ‘knowledge’ consisted of a mixture of information, assumptions and rumours conditioned by colonial racial discourse which simultaneously patronised and demonised Indians. At times when the Anglo-Indian community felt insecure or endangered, this knowledge created a ‘snowball’ effect. If, as went received colonial wisdom, ordinary Indians were a ‘subject’ people ‘incapable of political rationality’ then ‘political activity could only be comprehended in terms of conspiracy’.[[224]](#footnote-224) This could lead, as Wagner’s work demonstrates, to full-blown panic by local imperial authorities and even by the central imperial government back in Britain over essentially innocuous occurrences. In Webster’s case, it led her to belief in an anti-imperial conspiracy led by Freemasons, the Illuminati and Jews.

While bizarre, some took Webster’s theories very seriously. Infamously, her writing drew plaudits from Winston Churchill.[[225]](#footnote-225) Both in her own work and in the writings of those inspired by her work in *The Patriot*, the alleged existence of this conspiracy against civilization was used as justification to call for fascism, or something like it, in Britain. Webster was ‘convinced that only a great national movement can save us from destruction’, a British equivalent of ‘Fascismo’.[[226]](#footnote-226) For Webster, fascism seems to have meant little more than a defence of the established order or, as she put it, ‘True Conservatism’.[[227]](#footnote-227) She even moved in the same circles as arch-reactionary and later Conservative Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks.[[228]](#footnote-228) The fact that she had one foot in mainstream politics, so to speak, did not stop her from later becoming a leading member of Britain’s first self-identifying fascist movement, the British Fascisti, serving on the group’s Grand Council briefly between 1926 and 1927.[[229]](#footnote-229)

Nor was Webster alone in her calls for a stronger brand of Conservatism to combat the threat she had outlined. From its earliest issues, *The Patriot* served as a forum for those interested in organising a body to struggle against these so-called forces of subversion. Northumberland himself called for a ‘resuscitation of Conservatism’ to establish ‘strong government’ and save the Empire from ‘Democracy’ and ‘Socialist bureaucracy’.[[230]](#footnote-230) Several months later, *The Patriot* announced the foundation of an organisation with very similar aims. The Loyalty League burst onto the political scene shortly before the general election of October 1922 and a few weeks before Mussolini’s ‘March on Rome’.[[231]](#footnote-231) The League anticipated the founding of the British Fascisti, Britain’s first self-proclaimed ‘fascist’ group, by several months. As an organisation, it was variously styled as anti-communist, a British equivalent to the Italian ‘Fascisti’, and ‘an information bureau’.[[232]](#footnote-232) As well as being publicised in *The Patriot*, Webster also addressed one of the Loyalty League’s meetings at Caxton Hall on 30 November 1925.[[233]](#footnote-233)

The group usually features only as a footnote in the histories of the Radical Right, if it features at all.[[234]](#footnote-234) Their obscurity is further compounded by the lack of surviving published material issued by the group. There is one copy of their newsletter, *Loyalty News Debate*, in the University of Sheffield Libraries’ Special Collections.[[235]](#footnote-235) Outside of this, publications like *The Patriot* and the *Daily Herald* contain fleeting traces of their existence. Through at look at the Loyalty League’s appearances in other publications and at the profile of their founder and leader, an image emerges of a group that clearly illustrates the fusion of imperial experience, extreme politics and conspiracy theory on the Radical Right.

Brigadier-General Cyril Prescott Decie, the founder and leader of the Loyalty League, was born in Britain to Irish parents in 1865. He began a lengthy military career with his enrolment in the Royal Artillery in 1885.[[236]](#footnote-236) In the course of this career, he served in the Anglo-Boer War, and was stationed in India where he commanded the Artillery of the 1st Indian Division at Peshawar, taking part in operations against the tribes of the North-West Frontier.[[237]](#footnote-237) According to his *Who’s Who* entry, Prescott Decie sustained severe wounds during the First World War in which he served between 1916 and 1917. Following the Great War, from April 1920 to February 1921, Prescott Decie served as a Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) divisional commissioner for the turbulent counties of Clare, Limerick, and northern Tipperary.[[238]](#footnote-238)

Recruited to the position by his friend and ‘Police Adviser’ to Dublin Castle, Lieutenant-General Henry H. Tudor, Prescott Decie was charged with improving cooperation between the police and the armed forces.[[239]](#footnote-239) He arrived in Ireland shortly after the arrival of the first ‘Black and Tans’. The RIC was initially a civilian police force, totally unequipped for the kind of tactics employed by the republican movement. They were a principal target of republican violence and an attempt was even made on Prescott Decie’s life in November 1920.[[240]](#footnote-240) However, such violence was not one-sided. Prescott Decie had a reputation for an extremely harsh attitude toward the Irish.[[241]](#footnote-241) In Irish historiography, he is known as the author of a letter, written 1 June 1920, cited as potential evidence of the early adoption of a policy of violent reprisals by the British state.[[242]](#footnote-242)

Infuriated by the government’s willingness to negotiate with the Irish nationalists, Prescott Decie resigned from the RIC in protest. Initially published in the *Morning Post*, his letter of resignation later appeared in the *National Review* as well.[[243]](#footnote-243) Upon his return to Britain, Prescott Decie became active in die-hard Conservative circles. His name appears a number of times in *National Opinion*, the newspaper of Henry Page Croft’s National Constitutional Association (NCA).[[244]](#footnote-244) The NCA was formerly the National Party, a xenophobic, militarist, imperialist party that broke away from the Conservatives in 1917.[[245]](#footnote-245) By the time of Prescott Decie’s involvement, the National Party had returned to the Conservative fold under its new name.[[246]](#footnote-246) The NCA played a considerable role in organising most of the die-hard meetings of the early 1920s.[[247]](#footnote-247) Along with Page Croft and Northumberland, Prescott Decie was also active in supporting the cause of southern Irish Loyalists.[[248]](#footnote-248)

Prescott Decie shared many of his views with the die-hards. Upon founding the Loyalty League, he circulated a letter in the local, regional and nation press introducing the League and stating its founding principles. The letter attacked the colonial record of the second Lloyd George coalition, which Prescott Decie blamed for the surrender of Ireland and Egypt and for ‘bringing the loss of India to the Empire within the bounds of possibility’.[[249]](#footnote-249) It was in Ireland, as he wrote in *The Patriot*, that he had seen civilians loyal to Britain ‘left at the mercy of turbulent and often alien forces’.[[250]](#footnote-250) Prescott Decie feared that ‘[a]t any time now our Government may surrender to the small minority of extremists in Great Britain’. ‘If the Government deserts the loyalists of Great Britain,’ he wrote, ‘as they have the loyalists of Ireland, where shall we be?’ Hence, his Loyalty League planned to bring together ‘those who are loyal to their King and country’ for ‘the protection of the Empire’.

Prescott Decie’s fears of Irish-style violence breaking out in Britain were not entirely overblown. Just a few months before the founding of the Loyalty League, two IRA gunmen assassinated the Chief of Imperial General Staff, Field-Marshall Sir Henry Wilson, on the doorstep of his home in London. The assassination of Wilson, who had been heavily involved in the situation in Ireland, appalled Prescott Decie. He indicted the government for having ‘given way to Evil in Ireland’, adding that it was only a matter of time before ‘the Evil would therefore extend and cross the sea’.[[251]](#footnote-251) However, Prescott Decie feared more than an extension of IRA violence. Unable to come to terms with the British government’s decision to negotiate with the Irish nationalists, he blamed ‘alien’ interference for the change in policy direction.[[252]](#footnote-252) In reality, the war in Ireland was becoming increasingly unpopular back Britain.[[253]](#footnote-253) For Prescott Decie, however, this was all evidence of ‘a definite plot by a portion of the Jewish race for developing an attack on the British Empire, the great bulwark of Christianity.’[[254]](#footnote-254)

The Loyalty League’s activism consisted mainly of heckling left-wing and anti-colonial meetings.[[255]](#footnote-255) Prescott Decie also ran as an ‘Independent Conservative’, representing the Loyalty League, against the ‘Coalition Unionist’ candidate, Samuel Samuel, in Putney during the October 1922 General Election. *The Times* reported that the contest was bitter and that Prescott Decie’s campaign against Samuel, who was from a Sephardic Jewish background, had been labelled ‘“purely antisemitic”’.[[256]](#footnote-256) Overall, the group seems to have been fairly small, similar in many ways to The Britons and the British Fascisti. By the late twenties, there very few signs that the Loyalty League was still in operation. Certainly, there is little trace of them following a libel case in 1925, which resulted in Prescott Decie paying £600 in damages for slandering J. Lyons & Co. Ltd.[[257]](#footnote-257) Prescott Decie later became a member of the splinter group from the British Fascisti, the National Fascisti.[[258]](#footnote-258)

Webster’s own involvement with Radical Right groups like the Loyalty League and the British Fascisti was limited and rather short-lived. Nevertheless, she remained active on the Radical Right, regarded as somewhat of an authority. In 1927, she founded something called ‘the “Patriots’ Inquiry Centre”’ to act as ‘a central bureau of information’ on the global plot against civilization.[[259]](#footnote-259) In founding the Centre, Webster intended to create a repository of information on various subversive groups as well as act as a library for the literature of the various Radical Right groups. Little more was heard of this group after the letter announcing its formation in *The Patriot*, despite Webster’s claims that she had support from ‘several of the most important patriotic and anti-Socialist associations’.[[260]](#footnote-260)

An old transcript of one of Webster’s speeches appeared in *The Patriot* in 1932 but little was heard from her after this.[[261]](#footnote-261) In 1938, she penned a pro-Nazi, pro-appeasement pamphlet entitled *Germany and England*.[[262]](#footnote-262) After this, apart from the release of the first volume of her biography in 1949, she faded into obscurity. Given the absence of a second volume, the nature of her later political activities is unknown. Her ideas, however, achieved an impact far beyond the remit of her own political activism. Webster’s conspiracist re-telling of history, and the imperialist antisemitism developed by Webster and her colleagues at the *Morning Post* and *The Patriot*,provided the framework in which British fascism took shape.

# **The ‘Colour War’ against the Empire**

Though Webster’s time with the British Fascisti (BF) was short, their newspapers regularly recommended her books and the influence of her ideas on their ideology is evident.[[263]](#footnote-263) Like Webster, the BF also sprung from the die-hard Conservative political fold. In fact, for many years in the historiography, the group’s ideology was said to represent little more than ‘Conservatism with Knobs On’.[[264]](#footnote-264) Recent assessments have advanced the more sophisticated argument that the BF’s ideology was a ‘was a hybrid of nationalist, anti-communist, authoritarian, anti-semitic ideas derivative of both Mussolini’s Italy and Edwardian Britain’.[[265]](#footnote-265) However, imperialism represented a central (and unacknowledged) influence on their ideology. Beyond the imperial fervour of the die-hards, leading BF members were profoundly affected by direct experience of empire. Such experiences coloured their understanding of the threats from which fascism was supposed to guard.

The BF’s formation in the late spring of 1923 was announced in a series of six advertisements calling for willing volunteers printed in the back pages of *The* *Patriot*.[[266]](#footnote-266) There was even some speculation in left-wing anti-fascist circles early on in the BF’s existence, fuelled by the fact the BF initially shared offices with *The Patriot*, that Northumberland was ‘the prime mover in the British Fascisti organisation’.[[267]](#footnote-267) In fact, the BF’s founder was Rotha Lintorn-Orman, a young woman who had served with distinction in various voluntary medical bodies during the First World War and won the *Croix de Charite* for ‘gallantry in action’ in Serbia in 1916.[[268]](#footnote-268) It was rumoured that the initial inspiration for the BF struck while she was weeding the kitchen garden of her farm in Somerset.[[269]](#footnote-269) In any case, Lintorn-Orman became convinced of the need for an extra-parliamentary organisation to fight Bolshevik attacks at home and out in the Empire.

Both contemporaneous and later scholarly estimates put the BF’s membership at around 30,000 at the group’s height.[[270]](#footnote-270) Their fascist recruits were organised along paramilitary lines and, from 1927, possessed their own uniform of a coloured shirt, like the Italian fascists, only theirs was blue and not black.[[271]](#footnote-271) In the early 1930s, they added a beret and dark trousers for men or a skirt for women. Members used the Roman salute of the Italian fascists as a well their own variant.[[272]](#footnote-272) Their activities included marches and rallies on national holidays like Remembrance Day and Empire Day, street battles with communists around Trafalgar Square and in Hyde Park, and preparations for the coming ‘crisis’.[[273]](#footnote-273) During the 1926 General Strike, the BF also assisted in the government’s strike-breaking efforts.[[274]](#footnote-274) Early on, they declared their ‘sole object’ to be ‘the preservation of the BRITISH EMPIRE’.[[275]](#footnote-275)

Much like the other readers of *The Patriot*, Lintorn-Orman and her comrades saw Britain menaced by an ‘international’ conspiracy that they believed was aiming ‘to bring about a revolution in this country and disrupt the Empire’.[[276]](#footnote-276) The BF’s preoccupation with an imagined imperial crisis closely reflected the experience of men and women who had spent their lives serving, working or living out in the Empire. Lintorn-Orman herself was the granddaughter of Sir John Lintorn Simmons, ‘an illustrious field-marshal’ and Governor of Malta between 1884 and 1888.[[277]](#footnote-277) Beyond Lintorn-Orman, there were many more with first-hand experience of the Empire. Barbara Farr identified ‘paternalistic former colonial military officers’ as a significant element in the BF’s membership.[[278]](#footnote-278)

The BF’s second president between 1924 and 1926, Brigadier-General Robert Byron Drury (‘R. B. D.’) Blakeney, fits neatly into this category. He took over after the BF’s first president, Lord Garvagh, a justice of the peace for County Londonderry, resigned in January 1924.[[279]](#footnote-279) A ‘pivotal figure’ in the BF’s early development, Blakeney defined much of the movement’s early character.[[280]](#footnote-280) He established the group’s ‘tight-knit military’ ethos, their paramilitary ‘Q Division’, and rechristened the group under an anglicised name as the ‘British Fascists’ in 1924.[[281]](#footnote-281) In joining the BF, Blakeney left a long career of imperial service behind him.

Blakeney had served with distinction during the Sudan Campaign on the Dongola Expedition in 1896 and other operations in 1897, and in the Battle Khartoum in 1898.[[282]](#footnote-282) His record of distinguished service continued during the Anglo-Boer War between 1900 and 1901. After his time in the military, Blakeney remained out in the Empire, working as deputy general manager of the Egyptian State Railway from 1906 to 1913.[[283]](#footnote-283) After serving in the First World War in Egypt and the Dardanelles, he became the general manager from 1919 to 1923.[[284]](#footnote-284) He appears only to have returned to Britain in late 1923 or early 1924 as his entry in the 1924 edition of *Who’s Who* still lists an address in Madhi, Egypt.

Like Blakeney, Brigadier-General Sir Ormonde Winter, the BF’s Officer-in-Command of the London Area, also possessed a long record of colonial service.[[285]](#footnote-285) Between 1920 and 1923, Winter worked as Deputy Chief of Police and Chief of Intelligence in Ireland.[[286]](#footnote-286) Like Prescott Decie, Winter was recruited by Tudor whom he knew from his time serving in India.[[287]](#footnote-287) Winter was charged with creating ‘a united intelligence system under police control’ but apparently proved a poor spy.[[288]](#footnote-288) Alongside Blakeney and Winter, Colonel Bramley, the head of the BF’s ‘Intelligence Department’ was formerly for ‘sometime connected with the Police in India’.[[289]](#footnote-289) Some of the BF’s older members had fought in the Ashanti War of 1873-1874 and even during the suppression of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.[[290]](#footnote-290)

Blakeney and the other ex-imperial administrators, retired policeman, and soldiers in the BF’s ranks were intensely alive to the possibility of the Empire’s collapse. Their fascism represented the paranoia of men formerly responsible for ruling over unwilling colonial subjects. The vast, organised anti-imperial conspiracies they imagined were merely inflations of the kind of instances of anti-colonial intrigue and violence that they had actually witnessed. In his time as general manager of the Egyptian State Railways, Blakeney would have witnessed the widespread violent unrest during the spring and summer of 1919 triggered after the British arrested and deported leading Egyptian nationalist Saad Zaghlul and some of his associates.[[291]](#footnote-291) Before he left Egypt, in 1923, he also gave evidence at ‘[t]he trial of fifteen Egyptians on charges of conspiracy to murder British officers, soldiers and civilians’.[[292]](#footnote-292) The spectre of anti-colonial violence lurked behind Blakeney’s conception of the ‘great scheme’ being carried out against the British Empire. As he explained in a piece for the journal, *The Nineteenth Century & After*:

Like all really great schemes, this can be written on the back of an envelope. It may be summed up in the words “Turn the coloured races against the white. Cut Britain’s supplies and communications.”[[293]](#footnote-293)

Winter, too, was no stranger to such violence. During his time in Ireland, he was witness to both the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. As part of his police duties, he travelled the country investigating political murders.[[294]](#footnote-294) On 2 June 1921, he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.[[295]](#footnote-295) For two years after he returned from Ireland he was accompanied everywhere by a police escort to guard against potential reprisals.[[296]](#footnote-296)

The rumours circulating in the BF press further reflected these anxieties. Egypt and the Sudan were named as ‘the principal points of Bolshevik activity’.[[297]](#footnote-297) According to the BF’s *Fascist Bulletin*, Soviet agents were attempting to circulate ‘Red propaganda’ among colonial troops. The authorities had reportedly seized packages bound for ‘the troops of the 2nd Sudanese battalion at Khartoum’ in Stockholm in 1925.[[298]](#footnote-298) Elsewhere, the Soviets were said to be instigating a world ‘negro movement’, in Africa raising ‘the war cry: “Men of colour, unite against the Whites.”’[[299]](#footnote-299)

This plot against the Empire did not only take the form of anti-colonial violence. BF members also perceived subversive intentions behind moderate constitutional reform in India. In July 1925, one fascist attacked the report of the Muddiman Committee, convened by the viceroy Lord Reading in 1924 to review the constitutional alterations made by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.[[300]](#footnote-300) Writing in *The Fascist Bulletin*, they indicted the Committee as an effort ‘to placate the unrest of an implacable Indian minority’. Particularly infuriating, they went on, was the exclusion from the Committee of ‘our Indian executive officials – the men on the spot… the most important assert of our Indian administration’. In reality, far from harbouring anti-imperial aims, the Muddiman Committee was an attempt to curb any potential radical constitutional reform by the incoming Labour government.[[301]](#footnote-301) Though it was essentially appointed to prevaricate, in the Muddiman Committee, the BF saw further signs of evidence of ‘the Moscow-Soviet’s game’ to ‘see the British Empire “*splintered in doom.*”’[[302]](#footnote-302)

The BF characterised the relationship between Britain and its Empire as one of an essential lifeline. In their view, Britain’s imperial ties were like veins and capillaries, sustaining the British race. The Empire thus stood as the foundation and reflection of Britain’s strength. However, the BF also saw Britain’s far-flung imperial outposts as uniquely vulnerable. Distant ‘white man’s countries’ like Australia and South Africa were politically and racially threatened by ‘the Communistic menace’.[[303]](#footnote-303) Australia, wrote one, also was menaced by ‘the “Yellow Peril”’ from nearby Asian countries.[[304]](#footnote-304) In South Africa, on the other hand, the danger lay in its majority ‘black population’, kept in line only ‘by her loyal Civil Service and British Constitutional methods’.[[305]](#footnote-305) If these fell to ‘Communistic pressure’, ‘our loyal Colonists and natives would be literally swamped and all our labour for a white Africa… would be lost.’[[306]](#footnote-306)

The overstretched British Empire also provided plenty of points of entry to potential anti-colonial plotters looking to strike at the heart of the Empire. BF members’ acute awareness of the interconnected nature of the Empire meant that they perceived colonial unrest as similarly interconnected. Localised incidents could thus take on the appearance of a unified threat to the entire imperial edifice. They shared such fears with imperial administrators in places like India during the late 1920s and 1930s, who were concerned about border-crossing activists and international organisations like the League Against Imperialism. These were more than paranoid delusions; leading activists like Jawaharlal Nehru possessed links not only to the Soviet Union but also to an international network of communist activists encompassing Britain and the USA.[[307]](#footnote-307) Heightened awareness of these links by the colonial authorities meant that they were quick to attribute the responsibility for increased anti-colonial agitation to Moscow agents.[[308]](#footnote-308) The BF feared that Communist-inspired agitation along these lines might flow to the centre from the periphery. In case of such an event, Blakeney worried that Britain’s armed forces would be forbidden from violently repressing an uprising in Britain, reminding his readers of ‘the treatment meted out to General Dyer’.[[309]](#footnote-309) In such a situation, BF members planned to step into the breach as an extra-parliamentary, paramilitary organisation prepared to use ‘*every means and every device in our power*’ to quell seditious activity.[[310]](#footnote-310)

Weary of transnational anti-imperialists, BF members regarded colonial subjects living, working and studying in Britain as an enemy within. Their newspaper made regular references to the presence of ‘coloured’ immigrants and students within Britain. The BF’s objections to immigrants went beyond ordinary xenophobia; they feared these elements might, ‘led by Jewish Commissars’, form the foot soldiers of an attack at the very heart of the Empire.[[311]](#footnote-311) They foresaw a co-ordinated attack on multiple fronts masterminded by a ‘Junta of Jews’ directing affairs from Moscow.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Again, in their conception of a far-reaching racial threat to the Empire, the BF reflected the times in which it existed. Following the First World War, in addition to anxieties about industrial militancy, went racist fears about miscegenation.[[313]](#footnote-313) During the First World War and the immediate post-war years, British cities, including and especially the nation’s capital, were host to non-white colonial troops from India, the Caribbean, and Britain’s African colonies. After the war’s end, some of these demobilised troops added to the small black British population in port towns and cities. This numbered about 20,000 people in April 1919 and mostly consisted of men working in either shipping or soldiery.[[314]](#footnote-314) The same year also saw a series of serious racist riots in Cardiff, Liverpool and London carried out by white residents against the presence of people of colour.[[315]](#footnote-315)

BF members thus formulated their fascist ideology not only at a time of increasing colonial strife but while the ‘colour line’ was in the process of being redrawn.[[316]](#footnote-316) This line now ran increasingly through Britain itself rather than between the British Isles and its colonies. Nowhere was this more marked than in London. The heart of the Empire was also the site of resistance to the Empire. With few official restrictions on imperial subjects entering Britain and limited government powers to extradite suspected rebels, London became the temporary home to scores of anti-colonial activists from such far-flung locations as India, West Africa and the Caribbean.[[317]](#footnote-317) Despite possessing branches as far away as Ulster and the Irish Free State, London was the BF’s base of operations, particularly during the later twenties. [[318]](#footnote-318) As their publications demonstrate, BF activists encountered this activist community, further fuelling their obsessions about anti-colonial plots.

One writer in the BF’s *Fascist Bulletin* drew public attention to ‘the number of anti-British coloured students now in London’.[[319]](#footnote-319) They alleged that ‘a special campaign of hostility’ was being carried out by Communists ‘[a]mong young Egyptians, Asiatics and Negroes coming to London with the alleged purposes of study’.[[320]](#footnote-320) The article warned that the rantings and ravings that these students were subjected to would produce young men ‘quite capable of repeating the crime committed by Dhingra fifteen years ago.’[[321]](#footnote-321) ‘Dhingra’ referred to Madan Lal Dhingra, an Indian student who assassinated a British official of the Government of India on 1 July 1909. Dhingra was part of an activist network of Indian students based out of India House, a hostel and activist hub for Indian students in North London. Nicholas Owen notes that Dhingra was ‘probably’ acting on the orders of activists working out of India House.[[322]](#footnote-322)

The article in the BF’s newspaper makes reference a hostel of this kind in London where ‘effort is made to poison goodwill and inflame anti-British hatred’.[[323]](#footnote-323) From here, it was alleged, ‘the coloured student’ gets ‘drunk on Socialist and anti-British rhetoric’ makes ‘a public nuisance’ of himself on the streets of London. In addition to the danger that they might be exposed to political miseducation at the hands of communists, BF activists found colonial students’ close proximity to white women scandalous. However, they blamed the women themselves for fraternising with the students, deriding them as ‘too ignorant to feel that healthy sense of shame at being seen with a coloured man which is the usual protection of white women’.[[324]](#footnote-324) The BF proposed to combat all this with severe restrictions on the rights of ‘aliens’, even students, to reside in Britain.[[325]](#footnote-325)

The BF’s suspicion of colonial students was based on set of imperial racial stereotypes. For many years throughout the Empire, British administration had relied upon a class of Western-educated or westernised native administrators.[[326]](#footnote-326) However, these Western-educated ‘natives’ were reviled as much as they were relied upon. In India and elsewhere, they came to form the mainstay of nationalist movements.[[327]](#footnote-327) They were seen as unnatural and unrepresentative of the ‘masses’, referred to as ‘babus’.[[328]](#footnote-328) These men were held to be semi-civilised and lesser men when held up next to the more authentic ‘tribal’ or ‘traditional’ martial native or the ‘manly’ Englishman.

Martial race theory, as these ideas became known, originally emerged out of the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. The mutinous, largely Bengali regiments were attacked as effeminate, duplicitous and cowardly, while the loyalists, largely Sikhs from the Punjab, were revered as manly and courageous warriors.[[329]](#footnote-329) With the emergence of colonial nationalism in the later nineteenth century, these ideas were redeployed against the Westernised or Western-educated Indians who often worked as the Raj’s clerks and functionaries, and who were early agitators for independence. Though rooted in the context of the Indian Empire, martial race theory and associated epithets like ‘babu’ became a feature of imperial discourse across the Empire, used to denigrate those among ‘colonised’ peoples with temerity to demand self-government. BF activists included colonial student activists from places like India, Egypt and China among the supposed agents of the same ‘subversive’ international as Bolsheviks, ‘Indian Politicians’, ‘Irish Nationalists’, ‘Pacifists’, ‘Internationalists’, and others.[[330]](#footnote-330) Along with their co-subversives, they were accused of engaging in ‘the undermining, conscious or unconscious… of the Empire’.[[331]](#footnote-331)

The worldview of the BF, Britain’s first fascists, was heavily influence by imperial experience. These experiences, possessed by some of the group’s leading members, meant that its activists perceived the ‘Jewish-Bolshevik’ menace to the Empire in imperial terms. Moreover, their fears of the non-white population within Britain, particularly colonial students, illustrate the imperialist assumptions on which many BF activists’ politics were founded. More than the example of Italian fascism or influence of the die-hard Conservatism, imperial experiences shaped their worldview. Nevertheless, the group remained close to the die-hard fold in their political associations and activism. They even provided ‘600 odd’ stewards for anti-communist meeting addressed by a number of die-hard Conservative MPs including Henry Page Croft in 1926.[[332]](#footnote-332) At the centre of their fascism, however, lay the fear common to the colonial soldier, police officer and administrator; namely, the fear that someone, somewhere, was secretly plotting to overturn their authority, overrun their communities, and do unspeakable things to them and their women.

# **The Empire and the Aryans**

The Britons emanated from the same die-hard wellspring as the BF and were similarly was preoccupied with the idea of an alliance of ‘subversive’ forces threatening the Empire’s survival. They differed from the BF in their extensive embrace of pseudo-scientific ideas of race and obsessive antisemitism. For The Britons, Jews represented the mastermind behind all the things they considered anti-imperial or anti-white. While the BF vaguely referred to ‘Jewish-Bolsheviks’, The Britons devoted countless articles and pamphlets to elaborate (if contradictory and inconsistent) explanations of the history, character, and alleged machinations of ‘the Jew’.

Henry Hamilton Beamish and a small group of individuals founded The Brtons in 1919. J. H. Clarke chaired its inaugural meeting at which Beamish was made president, Clarke vice-president and A. Toulmin Smith the honorary secretary. Nick Toczek has suggested that among the other founding members were Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Lane, George P. Mudge, Joseph Banister, Bessie Pullen-Burry and Lord Sydenham of Combe.[[333]](#footnote-333) Inspired by the *Morning Post*’s ‘The Cause of the World Unrest’ series and Webster’s books, The Britons gave reactionary antisemitic conspiracy theories a more pronounced racist edge.[[334]](#footnote-334) They combined them with the literature of nineteenth century pseudo-scientific racism and white supremacist literature from the early twentieth century.

The Britons believed that the Jews were *racially* predisposed to oppose to the British Empire and were behind all that appeared to be going wrong with it. Like the die-hards, they bemoaned the British ‘retreat’ from Ireland and Egypt, and the reform of British administration in India. They also despised Edwin Montagu, the reforming Secretary of State for India. In their early years, The Britons vociferously criticised the coalition government of David Lloyd George for having presided over a series of imperial ‘surrenders’; they derisively dubbed it the ‘Jew-alition’ government.[[335]](#footnote-335) The group aimed to ‘expose’ and exclude Jewish ‘plotters’, declaring:

As Mr. Lloyd George would say, “You cannot have an A-1 Empire if it is run by C-3 Jews.” In fact, we cannot have a British Empire at all if Jews of any description are allowed to control it.[[336]](#footnote-336)

The Britons have been the subject of only one full-length historical study, Nick Toczek’s *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators: Antisemitism and the UK Far Right*, and of a handful of chapters in edited collections on British fascism and extreme racism. In the existing historiography, considerations of The Britons’ ideology have primarily focused on their overriding antisemitism. The scant existing scholarship on The Britons has neglected to analyse the white supremacist elements of the group’s ideology and the interplay between these and their antisemitic ideas. Their antisemitic worldview rested on the notion that the history of the world was defined by the clash of superior and inferior races. They added an emphasis to Webster’s theories that was not only rabidly anti-Jewish but drew on white supremacist ideas from Anglo-Indian Orientalist scholars and the writings of American eugenicists.

The Britons based their ideology on a ‘defensive, but defiant’ conception of whiteness, jealously protective of its privileges and common to white settler communities throughout the British Empire. [[337]](#footnote-337) The founder of The Britons, Henry Hamilton Beamish, lived most of his adult life in communities of this kind. In 1891, at the age of seventeen, he travelled to Canada and worked as a wheat farmer.[[338]](#footnote-338) For several years after this, he worked in Ceylon, first as a tea planter and then from 1898 to 1899 as assistant manager on the Hope Estate in Upper Hewaheta. Beamish served in the Anglo-Boer War and, after a period of leave to attend his father’s funeral in Britain in 1901, returned to South Africa where he lived until 1918. Afterwards, he again returned to London, but this homecoming was short-lived. In 1919, Beamish and a fellow antisemitic activist were fined £5000 (plus thousands of pounds worth of costs) for libelling Sir Alfred Mond, the First Commissioner of Works and the British-born son of German Jews.[[339]](#footnote-339) They produced and exhibited a poster claiming that Mond ‘allotted shares to the Huns during the war’.[[340]](#footnote-340) Unable to afford the colossal fine, Beamish fled to Southern Rhodesia. Apart from occasional trips to Britain and jaunts as a ‘“travelling salesmen” of the Nazi ideology’, he spent the remainder of his life there working as a mine owner, landowner and, for a short period from 1938 to 1939, an independent MP.[[341]](#footnote-341)

Beamish was not unusual among The Britons’ members and associates in his extensive experiences of colonial life. Another of their prominent members was the explorer and author Bessie Pullen-Burry, promoted by the group as their Palestine ‘expert’. Other members with imperial experience included fellow Anglo-Boer War veteran Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Lane and Lord Sydenham of Combe.[[342]](#footnote-342) As Gisela Lebzelter remarked, the ideology of The Britons represented the politics of those who ‘had… experienced racial superiority as a political reality, not just as myth’.[[343]](#footnote-343)

Despite being a small and marginal organisation kept alive by a handful of individuals, The Britons were also associated with a number of other prominent proconsular figures and die-hard politicians. Among those who sent in ‘[l]etters expressing regret at an inability to attend’ The Britons’ meeting in November 1921 at Caxton Hall were the Duke of Northumberland, the Marquess of Salisbury, Earl Stanhope, the Earl of Selbourne and Viscount Curzon.[[344]](#footnote-344) The National Constitutional Association even advertised The Britons’ pamphlets in its *National Opinion* newspaper. [[345]](#footnote-345) Leader of the Loyalty League, Brigadier-General Prescott Decie, was also involved with The Britons and a number of prominent Britons members were also members of the Loyalty League.[[346]](#footnote-346)

The group’s extreme racist philosophy was outlined by the group’s ‘expert’ racist, George P. Mudge, in a series of articles for their newspaper in 1924. Mudge was an early member of the Eugenics Education Society (formed in 1907), a founding member of The Britons and professor of zoology at the University of London.[[347]](#footnote-347) In laying out The Britons’ racist ideology, Mudge drew on international sources. The Britons were transnational in their politics, keeping abreast of developments in white supremacist politics abroad. They advertised and sold copies of Henry Ford’s antisemitic newspaper the *Dearborn Independent*, and their newspaper featured articles on the Ku Klux Klan and the fledgling National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP).[[348]](#footnote-348) In January 1923, *The Times* reported that Beamish appeared in Munich to address a meeting of the NSDAP.[[349]](#footnote-349)

In order to justify imperial rule and explain the threats it faced, Mudge turned to the work of American eugenicist Madison Grant. Grant’s 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, though not a bestseller, went on to achieve international notoriety.[[350]](#footnote-350) In the book, Grant adopted what Matthew Guterl has identified as ‘an authoritarian, black-white rhetoric reminiscent of Afrikaner nationalism and southern segregationism’.[[351]](#footnote-351) As well as inspiring The Britons, Grant’s work also influenced the Nazis and *The Passing of the Great Race* was said to be Hitler’s ‘Bible’.[[352]](#footnote-352) Grant’s book was essentially an attack on democracy using pseudo-scientific racism. He argued that individuals were divided into races each with their own immutable physical, mental and moral characteristics.[[353]](#footnote-353) All manifestations of society, he added, were a reflection of this ‘fact’. Grant asserted that class hierarchies, for instance, were merely the remains of earlier ancient racial hierarchies with the ruling classes representing the vestiges of the master race.[[354]](#footnote-354) According to Grant, democracy flew in the face of the hereditary laws of race and he indicted those preaching ‘the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in its turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics’.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Working from Grant’s book, Mudge denoted three racial types in Europe: the Nordics, the Mediterraneans, and the Alpine race.[[356]](#footnote-356) The Nordics constituted a class of racial aristocrats, ‘the natural leader of the White people’.[[357]](#footnote-357) The maintenance of *any* kind of worthwhile civilization, Mudge held, rested on the maintenance of the hegemony of the Nordic race. According to Mudge and his comrades in The Britons, the Jewish ‘hidden hand’ was conducting an organised effort to weaken ‘the native, Nordic aristocracies’.[[358]](#footnote-358) The revolution they feared was racial, rather than political or social; an ‘Oriental revolution’ against white British rule composed ‘in the main [of] Jews, Indians, and Negroes, with some half-castes, a few Chinese, and a sprinkling of hooligans, mainly the low caste and perennially discontent type of Irish which every great British city and town contains.’[[359]](#footnote-359)

In order to prevent such a revolution and stop the racial ‘rot’ that The Britons believed was setting in, Mudge proposed the exclusion of all ‘alien’ influences from Britain and the Empire. The presence of ‘men of Nordic race’ was essential, Mudge maintained, in maintaining the strength of Britain’s Armed Forces and ensuring the smooth running and quality of her domestic institutions and ‘that world-wide administration’ upholding British ‘civilization’ throughout the Empire.[[360]](#footnote-360) Added to this, he called for legislation to outlaw race mixing which would forbid interracial marriages as an act of race ‘treachery’.[[361]](#footnote-361) Mudge intended to restrict immigration, or as he put it, the ‘swamping’ of the white races of Europe by an ‘influx of Eastern races’, as well.[[362]](#footnote-362)

The Britons believed that the racial revolution by the ‘coloured’ East against the ‘white’ West was playing out in Britain’s colonies. South Africa and India came up regularly in The Britons’ periodicals. Undoubtedly, the prevalence of the former was partly down to the long periods Beamish spent residing in South Africa. Beamish first encountered ‘extreme anti-Jewish sentiment’ in South Africa ‘during and after the Boer War’ where such views ‘were widely held within the post-Victorian southern African ex-pat community’.[[363]](#footnote-363) Articles in their newspaper *Jewry Über Alles* claimed that in South Africa, ‘the Jews curse reigns supreme’.[[364]](#footnote-364) They consolidated their power, The Britons claimed, through ‘the Jew-engineered Jameson raid, the Jew-made Boer war’, and bribery.[[365]](#footnote-365) Influenced by the old antisemitic theories of two of their members, Arthur White and Joseph Banister, The Britons claimed that the Dominion was virtually under total Jewish control.

Writing for The Britons’ newspaper, Banister argued ‘Yiddish pedlars’ had directed Indian campaigns against racial legislation in South Africa and were now behind nationalist agitation in India.[[366]](#footnote-366) Banister noted that Gandhi had a number of Jewish friends and associates during his time in South Africa, including Henry Polak, a British journalist and lawyer, and Hermann Kallenbach, a German architect.[[367]](#footnote-367) Both were Tolstoyan activists who helped with Gandhi’s early political agitation on behalf of Indians in South Africa. While in reality Polak and Kallenbach were friends and disciples of Gandhi’s, Banister argued that they were in fact Gandhi’s Jewish ‘puppet-masters’ who directed him towards India once they were done with South Africa. Banister’s paranoid theories illustrate the way that The Britons’ conspiratorial thinking functioned as an expression of their anxieties about the Empire.

India, too, was said to be under Jewish control. The Britons accused a number of colonial officials with Jewish backgrounds, such as die-hard bugbear Edwin Montagu, and the Viceroy of India, Lord Reading, of being agents of the Jewish world plot. Both Montagu and Isaacs were implicated in the Marconi affair and the Indian silver affair, two high-profile financial scandals that shook the world of Edwardian politics in the years 1912 and 1913.[[368]](#footnote-368) The scandals provided fuel for antisemites at the time, cited in particular by *New Witness*, a journal edited by the writer Hilaire Belloc and the journalist Cecil Chesterton.[[369]](#footnote-369) For Belloc, Chesterton, and the contributors to their journal, the scandals were evidence of a corrupt and Jewish-dominated political system. They fulfilled the same function for The Britons, who reminded their readers of the Marconi affair and Lord Reading’s involvement when he was made Viceroy in 1921.[[370]](#footnote-370) The Britons’ harboured a passionate hatred for Montagu. They referred to the reforming tendency of his colonial policies as ‘Montaguism’, which they believed was really ‘Jewism undiluted’ calculated ‘to destroy our Indian Empire’.[[371]](#footnote-371) Montagu was racially disposed, they argued, to side not only with other Jews but also ‘with the “downtrodden nations”’ of the world.[[372]](#footnote-372) Echoing other die-hard attacks on Montagu, they referred to him as an ‘Oriental’, a term ‘also used to characterize south Asians’, in an attempt to place him ‘squarely in the camp of Gandhi and his followers’.[[373]](#footnote-373)

This is an argument that crops up repeatedly in The Britons’ publications: that Jews were the racial allies of rebellious colonial subjects. This conviction lay behind The Britons’ persistent attempts to ‘colour’ Jewish people as ‘Asiatic’ or as possessing ‘black’ or ‘Negro’ blood.[[374]](#footnote-374) One contributor to their newspaper even went so far as to suggest that the true motivation behind Benjamin Disraeli’s expansionist imperialism back in the nineteenth century was to create a bridgehead for an assault by the Asiatic ‘East’ upon the ‘Nordic’ West. The writer suggested that Disraeli transformed India ‘into an integral part of the British Empire’ so ‘that his ancestral East should conquer the West’.[[375]](#footnote-375) Montagu and other imperial administrators of ‘dubious’ racial and national loyalties were accused of carrying on this attempt to racially infiltrate the West via British India.[[376]](#footnote-376)

The Britons viewed this imagined conflict between the white Aryan race and Jewish-directed forces of ‘colour’ as eternal. They projected it back into the past and in doing so made use of the old Orientalist theories of Anglo-Indian scholars dating back to the late eighteenth century, originally used to justify British domination of India. As part of the early imperial conquest of India, the East India Trading Company had tasked its administrators with collecting knowledge of local customs, language, and history.[[377]](#footnote-377) Out of this developed the search for and study of what was thought to be the common racial origin of ancient Europeans and ancient Indians.[[378]](#footnote-378) This soon developed over the course of the nineteenth century into what Thomas R. Trautmann has called ‘the racial theory of Indian civilization’, the idea:

that India’s civilization was produced by the clash and subsequent mixture of light-skinned civilizing invaders (the Aryans) and dark-skinned barbarian aborigines (often identified as Dravidians).[[379]](#footnote-379)

For the British imperialists, the British represented the latest incarnation of these ‘light-skinned’ Aryan invaders, the original ‘civilizers’ of India, who had returned to carry on their historic mission.[[380]](#footnote-380) Trautmann wrote that this notion of historic white supremacy was central to ‘the development of a conception of racial whiteness’.[[381]](#footnote-381)

The Britons made remarkably similar use of the very same ideas, adding antisemitism into the cocktail of imperialist ideology. They too believed in the historic supremacy of the Aryan race, of which the British were considered prominent representatives. They credited Aryan initiative and other qualities for the splendour of ancient civilizations in India, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Sumer. The amateur racial theorists among The Britons attributed the fall of these great civilizations to racial mixture, as in the original Orientalist version. They also added the idea that ‘Semitic’ subversion had played a role in civilizational decay. These lessons in ancient ‘history’ – examples of great civilizations brought low by ‘alien’ influences – were intended to serve as a warning of the potential future of the British Empire.

In one of The Britons’ pamphlets, anonymously authored under the pseudonym “Apionus”, it was argued, for instance, that ‘that the original Sumerians of Babylon, a white race, suffered penetration, revolution and domination by an alien Semitic people’.[[382]](#footnote-382) They went even further back than Webster, arguing that Jewish influence had been behind the ‘great revolutions of the past, those of Babylon, Egypt and Rome’ as well as the modern French and Russian ones.[[383]](#footnote-383) The Britons, describing themselves as the ‘watchmen’ of the ‘white race’, conceived of their political mission as exposing this ancient conspiracy.[[384]](#footnote-384) Believing the political system and the press to be utterly under the control of unseen Jewish forces, The Britons adopted the apparently ‘essential’ role of ‘uncovering’ such information. As “Apionus” wrote, ‘The white race has only to discover itself in order to save itself.’[[385]](#footnote-385)

The Britons stood apart from the nascent form of British fascism in the 1920s. They were in contact with some members of the BF and saw the group as potential allies in the struggle against the Jews, though they criticised them for being, in their view, insufficiently antisemitic.[[386]](#footnote-386) As Lebzelter put it, The Britons ‘seemed to entertain rather woolly ideas of fascism’.[[387]](#footnote-387) Insofar as they possessed their own political programme, it was ultra-conservative, pro-Empire, anti-immigrant and favoured the establishment of neo-aristocratic, authoritarian rule.[[388]](#footnote-388) They remained a small group of dedicated antisemites more interested in the circulation of special ‘knowledge’ that they had ‘uncovered’ about the Jewish world plot than in contesting elections.

From 1925, publication of their journal ceased without notice. Afterwards, The Britons no longer operated as a political organisation, instead concentrating solely on publishing racist literature. J. H. Clarke continued to run the organisation until his death in 1931 after which point another member, J. D. Dell, took over.[[389]](#footnote-389) In February 1932, the Britons Publishing Company split from its parent organisation. They continued to exist in some form or another until the mid-1970s. The group continued its mission, disseminating *The Protocols* and other racist literature. [[390]](#footnote-390) By 1968, their English edition of *The Protocols* was on its 84th impression.[[391]](#footnote-391) However, they made little impact on inter-war politics. Apart from urging their supporters to vote Conservative, The Britons shunned much of the political mainstream.[[392]](#footnote-392) Yet, as will be shown in later chapters, The Britons’ significance lay in their success at keeping antisemitic, white supremacist ideas alive. They provided access to obscure and often out-of-print volumes of racist literature, feeding the prejudices and extreme politics of successive generations of Radical Right activists.

# **Conclusion**

The Radical Right of the 1920s firmly and fearfully believed that the British Empire was in constant danger of collapse; a collapse variously engineered by Jews, secret societies, and colonial students and ethnic minorities within Britain. In all of the variants of this conspiracy-minded, more or less antisemitic worldview, Empire remained the obsession. A range of imperial influences determined their perception of the threats the Empire faced. On one level, their worldview was a response to contemporary concerns. The post-war settlement had led to the expansion of the Empire. At the same time, this expansion brought with it fears that the Empire’s size now left it overstretched and vulnerable. The anxieties of those on the Radical Right in this regard were fuelled by a crisis of Empire in the years immediately following the war and even more so by the concessions that the British government granted to nationalists in India, Egypt and Ireland.

Most of all, the worldview of the Radical Right reflected the fact that it was composed of those who had had early, formative experiences of Empire. Experiences such as these shaped the racism and conspiracy theories of Webster and leading activists of the Loyalty League, the British Fascists and The Britons. The later influences – Webster’s revival of a French reactionary tradition, the BF’s embrace of the trappings of Italian Fascism, and The Britons’ use of obscure racial theories – all rested on an imperial foundation. Webster’s bizarre theories fit within a tradition of British imperial conspiracies, which imagined sinister plotters pulling the strings of otherwise docile ‘natives’. The ‘old hands’ of the BF feared an international anti-colonial uprising, a transnational restaging of the Indian Mutiny or Irish War of Independence. Meanwhile, Beamish, Mudge and their fellow racists found the confirmation of their settler racism in the white supremacist ideas of Madison Grant and the old, pseudo-archaeological theories of Anglo-Indian scholars.

The next chapter deals with the continuing influence of imperial ideas of race on the Radical Right during the following decade. The 1930s saw the rise of fascism in Germany and the consolidation of the fascist state in Italy. Both of these regimes exerted an influence on the British Radical Right. Its activists borrowed shirts, symbols and slogans from continental fascists but the British Empire remained the major obsession in the context of the imperial and international situation.

# 2 ‘Fascist Empire’: Imperialism and Race on the British Radical Right, 1930-1940

# **Introduction**

In 1932, the former Labour MP and now leader of the new British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley published *The Greater Britain*. Complete with the Italian fascist symbol of the *fasces* as a frontispiece, in its pages Mosley set out his political vision. Despite its fascist trappings, in both its title and contents, it was an imperialist tract. For the book’s title, Mosley made use of a phrase introduced into the lexicon by Charles Dilke and his two-volume travelogue, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries* (1868), and later popularised during the 1880s.[[393]](#footnote-393) The term referred to the British Isles and the Dominions, essentially the ‘white’ portions of the Empire, excluding India and the ‘black empire’.[[394]](#footnote-394) The ideal of ‘Greater Britain’ served as the basis for various visions of imperial federation throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Reminiscent of Joseph Chamberlain’s schemes for drawing the Dominions closer to Britain through economic and political union, Mosley’s fascist revival of Great Britain was to be built on the harnessed economic resources of ‘Greater Britain’. A self-contained imperial economy combined with authoritarian government, Mosley theorised, would enable Britain to avert ‘national disaster’ and ‘decline’, defy ‘alien’ financiers, and recapture imperial greatness.[[395]](#footnote-395)

The foundational text of Mosley’s British Union of Fascists illustrates the continued influence of the British Empire and imperialists ideas on the worldview of the British Radical Right into the 1930s. This chapter examines the continuing influence of imperial race discourse and other ideas on Radical Right groups during this period, including the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and the aforementioned British Union of Fascists (BUF). Though these groups drew inspiration from the consolidated fascist state in Italy and the emerging Nazi government in Germany, British imperialism remained a persistent influence. Alongside the rise of continental fascism, British fascism in the 1930s developed against the backdrop of negotiations about the future of British rule in India, Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia, and the increasing international tensions that eventually led to war in 1939.

This chapter examines the influence of imperial discourse on the IFL and BUF both in terms of their commentary on imperial and world affairs but also on their respective ideologies more generally. In its attempts to flesh out and analyse the worldview of the IFL and the BUF, this chapter builds on Richard Thurlow and Dan Stone’s work on British fascist ‘racial ideology’.[[396]](#footnote-396) Unlike the small number of other studies that have detailed the imperial policies of British fascist parties or set out to determine the ‘fascist’ features of British fascist imperialism, this chapter aims to uncover what was imperialist about British fascism.[[397]](#footnote-397) The chapter thus investigates how ideologues of the British Radical Right put imperial race discourse to fascist ends and how they repurposed colonial racist stereotypes and applied them to other groups, such as Jews, or otherwise synthesised them with antisemitism.

The first half of this chapter deals with Arnold Leese and his Imperial Fascist League, the foundation of which predated that of Mosley’s BUF by several years. The historiography on the IFL has focused mainly on its extremism, on its similarities to Nazism, and its influence on British neo-fascists of the 1950s and 1960s. Despite ‘Imperial’ being in the organisation’s name, scholars have yet to view the IFL’s ideology through the lens of imperial history. In incorporating such insights, this chapter builds on analyses of the IFL’s ideology by Graham Macklin as well as on older biographical studies of Leese by John Morell.[[398]](#footnote-398) This section looks at Leese’s ideological development from a generally discontented medical professional working out in the Empire into a white supremacist who found confirmation for his imperially-instilled racism in pseudo-archaeological and pseudo-scientific studies. In particular, it examines the influences Leese drew from nineteenth century Orientalist ideas about Aryan civilisation and the British Empire, martial race theory, and the writings of ‘Nordic’ supremacists from both Britain and America.

The second half of the chapter deals with the British Union of Fascists. The BUF’s ideology and the place of racism within it has been the subject of many books, articles and essays since the 1960s, though scholars have paid relatively little attention to the role played by the influence of Empire. [[399]](#footnote-399) Various historians have discussed the extent, development and sincerity of the anti-Jewish prejudice expressed by Mosley and his recruits over the course of the 1930s. More recently, the BUF’s antisemitism has been examined in a range of contexts. Scholars have grappled with its activists’ racist views towards the Jews in the context of sports and sportsmanship, and even the world of betting, but not yet in light of British fascists’ enduring imperial obsessions.[[400]](#footnote-400) In contrast, these sections analyse the BUF’s racist worldview, examining how BUF activists cast the spectre of ‘international Jewish finance’ as the antithesis of the ‘heroic’ greatness of British imperialism. They examine the movement’s use of colonial racist stereotypes in order to discredit and attack colonial nationalism, justify the fascist transformation of the British Empire, and, in the context of the Abyssinia Crisis, to support European fascist expansionism. Finally, the chapter considers how the BUF formulated their plans for a world ruled by fascist empires in dialogue with the liberal internationalist vision of imperialism projected by the League of Nations and its mandate system.

# **‘Nordic Fascism’ in the British Empire**

The Imperial Fascist League was founded in 1928 by the recently retired veterinary surgeon Arnold Leese and a small group of other individuals including Major J. Baillie and L. H. Sherrard.[[401]](#footnote-401) Brigadier-General D. Erskine Tulloch, formerly of the BF, initially led the group.[[402]](#footnote-402) After Tulloch, it was led by ‘a directorate of three persons’ consisting of Baillie, Sherrard and Leese.[[403]](#footnote-403) Eventually, Leese assumed sole control of the group and, according to the reports of the security services, was responsible for the content of the majority of its published output. In a 1943 report, MI5 summarised the early incarnation of the IFL’s ideology as patriotism of ‘the kind… usually attributed to Colonel Blimp.’[[404]](#footnote-404) Leese’s ascendancy to the leadership added an obsessive and fanatical hatred of ‘the Jew’ to their Blimpish imperialism.

Like Tulloch, before his time with the IFL Leese had also been a BF member. He found the group too moderate, summarising their ideology as ‘merely Conservatism with Knobs On’, and left to join the National Fascisti, a short-lived breakaway group.[[405]](#footnote-405) Founded in 1924, the National Fascisti adopted the black shirt and Italian fascist symbols like the *fasces*.[[406]](#footnote-406) They found the BF too close to the Conservative Party and instead stood unequivocally for restricting the franchise, excluding foreigners and others judged ‘unfit’, leaving a ‘comparatively small electorate’ of ‘virile and determined’ white Britons.[[407]](#footnote-407) They quite unashamedly proclaimed their belief in the supremacy of ‘the State’ over ‘the rights of man’.[[408]](#footnote-408) As a member of the NF, Leese served briefly as a local councillor in Stamford, elected on a ‘Fascist’ ticket and served for three years between 1924 and 1927.[[409]](#footnote-409) At some point during the late twenties, through another member of The Britons named Arthur Kitson, he became acquainted with the ‘Jewish Question’ and Henry Hamilton Beamish.[[410]](#footnote-410) Leese recorded in his autobiography how, soon after becoming a subscriber to their publications, Beamish visited Leese at his home in Stamford, Lincolnshire. Leese’s meeting with Beamish was a transformative moment in his life and set him off on his path, in his words, ‘conducting research on the Jew Menace’.[[411]](#footnote-411)

Studies of the IFL’s ideology have emphasised its similarities to Nazism, particularly in terms of the intensity of the genocidal and eliminationist antisemitic rhetoric used by its members.[[412]](#footnote-412) The security services noted these similarities at the time, erroneously claiming that the IFL ‘bases its policy on that of the German Nazi Party’.[[413]](#footnote-413) One can detect the influence of Nazi eugenicist Hans F. K. Günther in the IFL’s newspaper *The Fascist* as early as 1930.[[414]](#footnote-414) The IFL adopted the swastika as their symbol in early 1933.[[415]](#footnote-415) As early as 1935, Leese was recommending the ‘lethal chamber’ as ‘the most certain and permanent way of disposing of the Jews’.[[416]](#footnote-416) Given all this, it is tempting to describe Leese and his IFL as straightforwardly ‘Nazi’. However, Leese drew heavily on a Radical Right tradition that goes back to The Britons and to extreme, marginal Edwardian antisemites like Joseph Banister.

In addition to this, Leese’s beliefs about the supremacy of the white, or as he put it ‘Nordic’ race, rested on a foundation of rabid imperialism. By the time of the founding of the IFL, Leese was forty-nine.[[417]](#footnote-417) Long before he became a fascist, his political frame of mind had been set by his experiences of life and work in the British Empire, mainly in India. Born in Lancashire in 1878 to what John Morell called a ‘well-connected’ and ‘middle-class’ family, Leese later trained at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.[[418]](#footnote-418) Between 1907 and 1913, Leese worked as a ‘Camel Specialist’ to the Government of India and then briefly to the Government of the East Africa Protectorate between 1913 and 1914.[[419]](#footnote-419) During the first year of the Great War, he served as the ‘Veterinary Officer’ to the Marehan Field Force and between 1916 and 1917 as a ‘Camel Purchasing Officer’ in Somaliland. However, it was India, where Leese spent six years, which had the most impact on his politics.

Leese’s position as ‘Camel Specialist’ saw him conduct ‘field research in the most empty parts of North-West India’, accompanied by his dog and a native assistant.[[420]](#footnote-420) He did not fit in well with the other Anglo-Indians and so spent much of his time to himself ‘far from the haunts of the white man’.[[421]](#footnote-421) As far as political sensibilities are concerned, before his time India, Leese had a loathing of socialism common to many middle-class Britons. He went ‘out to India’ with ‘vaguely Liberal’ political views’.[[422]](#footnote-422) He returned convinced ‘that one man was not half as good as another’.[[423]](#footnote-423)

The idea of the ‘natural’ inequality of human beings, particularly different races of human beings, was central to Leese’s politics throughout his life. By the time Leese later encountered white supremacist racial theories, they merely provided support for what he had learned through his contact with the Empire. It was out in the Empire that he found ‘proof’ of what he would later call ‘the Fact of Inequality’.[[424]](#footnote-424) Leese looked back fondly on the relationship he had with his native assistant, with whom he ‘worked on a basis of complete inequality, a standard wisely set by my Aryan British pioneering countrymen in the that great Estate of Empire’.[[425]](#footnote-425) He argued that this attitude of detached superiority was the correct way that white people should treat all ‘lesser’ races and, especially, Jews. Ultimately, attempts to reform what Leese saw as the correct imperial order of things led him to resign from his position in India. He cited the ‘Indianisation of the services’, the practice of promoting native officers to positions formerly reserved for whites, as his reason for leaving.[[426]](#footnote-426)

As well as his own personal experience of the Empire, like The Britons, Leese absorbed imperialist racial theories. Leese’s contributions to the ongoing debate about Indian constitutional reform, which raged through the first half of the 1930s, illustrate the degree to which he took up such theories. Leese’s own fascist vision of India utilised stereotypes derived from martial race theory. In particular, Leese poured scorn on the ‘babus’ and lauded the loyal ‘fighting races’, the ethnic groups of the regiments that had fought to repel the Indian Mutiny. Among the ‘fighting races’ were Punjabi Sikhs and Nepalese Gurkhas among others who were said to naturally possess warrior-like characteristics. [[427]](#footnote-427) For decades, these ideas influenced the way that the British governed India. Leese used these ideas to attack the reformist aspirations of British colonial policy on the grounds that constitutional reform privileged the effeminate ‘babus’ of national movement over the loyal ‘fighting races’.

The pace of Indian constitutional reform accelerated during the 1930s, spurred on by the declaration of the Viceroy Lord Irwin in October 1929. Irwin restated Britain’s commitment to grant India dominion status at some unspecified point in the future. Both Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and his successor, Labour’s Ramsay MacDonald, broadly agreed with Irwin that the tense political situation in India called for further concessions.[[428]](#footnote-428) The real purpose of Irwin’s declaration was to co-opt moderate nationalists with a vague promise of self-government in future.[[429]](#footnote-429) To this end, he invited Indian delegates to London and, between 1930 and 1932, held three round table conferences in order to discuss a new constitution.[[430]](#footnote-430) Though the conferences failed to resolve the significant disagreements between the British colonial authorities and Indian nationalist politicians, they did produce the 1933 India White Paper, which later became the 1935 Government of India Act. The 1935 Act proceeded along the same lines as the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, conferring power over internal affairs to a mixture of elected and appointed Indian representatives while essential areas remained under British imperial control.[[431]](#footnote-431) The Irwin Declaration, the 1933 White Paper and the 1935 Government of India Act all incensed both die-hard Conservatives and British fascists.[[432]](#footnote-432) In reality, despite their liberal appearance, they merely constituted further stalling measures; they established self-government as an eventual aim, a distant and elusive speck on the political horizon.

For Leese, the idea granting any concessions to Indian nationalists was anathema. He derided Indian nationalism as ‘the most transparent humbug’.[[433]](#footnote-433) Drawing on martial race theory, he attacked the British government for handing India over to ‘the Babu’ under the influence of the Jews, and at the expense of the various ethnic groups that constituted the manlier ‘fighting races’.[[434]](#footnote-434) The members of the ‘fighting races’ were ‘noble’, loyal and brave, Leese wrote, while ‘[t]he “Babu”’ was a talker not a doer, at best useless and at worst dangerous.[[435]](#footnote-435) He argued that these ‘fighting races’ should be afforded ‘collectively, the respect of the ruling race’, but that this pride of place would be firmly *within* the Empire.[[436]](#footnote-436) In Leese’s fascist plans for India, only the ‘fighting races’ were accorded any measure of representation. They were to be represented in an ‘Agricultural Corporate State’, while ‘the… lawyers and Babu gasbags’ agitating for independence would be ‘automatically’ excluded.[[437]](#footnote-437) Leese regarded the latter as members of the ‘non-fighting… races’, ‘slave races’ with no claim to self-determination.[[438]](#footnote-438)

He believed Indians incapable of really wanting self-government. Instead, Leese believed that the real power operating behind the scenes was the Jews. In one IFL pamphlet, attacking the 1933 India White Paper, he fulminated: ‘THE WHITE PAPER IS JEWISH, THE POLICY OF SCUTTLE IS JEWISH.’[[439]](#footnote-439) By instigating Indian nationalism, he claimed that the Jews were trying to reduce ‘the power and authority of the White Man’s Government’.[[440]](#footnote-440) Here, one can see again how one form of racism could bolster another. The ideological atmosphere of Leese’s pre-fascist career had been one of paternalistic imperial racism. To him, Indians would never rise above the level of the ‘Half-devil & half-child’ natives of Kipling’s poetry, quite incapable of complex political thought and sincere anti-colonial aspirations.[[441]](#footnote-441) His patronising view of Indians thus served to justify his ideas about a grander conspiracy conducted behind the scenes by Jews.

Leese also combined martial race theory with the racial theory of Indian civilisation to attack Indian nationalism. In doing so, he frequently cited the work of eccentric Anglo-Indian scholar, L. A. Waddell.[[442]](#footnote-442) Waddell was a retired Indian Army medical officer and amateur Orientalist scholar who picked up where the Anglo-Indian scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had left off.[[443]](#footnote-443) In a series of lengthy tomes published between 1917 and his death in 1938, Waddell argued that the ‘Aryan race’ was in fact ‘the oldest of all the civilized races and the parents of all the other civilizations.’[[444]](#footnote-444) He defined the ‘Aryan race’ as ‘the tall, fair and long-headed race of people… now usually called “Nordic”’ who were in modern times ‘located mostly in… Britain and Scandanavia’ but whose members had included ‘the classic Greeks, patrician Romans, Medo-Persians, Hittites, early Phoenicians, the ancient Hindus, the Goths and old Rhine and Danube tribes, Ancient Britons, Normans and Anglo-Saxons’.[[445]](#footnote-445)

*The Fascist* recommended Waddell’s books throughout the 1930s, some of which were for sale directly from the IFL, and countless articles and pamphlets cited his theories.[[446]](#footnote-446) Graham Macklin has revealed that Waddell himself was a supporter of the IFL and corresponded with Leese, with one of Waddell’s letters reprinted in their newspaper.[[447]](#footnote-447) Leese used Waddell’s ideas to bolster his own imperial fascism. When arguing against the further introduction of measures of self-government in 1934, he portrayed the Raj as simply the modern equivalent of the old Aryan conquest of India, using these pseudo-archaeological theories to disregard Indian nationalism.[[448]](#footnote-448) He maintained that the ‘Aryan blood’ of India’s ‘upper castes’, brought into the country by ancient light-skinned Aryan invaders, had ‘worn too thin to give them any claim to rule’.[[449]](#footnote-449) Leese continued to advance this line even after independence in 1947, proclaiming that without ‘Aryan Imperialism’ India would go once again into decline.[[450]](#footnote-450)

As well as drawing on his Indian experiences and imperialist racial ideas about the Indian people, Leese looked to the example of the Dominions whom he considered to be ‘for the most part… more race-conscious than the Mother Country’.[[451]](#footnote-451) Complaining of the portrayal of interracial relationships in a 1933 British stage production of Eugene O'Neill’s *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, he wrote ‘What England needs is straight talk from Australia and South Africa on the elements of the colour problem.’[[452]](#footnote-452) According to his MI5 file, Leese had a number of contacts in southern Africa, including his mentor and founder of The Britons, Henry Hamilton Beamish.[[453]](#footnote-453) The IFL sent most of the 3,000 copies produced per issue of their newspaperto South Africa and Leese had a network of activists aiding in the circulation and publication of his books and pamphlets overseas.[[454]](#footnote-454) *The Fascist* even featured occasional contributions from South African comrades. After one article in *The Fascist* complained of increased sightings in London of ‘coloured men walking about with white girls’, the paper printed a message from ‘South African Fascists’ telling of the feelings of ‘humiliation and distress’ this caused and encouraging ‘all Fascists’ to do what they could to discourage the practice.[[455]](#footnote-455)

The relationship between the IFL and South African fascists is an intriguing one. Leese was keen to lend his support to fellow fascists in this ‘race-conscious’ dominion but reticent because of the pronounced strain of republican Afrikaner nationalism within South African fascism.[[456]](#footnote-456) Afrikaner nationalism developed out of a cultural movement for the protection and promotion of Afrikaans, the language of the original Dutch settlers and their descendants, during the 1870s.[[457]](#footnote-457) Following the Anglo-Boer War, this became an increasingly political movement, resentful of British imperial interference in South Africa. By the 1930s, a radical section of Afrikaner nationalism emerged which stood for the belief in the supremacy of ‘the white Dutch-settlers (or Afrikaans-) speaking, Protestant inhabitants’ to the exclusion of the British and South Africa’s Jewish population.[[458]](#footnote-458) During the 1930s, the coalition government, composed of J. B. M. Hertzog’s National Party and Jan Smuts’ South African Party, represented mainstream Afrikaner nationalism and desired an autonomous South Africa within the Empire. The Gesuiwerde (or ‘Purified’) National Party under Daniel F. Malan broke away from the coalition, declaring their support for an independent republic.[[459]](#footnote-459)

The proliferation of fascist groups in South Africa following the Nazis’ rise to power in January 1933 coincided with the radicalisation of Afrikaner nationalism. Already in possession of a base of supporters among South Africans of German descent, the Nazis launched a propaganda campaign in South Africa.[[460]](#footnote-460) They despatched vast piles of propaganda leaflets to German consulates in South Africa hoping to capitalise on the rich vein of indigenous antisemitism. Before the passing of the Quota Act of 1930, calls for the restriction Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe had been at the forefront of South African politics.[[461]](#footnote-461) The rise of the Nazis in Germany inspired the formation of a number of fascist groups in South Africa. These included the South African Gentile Nationalist Socialist Movement, known as the Greyshirts; Ray Rudman’s Boernasie; the South African National People’s Movement, led by Chris Havemann and also known as the ‘Blackshirts’; Manie Wessels’ South African Democratic Party; and H. S. Terblanche’s People’s Movement.[[462]](#footnote-462)

The IFL’s newspaper featured updates on the South African situation and reports on the progress of South African fascists groups. In particular, the IFL paid close attention to the Greyshirts, founded in October 1933, by Louis T. Weichardt.[[463]](#footnote-463) In his youth, Weichardt left his native South Africa to study commerce in Germany and was in the country when the First World War began. Though a British subject, Weichardt enlisted in the German army, fighting for three and a half years before he was severely wounded. He returned to South Africa in the mid-1920s and was active in the National Party as a vocal advocate for a more antisemitic party line. Weichardt later left the National Party to found the Greyshirts in protest over their entry into coalition with the pro-British Jan Smuts and his South African Party. As early as February 1934, *The Fascist* recommended the Greyshirts and their publication *Die Waarheid*, pledging to ‘do what it can to help them’.[[464]](#footnote-464)

The Greyshirts had a close relationship with the ‘Purified’ National Party. Greyshirt activists even entered into a series of unofficial electoral pacts with the ‘Purified’ Nationalist activists later on in the 1930s.[[465]](#footnote-465) The IFL, however, were deeply critical of Afrikaner nationalism. Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Lane, writing in *The Fascist*, accused Malan’s Purified Nationalists of trying to ‘oust the Englishman from South Africa or at any rate from all power’.[[466]](#footnote-466) He was also critical of the then South African Prime Minister J. B. M. Hertzog and Deputy Prime Minister Jan Smuts, and accused them of covertly working towards the same goal. Lane claimed that Afrikaner nationalists were working hand in hand ‘with the Hidden Hand’. According to him, the Jews were working to inflame the old ‘hatred of the English by the Boers’ in order to ‘break up… the British Empire (one of the first moves for World Domination)’. When Lane’s piece drew criticism, Leese defended him, writing in reply to critical correspondents that ‘we are Imperialist to our Aryan backbone’ and refused to endorse ‘the growth of germs of separation’.[[467]](#footnote-467)

Despite his admiration for South African ‘race-consciousness’, Leese was stubbornly imperialist and resolute in his belief ‘in South Africa only as part and parcel of the Empire’.[[468]](#footnote-468) However, he sought to reassure readers of *The Fascist* in June 1934 that Weichardt’s Greyshirts were ‘“sound” on the matter of the British Imperial Connection’.[[469]](#footnote-469) Alongside his objections to Afrikaner nationalism, Leese was also critical of what he called South African fascism’s ‘pro-German complex’.[[470]](#footnote-470) By this, he referred to South African sympathy for the Nazis’ calls for the return of former German colonies lost after their defeat in the First World War.[[471]](#footnote-471) Just because Britain or its Empire was not yet ‘Jew-free’, Leese wrote, this was no reason to believe Africa would be better in the hands of German Nazis.[[472]](#footnote-472) He argued that Britain was under no obligation to return German colonies it had won in the course of the Great War. He added ‘[j]ust as the Dutchman took territory from its original black owners, so did the Briton take lands from the Dutchman and the German’. *The Fascist* also contained assurances, in this case from a British South African member of the Greyshirts, claiming that the idea that the Greyshirts were ‘pro-German and anti-British’ was ‘Jewish propaganda’.[[473]](#footnote-473) Despite these debates and reservations, *The Fascist* continued to report favourably on Weichardt’s forays in electoral politics and to recommend the group’s publications as ‘100%’ anti-Jewish.[[474]](#footnote-474)

# **‘Nordic Fascism’ and the ‘Nordic myth’**

Leese’s conception of fascism represented the combination of imperial experiences and racial theories with the work of white supremacist pseudo-scientists and eugenicists popular in Britain and America during the 1920s. These writers argued that the Nordic race, of which the British and the Americans were part, was the superior race. Like Waddell and the earlier Anglo-Indian scholars, they also believed that this race formed a sort of eternal ruling class, well-represented throughout history among the landed gentry and seafaring imperial pioneers. They called for the restoration of the rule of this Nordic aristocracy. From very early on in his involvement with the British Radical Right, Leese understood fascism along these lines, as a ‘return’ to, or perhaps an advance, towards aristocratic rule.[[475]](#footnote-475) He outlined the aim of the IFL as ‘the formation of a new aristocracy of character, service and brains’ and looked forward to the day when British society would be run on an ‘aristocratic basis’.[[476]](#footnote-476)

By this, he did not mean a straightforward return to feudalism. Leese, after all, was a successful veterinary surgeon from a middle class family not a member of the landed gentry. While Colin Holmes speculated that Leese’s fascism might have stemmed from a paranoid personality disorder, there are signs that his attraction to fascism stemmed not from his individual psychology but from an upper-middle-class pessimism about the decline of British society due to democratisation and ‘socialism’.[[477]](#footnote-477) Leese originally trained as an equine veterinarian. When the rise of the automobile decreased the amount of work he was able to get, he went overseas.[[478]](#footnote-478) Like many men, an imperial career enabled Leese to rise to a position unavailable to him at home.[[479]](#footnote-479) Beyond his career, out in the Empire by the simple fact of the colour of his skin, he sat atop the colonial racial hierarchy. He returned to Britain with an inflated sense of himself, and, in fascism’s promises of neo-aristocracy, saw the means to ascend to the superior position he believed he deserved.

An examination of the works recommended by the IFL, or for sale in their newspaper, reveals the provenance of many of Leese’s ideas. Aside from The Britons, it seems Leese was also influenced by W. R. Inge, Anglican Dean of St. Paul’s. Dean Inge was a ‘successful popularizer’ of eugenics and ‘a well-known public figure in the inter-war years through his radio broadcasts and frequent newspaper articles’.[[480]](#footnote-480) Leese commended Inge’s articles in the very first issue of *The Fascist*.[[481]](#footnote-481) In his writing, Inge quoted the works of American white supremacists like Madison Grant, a favourite of The Britons, and his disciple Lothrop Stoddard. Drawing on Grant and Stoddard, he expressed a ‘racial pessimism’ which, ‘was really a coded form of expressing a more basic pessimism in the future for the English upper and middle class, which he saw as threatened by a militant, internationalist socialism’.[[482]](#footnote-482)

As well as imbibing Inge’s ideological combination of racism and pessimistic class snobbery, it is likely that through his work Leese was also introduced Grant and Stoddard. While Grant had already had considerable influence on The Britons, his ‘leading disciple’, Klansman and fellow eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard, was to have a profound impact upon Leese.[[483]](#footnote-483) After Grant, Stoddard was ‘the second most influential racist’ in 1920s America.[[484]](#footnote-484) During this time, he published a series of books on race including*The Rising Tide of Colour Against White World Supremacy* (1920), *The Revolt Against Civilization*: *The Menace of the Under-Man* (1922), and *Racial Realities in Europe* (1924). Stoddard elaborated on, and in some cases outright plagiarised, Grant’s arguments, giving them an urgent and even more pronounced white supremacist edge. Stoddard’s books soon made their way into Radical Right circles in Britain. As well as encountering Stoddard’s work through Inge, Leese would have read about it in the pages of *The Patriot* to whose correspondence section he occasionally contributed.[[485]](#footnote-485) Webster’s books cited Stoddard’s writings and Prescott Decie’s Loyalty League also recommended his work.[[486]](#footnote-486)

Examining Stoddard’s books, one can see that so much of Leese’s worldview was influenced by the primacy Stoddard placed on race and aristocracy. The first issue of the IFL’s *The Fascist* referenced Stoddard’s tirade against the ‘Under-Man’ in his *Revolt Against Civilization* when it appealed to its readers to join their struggle against ‘politicians, international parasites and seditious “undermen”’.[[487]](#footnote-487) *The Fascist* also recommended Stoddard’s books and propagated his ideas.[[488]](#footnote-488) Leese regularly repeated Stoddard’s maxim that race was the essential feature of human society and that everything, including and especially politics, was simply a reflection of underlying racial ‘realities’.

In his first white supremacist call-to-arms, *The Rising Tide of Colour*, Stoddard envisioned a future in which ‘white lands’ were swamped ‘a rising flood’ of ‘colored’ immigrants.[[489]](#footnote-489) He elaborated on this in the two books that followed, elevating the coming ‘flood’ to the status of a ‘*revolt against civilization*’ by the ‘Under-Man’.[[490]](#footnote-490) While Stoddard was writing in the context of a campaign for US immigration legislation, in Britain, Inge had dwelled on the implications that Stoddard’s work had for the British Empire.[[491]](#footnote-491) The imperilled ‘White World’ Stoddard envisioned consisted of North America, Europe, Australia, and the colonized portions of Africa and South America.[[492]](#footnote-492) Stoddard’s concern for the preservation of ‘White rule’ was transnational; he observed that ‘the determination to get rid of white rule’ was ‘spreading like wild-fire over the brown world to-day.’[[493]](#footnote-493) This slot very easily into Leese’s fervent support for British imperialism and buttressed the attitudes he had acquired in the course of his colonial experiences.

In order to repel the ‘coloured’ advance, Stoddard advocated the restriction of immigration, a renewed spirit of ‘white solidarity’, and eugenic intervention to create ‘*an ever-perfecting super race*’.[[494]](#footnote-494) Like Webster and Grant before him, Stoddard identified the liberal and egalitarian philosophy of the Enlightenment as the root of the problem. He attacked democracy as no better ‘than Mumbo-Jumbo or West African ju-ju’.[[495]](#footnote-495) Stoddard’s solution, his proposed counter-revolution in defence of white ‘civilization’, took the form of the establishment of a ‘*Neo-Aristocracy*’.[[496]](#footnote-496) In Stoddard’s ‘*Neo-Aristocracy*’, also termed ‘“Aristo-Democracy,” or… “Neo-Democracy”’, Nordic racial aristocrats would consolidate their rule through highly authoritarian eugenic engineering.[[497]](#footnote-497)

Stoddard’s neo-aristocratic white supremacist creed is central to understanding Leese’s own worldview, which he called ‘Racial Fascism’.[[498]](#footnote-498) In fact, Leese’s political views owed a greater deal more to the alarmist white supremacy of the 1920s than to European fascism of the 1930s. Leese came to fascism through racism, not the other way around. Even his understanding of Webster’s conspiracy theories, which the IFL also praised and propagated, was coloured by his extreme racism.[[499]](#footnote-499) Leese opposed what he called ‘the poisonous Jewish Masonic doctrine of Universal Brotherhood (“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”)’ on the grounds that in practice it meant, ‘for the white race, willingness to accept as a brother-in-law a man of colour’.[[500]](#footnote-500) In fascism, Leese believed he had found a system that could create anew the kind of racial aristocracy to which he had become accustomed in India and East Africa, and which Stoddard had advocated in his books.[[501]](#footnote-501)

Finding confirmation of imperial inequalities in Stoddard’s neo-aristocratic racism, Leese incorporated the figure of ‘the Jew’ into his bigoted credo. Directing the rising tide of ‘colour’, behind every attempt to weaken white rule, Leese saw the hidden hand of Jewry. Viewing everything through the prism of race, Leese interpreted history in light of Stoddard’s warnings of a tidal assault on the white West by the ‘coloured’ East. According to Leese, the Jews were leading the latest ‘great Asiatic assault upon Europe’ in the form of Bolshevism.[[502]](#footnote-502) Again, here he borrowed from Stoddard’s racialisation of Bolshevism and his assertion that Bolsheviks were ‘mostly born’ and not made.[[503]](#footnote-503) In this warped worldview, Jews represented the ringleader of the world’s ‘inferior’ races and Bolshevism, ‘their’ creed, represented the political expression of racial resentment. As Leese wrote in an article in *The Fascist* in 1933:

The Jews are always to be found on the side of colour, and the influence of all Jews is thrown into the campaign to make the white man forget that the civilisation of the half the world depends upon himself.[[504]](#footnote-504)

Like The Britons, Leese made little political impact during the inter-war period. The IFL estimated their own membership at 2,500 during the mid-thirties but the security services reported that they had no more than 150 members, with around 50 very active members.[[505]](#footnote-505) The IFL refrained from taking part in elections, instead concentrating on the realm of ideas and working to ‘expose’ a Jewish conspiracy against the Aryan race. The security services observed in 1936 that the IFL’s activities were ‘confined almost wholly to the publication and the sale or distribution of their literature’.[[506]](#footnote-506)

Leese’s white supremacist racism and antisemitic fixations took precedence over the specifics of fascist politics to such a degree that they, along with his own abrasive personality, actually inhibited the development of the IFL. For instance, during Oswald Mosley’s conversion to fascism in the early thirties, his followers attempted a merger with the IFL.[[507]](#footnote-507) However, disagreements over the importance each group placed on the ‘Jewish Question’ got in the way of collaboration and relations between Mosley and Leese soured.[[508]](#footnote-508) Leese went to launch antisemitic tirades against Mosley’s first wife Cynthia.[[509]](#footnote-509) He also referred to the BUF as the ‘British Jewnion of Fascists’ and their ideology as ‘Jewish’ or ‘Kosher Fascism’.[[510]](#footnote-510) While, as later chapters will demonstrate, Leese’s ideas proved a significant influence on a new generation of fascists after 1945, during the inter-war period the IFL never approached the size or notoriety of Mosley’s British Union of Fascists.

# **Empire versus ‘International Finance’**

The BUF was founded in 1932 by Sir Oswald Mosley, an ex-MP who had served in both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. After leaving Labour, he had founded his own New Party and drifted closer and closer towards fascism.[[511]](#footnote-511) The BUF became the largest of Britain’s inter-war fascist parties. At its height, it had an estimated 50,000 members and was briefly endorsed during 1934 in the newspapers of press baron Lord Rothermere.[[512]](#footnote-512) The BUF was composed of some of Mosley’s old colleagues from the New Party, as well as many of the former members of the British Fascists.[[513]](#footnote-513)

Mosley and his followers adopted the Italian *fasces* as their symbol and a black shirt, reportedly based on Mosley’s fencing jacket, as its uniform.[[514]](#footnote-514) Despite the Italian appearance, Richard Thurlow has offered the following summary of Mosley’s political worldview:

[Mosley’s] whole political life was dedicated to two propositions: that the Empire and/or Europe was in danger of collapse without drastic reorganization under firm leadership, and that he alone could provide the heroic flair and drive to restore the power that was being insidiously undermined by external and internal enemies.[[515]](#footnote-515)

The British Empire was to serve as the foundation on which Mosley planned to build British fascism. As he set out in *The Greater Britain*, the closest thing to a manifesto that the early BUF possessed, the Empire was threatened by the tempestuous international economic system. To guard against this threat, Mosley proposed reorganising the British Empire as a self-contained ‘economic entity’, exploiting the ‘natural balance of exchange’ that he argued existed between Britain and its colonies.[[516]](#footnote-516) In the second edition of *The Greater Britain* in 1934, he referred to this programme as national and imperial ‘Autarchy’.[[517]](#footnote-517) In order to create this insulated imperial economy, Mosley believed it was essential to effectively suspend democracy. A future British fascist government was to have ‘absolute power to act’ and disregard ‘obstructive minorities’ in executing what it believed to be ‘the will of the majority’.[[518]](#footnote-518)

As Bernard Semmel noted, Mosley’s economic ideas about imperial ‘Autarchy’ owed a great deal to the ‘social-imperialism’ of Edwardian political thinkers Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Alfred Milner.[[519]](#footnote-519) Chamberlain had served as a Liberal MP and then as a Liberal Unionist in a Conservative coalition government as Colonial Secretary between 1895 and 1903. Inspired by the work of Victorian imperialist writers like J. R. Seeley, Chamberlain’s ‘self-appointed task was to prevent Britain declining from a great empire into a little state by rousing the nation to the threats it faced, and by implementing a practical and comprehensive policy of resistance and regeneration.’[[520]](#footnote-520) From 1903, he began campaigning to establish a system of preferential trade between Britain and its Dominions, with tariff walls keeping out ‘foreign’ competition.[[521]](#footnote-521) Milner, who had served as an imperial administrator in various roles but most notably as High Commissioner of South Africa from 1897 to 1901, was an enthusiastic supporter of this vision and came to preach social-imperial ideas with a near religious fervour.[[522]](#footnote-522) Chamberlain and his supporters hoped to use an imperial economy restricted along these lines to ‘bring greater and more secure levels of employment for British workers… further improvements in job security… in the shape of tariff protection for British industries’ and as ‘a means of raising revenue for social reforms’.[[523]](#footnote-523) The cause of tariff reform or imperial preference was the economic wing of the Edwardian drive for ‘national efficiency’, a response to the perceived national and imperial decline supposedly highlighted by the Anglo-Boer War.[[524]](#footnote-524) Chamberlain’s ideas caught on with ‘a band of young Conservatives’ anxious about the future of the Empire.[[525]](#footnote-525) Though often sidelined by the Party’s leadership, the issue of idea of a unified imperial economy continued to figure in Conservative politics until the outcome of the 1932 Ottawa Conference led to the establishment of a moderate version of imperial preference.[[526]](#footnote-526)

Mosley’s interest in social imperialist ideas was evident from early on in his political career. When he stood as a Conservative candidate in 1918, he did so under the idiosyncratic, Milnerite slogan of ‘imperial socialism’.[[527]](#footnote-527) Mosley later identified his ideas at this time as in the tradition of ‘the combination of radicalism and imperialism in the Birmingham school of Joseph Chamberlain’.[[528]](#footnote-528) After his conversion to fascism, BUF members continued to refer to their fascism as ‘“Socialistic Imperialism”’.[[529]](#footnote-529) Like Chamberlain, Mosley developed ‘a coherent, doom-laden, and apocalyptic vision, part historical, part geopolitical, and part prescriptive’ and was ‘compulsively preoccupied by enemies without and by enemies within’.[[530]](#footnote-530) He also ‘looked back appreciatively (and selectively) to an earlier golden age of victorious virtues, robust will, splendid endeavour, and unchallenged supremacy’. Mosley differed from Chamberlain and Milner in his total opposition to parliamentary democracy and his intention to use social imperialist ideas to defeat what he referred to as ‘International Jewish Finance’.

Antisemitism, though pursued less obsessively by Mosley than by Leese, was *central* to his conception of British imperialism and his perception of the threats the Empire faced. Antisemitism was present among Mosley’s followers even before the founding of the BUF. In *The New Times*, the newsletter of the pre-BUF New Party, there were articles discussing the necessity of being tactically discrete in expressing anti-Jewish views.[[531]](#footnote-531) The Empire was to be reorganised as a self-contained unit for the express purpose of resisting and excluding ‘the alien power’ of ‘foreign finance’.[[532]](#footnote-532) Mosley blamed the forces of ‘predatory and alien capitalism’ for the weakness of the mainstream political parties and their inability to halt Britain’s progress ‘along the road to national disaster’.[[533]](#footnote-533) While *The Greater Britain* never mentions Jews directly, using euphemisms like ‘alien’, in light of both the discussions in the New Party’s publications and the later extensive use of terms like ‘alien’ and ‘international Jewish finance’ in the BUF press it is clear to whom Mosley was referring.

The BUF’s programme consisted of an authoritarian rendering of social imperialism plus antisemitism. In Mosley’s Manichean separation of the world, the British Empire and other fascist powers stood on one side and ‘international Jewish finance’ stood on the other. He presented them as two fundamentally opposed systems. In one of his early fascist speeches, Mosley contrasted Empire with international finance. He attacked ‘alien Yiddish finance’ for ‘flooding the British Empire’ with cheap foreign goods produced by sweated labour and ‘undermining the prosperity of Britain’. British fascists, on the other hand, wanted to restore Britain to greatness, remaining true to the ‘the old spirit… the spirit of Drake and Raleigh, the spirit of Clive and Warren Hastings’.[[534]](#footnote-534) Mosley compared their imperial heroism to the debased and materialistic colonial exploitation that he argued was promoted by ‘international finance’.

When the BUF expressed their antisemitic support for Empire, ‘International Jewish finance’ constituted both an internal *and* external threat to the Empire. As the disembodied, directing force of the world economy, international Jewish financiers were cast both in the role of exploitative imperialist *and* anti-imperial plotters. Mosley and other BUF activists held that Jewish financial involvement had corrupted the great ideal of Empire. They argued that the Empire had been founded on the basis of romantic ideals – greatness, destiny, and heroism – but had become about gold, greed and usury.

The railing of BUF writers against ‘international Jewish financiers’ must be placed into the context of earlier manifestations of imperialist antisemitism. In their support for ‘heroic’ British imperialism in contrast to a ‘Jewish’ or ‘alien’ financial imperialism, the BUF were dealing in antisemitic stereotypes that date back to Shakespeare’s Shylock but also to certain anti-imperialist arguments from the around the time of the Anglo-Boer War. Much like Arnold White and Joseph Banister before them, the BUF put what were originally anti-Jewish anti-imperialist arguments to imperialist ends.

Decades earlier, the economist, critic of imperialism and Liberal, J. A. Hobson, had opposed the Anglo-Boer War on the grounds that Britain was fighting merely to defend the investments of ‘a small group of international financiers, chiefly German in origin and Jewish in race’.[[535]](#footnote-535) He even referred to the conflict as ‘the Jew-Imperialist design’.[[536]](#footnote-536) Hobson was employed as a journalist on the *Manchester Guardian* in 1899 and his experiences as a correspondent during the Anglo-Boer War provided material for *The War in South Africa* (1900) as well as his more famous *Imperialism, A Study* (1902). Hobson’s antisemitic explanations for the war were widely circulated by its opponents.[[537]](#footnote-537) Colin Holmes and Claire Hirshfield identified similar contemporaneous expressions of an antisemitic anti-imperialism on the left in the publications of the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation, as well as in Robert Blatchford’s *The Clarion*.[[538]](#footnote-538)

Mosley and his recruits drew on very similar arguments that the British Empire was being made to serve the interests of ‘rich Jews’. The BUF’s resident philosopher and eventual Director of Policy, Alexander Raven Thomson, even repeated these earlier antisemitic analyses of the Anglo-Boer War in *Action*.[[539]](#footnote-539) He presented tensions between Boer and Briton as the result of ‘Jew financiers’, and the ‘tragic’ Anglo-Boer War as the result of the economic interests of ‘the Jews and alien financiers’.[[540]](#footnote-540) For Hobson and left-wing critics of Empire, similar arguments had been part of an overall critique of imperialism whereas for Raven Thomson and other Mosleyites they were a means of making the point that the British Empire had strayed from what they regarded as its ‘true’ and ‘heroic’ purpose.

For the BUF, malicious Jewish influence in the Empire had replaced the ties of blood and the principles of duty and obligation with money-making imperatives. As Michael Goulding put it in their *Action* newspaper, the Empire was being ‘slowly and surely’ destroyed by ‘the gold of usury’.[[541]](#footnote-541) Jewish financiers, claimed Goulding, had reduced ‘the heroism of the past’ and ‘the great responsibilities of Destiny’ into a matter of pounds and pence.[[542]](#footnote-542) Raven Thomson lamented that Britain’s imperial ‘heritage’, left by ‘our heroic forefathers’, had been transformed into ‘a field of exploitation for alien finance operating from the City of London’.[[543]](#footnote-543) John Beckett, who served for a time as the BUF’s Director of Publications, accused the imperial state of acting as ‘a debt collector’s Government’ working to make the Empire ‘safe for international finance’.[[544]](#footnote-544) In contrast, for Beckett, the true purpose of ‘[a]n Imperial race’ was to ‘defend its subjects against exploitation and international usury’.

The kind of antisemitic arguments that had functioned as criticisms of Empire in the hands of Hobson and others now became a means of supporting the Empire and deflecting criticisms of imperial conduct. The BUF argued that the real culprits behind imperial injustices and excesses were international Jewish financiers and not *genuine* British imperialists. In South Africa and in India, Goulding alleged that Jews were exploiting ‘natives to the detriment of the white man’.[[545]](#footnote-545) He also indicted them for weakening the ties of the Commonwealth by placing ‘their greedy lust for gold above the efforts of our forefathers’.[[546]](#footnote-546) Olive Hawks, an enthusiastic BUF activist and its Chief Women’s Organizer from 1940, went even further, arguing that the real target of the ire of colonial nationalists should be ‘the forces of finance’ and not British administration.[[547]](#footnote-547) Abuses of imperial power, in Hawks’ view, were the fault of Jewish ‘Financial Democracy’ and not British imperialism.

Fervent support for British imperialism coupled with opposition to a specific ‘financial’ imperialism was at heart of the BUF’s campaign to save the Lancashire cotton industry during the mid-1930s. During the 1930s, the Lancashire cotton industry faced losing the market for its cotton in India to foreign competition from Japan as well as to manufacturers within India.[[548]](#footnote-548) The imposition of higher tariffs on British exports in India further compounded the problem. Mosley proposed a raft of highly authoritarian and reactionary measures to solve Lancashire’s problems, which he blamed on ‘alien international financiers’.[[549]](#footnote-549)

In a 1935 speech to a rally at the Albert Hall, Mosley identified ‘International Jewish Finance’ as ‘the enemy and foe, sweating the East and ruining the West; destroying the Indian masses and filling the unemployment queues of Lancashire’.[[550]](#footnote-550) The problem was not imperialism, but imperialist exploitation carried out by Jews. William Joyce, the BUF’s Director of Propaganda and later the infamous ‘Lord Haw-Haw’, illustrated the imperialist doublethink in action here, drawing a distinction between ‘authentic’ and ‘financial’ imperialism.[[551]](#footnote-551) He wrote that ‘[t]he true Imperialist… is stirred to implacable indignation by the fact that international finance… plays such a large part in exploiting low-grade labour to destroy British markets’.[[552]](#footnote-552) Joyce even speculated that by mobilising ‘the slave-labour of the East’, international financiers were hoping not only to ‘starve Lancashire’ but also to ‘overthrow Western civilization by mobilizing the coloured races against the white’.[[553]](#footnote-553)

There was a delusional utopianism to the BUF’s arguments in favour of Empire but against international finance. Mosley and his followers imagined that they could separate the high-minded ‘heroic’ values of British imperialism from the accompanying economic exploitation. They drew an illusory distinction between ‘*true* imperialism and *capitalist-Jewish-finance* imperialism’.[[554]](#footnote-554) However, no amount of antisemitic conspiracy theory could change the fact that exploitation could not be divorced from imperial expansion. Championing the ‘heroic’ pioneers of the East India Trading Company (more of which will be seen in the following chapter), sat awkwardly and inconsistently alongside denunciations of financial exploitation.

# **‘Babus’, ‘savages’ and an imperial ‘Fascist Peace’**

Alongside their critiques of ‘international Jewish finance’, BUF activists drew on imperial race discourse when it came to discussing non-white ‘subjects’ of Empire and, in particular when attacking colonial nationalism. Bound up with the BUF’s imperialist, antisemitic campaign around the Lancashire cotton industry was a critique of Indian nationalism that employed martial race stereotypes. Like the BF and the IFL before them, the BUF made frequent use of the gendered aspect of martial race ideas. Its activists repeatedly attacked Indians fighting for self-government as effeminate. For the BUF, it was precisely their effeteness, according to martial race theory, that disqualified Indian nationalist activists from self-government.

The articles and speeches of a number of BUF activists featured attacks on ‘babu’ intellectuals. A.K. Chesterton was the BUF’s Director of Publicity and Propaganda and editor, at various times, of their newspapers *Blackshirt* and *Action*.[[555]](#footnote-555) Writing in *Action*, he fumed that Britain was surrendering India to ‘the chicanery of Parsee moneylenders and Babu politicians, who would faint if a squib burst at their feet’.[[556]](#footnote-556) Around the time that the 1935 Government of India Act was being discussed in Parliament, Mosley called on the British government to stand fast before these ‘lesser’ men and refrain from ‘backing out of India, jabbering and salaaming before the frowns of a few Babu lawyers’.[[557]](#footnote-557) Reviewing the autobiography of Indian nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru in *Action* a year later, John Beckett regurgitated martial race ideas when he wrote that ‘the educated Indian… has usually lost the manliness of his more Asiatic brothers and acquired a superficial Western cunning’.[[558]](#footnote-558)

The British imperialists of the nineteenth century had used martial race ideas to deny Indian claims to masculinity and therefore to self-determination. For Mosleyite fascists, the same ideas functioned not only as a justification for the continuation of British imperial rule, but for the revivification of British imperial authority along fascist lines. The Empire, argued various BUF figures, required a steady, strong and masculine hand. Indian men, supposedly afflicted with ‘native hysteria’, were simply not masculine enough to govern themselves.[[559]](#footnote-559) Behind William Joyce’s assertions that ‘Indian Swarajist Movement is supported by International financiers’ was a belief in the essential inferiority and incapability of Indians.[[560]](#footnote-560) As another BUF activist wrote, with all the arrogance of an Anglo-Indian official, ‘There is only one form of government that [the Indian] understands and that is a ruler who knows his mind and gets his way.’[[561]](#footnote-561)

BUF activists enthusiastically employed old imperial racist stereotypes, this time against Africans, during the Abyssinia Crisis of 1935. Italy had long had designs on Abyssinia and Mussolini was determined to conquer where earlier Italian attempts had humiliatingly failed. He used a skirmish on the border at Wal Wal between Abyssinian troops and soldiers from Italian Somaliland as pretext for a renewed effort at imperial expansion. From the beginning of the Abyssinia Crisis, the BUF threw its weight behind the Italian cause. In part, the BUF’s support of Italian interests was payment for Mussolini’s financial support.[[562]](#footnote-562) Beyond this, however, Italy’s aggressive and expansionist imperialism chimed with Mosley’s grand designs for ‘Greater Britain’. In August 1935, the BUF mounted a campaign under the slogan ‘Mind Britain’s Business’, ostensibly a peace campaign but really a campaign in favour of fascist expansionism.[[563]](#footnote-563) In defending Italy, the BUF employed examples from British imperial history of the ‘civilising mission’ against ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’ and drew on well-established colonial racist tropes about Africans.

They supported Italian interests, and justified the eventual Italian invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935, as the modern equivalent of the British imperial ‘mission’. Raven Thomson looked to the reconquering of the Sudan in the 1890s by Herbert Kitchener, then Commander-in-Chief of British forces in Egypt, ‘Like the Italians, [Kitchener] was marching against a barbaric enemy with a reputation for bravery and military skill.’[[564]](#footnote-564) Kitchener and Mussolini were doing the same thing, it was argued, simply ‘put[ting] down slavery and barbarism with a strong hand’.[[565]](#footnote-565) Mosley likened it to another event from the ‘greater days’ of British imperialism, an 1868 expedition in Abyssinia led by army officer Robert Napier whose mission it was to rescue several missionaries and two representatives of the British government.[[566]](#footnote-566) Mussolini, Mosley claimed, was only acting in the tradition of British imperialists when he made it clear that ‘he would not stand for’ slavery and barbarism.[[567]](#footnote-567) Captain Robert Gordon-Canning, who wrote on foreign affairs for BUF periodicals, found the Italians guilty of ‘no more than… a task so often carried out by our country and to the glory of our countrymen – carrying the reign of peace to warring tribes and bringing to these backward and barbaric races the science of the West.’[[568]](#footnote-568)

In addition to comparisons between the British imperial past and the Italian fascist present, the BUF press was replete with images of alleged Abyssinian barbarism, of mutilated victims of torture and slavery.[[569]](#footnote-569) Gordon-Canning described Abyssinia as ‘[a] barbaric and backward land’.[[570]](#footnote-570) He also cited the accounts of Sir Edward Grigg, ex-Governor of the Kenya colony, published in *The Times*,which told of the encroachment of Abyssinian slavers into British imperial territory.[[571]](#footnote-571) One of the captions accompanying images of Abyssinian atrocities in the BUF’s *Blackshirt* newspaperillustrates their attempt to present Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia as the younger brother of the British imperial ‘civilising mission’. The caption read ‘It can be understood why thousands of natives ask with pitiful hope, “Is the white man coming now to deliver us?”’[[572]](#footnote-572)

The superficial humanitarian concern for the plight of Abyssinian ‘natives’ was accompanied by outrage against other Abyssinians, dubbed ‘Black Murderers’.[[573]](#footnote-573) For BUF writers, much more than Italian territorial ambitions were at stake in Abyssinia. For them, the continued dominance of the white race in Africa hung on the prospect of an Italian victory. Pieces in the BUF’s newspapers invoked spectres of Britain’s colonial past, images of literal and figurative castration and of the violation of white women, to drive home the point that this was not simply a foreign skirmish but a high stakes battle over the future of white rule in Africa. Failure to subdue the Abyssinians, cautioned one BUF writer, would mean that British subjects in nearby Kenya would ‘pay the price’ with ‘the plunder of their cattle, the enslavement of their women, and the death or shameful mutilation of their own persons.’[[574]](#footnote-574)

A.K. Chesterton reiterated similar threats when Haile Selassie, the exiled Emperor of Abyssinia, visited Britain in June 1936. Chesterton was scandalised by the spectacle in the news footage of Selassie’s arrival of a white women greeting Selassie with a low curtsey and presenting him with a bouquet. Chesterton hoped that this footage would not be shown ‘in all those parts of the world where small colonies of whites are overwhelmingly outnumbered by blacks’.[[575]](#footnote-575) In these places, he warned, ‘the “Black Peril” to womanhood in Africa is sufficiently menacing without being encouraged’.[[576]](#footnote-576) Here and elsewhere in their coverage of Abyssinia, the BUF were exploiting the fear of miscegenation. The danger of the violation of white women became a metaphor for a much-feared violation of the imperial order of things.

When it came to the invocation of the danger of black sexuality to white women, Chesterton and other contributors borrowed from a tradition of colonial racism, which, in Chesterton’s case, had been learnt first-hand from childhood. A dedicated imperialist throughout his political career, Chesterton was born a few months before the start of the Anglo-Boer War to British settlers living on the Witwatersrand.[[577]](#footnote-577) The Witwatersrand, where he also spent much of his childhood, was the scene of ‘periodic waves of collective sexual hysteria’ over the so-called ‘Black Peril’ between 1890 and 1914.[[578]](#footnote-578) The ‘Black Peril’ was a colloquial term used in settler communities throughout the Empire, but especially in southern and east Africa, to refer to ‘the supposedly pervasive danger to white women of rape by black men’.[[579]](#footnote-579) Panics over the ‘Black Peril’ did not correspond with actual incidents of rape or sexual assault; instead, they reflected flashpoints of racism, economic and political instability, sexual jealousy and misogyny on the part of white male settlers. [[580]](#footnote-580) In Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, ‘Black Peril’ panics became a way of constructing and then repeatedly reasserting a white racial identity against the divisions of class, gender, and, in the latter case, those between British and other European settlers. [[581]](#footnote-581)

Chesterton was not a lone figure in this regard. A number of other BUF members had colonial experiences before their days as fascist activists. W. F. Mandle noted the high incidence of colonial connections among his sample of around one hundred members of the BUF’s leading members.[[582]](#footnote-582) Mandle noted that two-thirds of his sample, representing ‘the BUF elite’ – the organisation’s officials, candidates, officers and Mosley’s important lieutenants – had travelled, served or worked overseas.[[583]](#footnote-583) Aside from Europe, this included locations as far-flung as Africa, India, and the Far and Middle East.[[584]](#footnote-584) Ex-colonial army officers, colonial administrators, tea planters and farmers were well-represented within the organisation’s ranks.

For many BUF members, their conception of whiteness, as well as of non-white people, had been sharpened by colonial encounter. Rex Tremlett, the editor of *Fascist Week*, one of the BUF’s early newspapers, was also born in South Africa to British settler parents. A Special Branch investigation into Tremlett from 1941 reported that he had ‘led a most interesting life’ working at ‘tobacco planting in Nyasaland, gold mining in different parts of South and South East Africa’ and as ‘editor of a sports journal in South Africa’.[[585]](#footnote-585) Jorian Jenks, agricultural advisor to the BUF, had been a farmer in New Zealand from 1922 until 1928.[[586]](#footnote-586) A glance at the profiles for prospective parliamentary candidates in both the BUF’s *Action* and *Blackshirt* newspapers reveals the presence of members who had worked or served across the Empire, in India, ‘Persia’, Arabia, Malay, China, Kenya, Nigeria, Singapore, Northern Rhodesia, Australia, and the Gold Coast.[[587]](#footnote-587) When articles in the BUF press invoked imperial racist stereotypes as they did in their coverage of the Abyssinia Crisis, they were dealing in what, for a significant number of BUF members, had been part of a lived reality rather than just abstract ideas of racial superiority.

William Joyce, whose obsession with the Empire was forged in the crucible of early twentieth century Ireland, also saw broader imperial implications in the conflict between the Italian invaders and the Abyssinians.[[588]](#footnote-588) For him the Abyssinia Crisis represented the clash ‘between the triumphant progress of white civilisation and its subjugation by the Oriental and African barbarian’.[[589]](#footnote-589) He was resolutely opposed to any British intervention in the dispute via the League of Nations. The sympathies of imperial Britons, wrote Joyce, would ‘naturally be with the Italians, who hurl back the sinister claim to molest and murder the white man with impunity’.[[590]](#footnote-590) Joyce considered fascism to represent ‘true Imperialism’, picking up where the ‘old’ imperialism left off and fighting the corner of ‘white civilization’.[[591]](#footnote-591) As ‘a national and Imperialist power’, reasoned Joyce, Britain’s place was alongside Germany and Italy.[[592]](#footnote-592)

The Abyssinia Crisis provided yet another occasion for the blending of BUF members’ racisms. BUF propaganda portrayed Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie as a ‘Black Jew’ and Abyssinia as a country whose religious traditions were awash with ‘Jewish rites and customs’.[[593]](#footnote-593) In Selassie, Mosleyites perceived a synthesis of the stereotype of the barbaric black tribal leader and the international financier. In one front-page article in *Blackshirt*, John Beckett accused Selassie of being ‘[a] profiteer, who, living in the midst of slavery and poverty, grows rich by profiteering and raking of his own nation’s needs’.[[594]](#footnote-594) In addition, they made much of the fact that Selassie’s hereditary title was the ‘Lion of Judah’. In fact, the purported Jewishness, as well as the blackness, not only of Selassie but of Abyssinians in general was constantly stressed. Gordon-Canning described the Abyssinians as ‘black Jews and Negroes’ while another referred to them simply as ‘the ruling tribe of black Jews’.[[595]](#footnote-595)

In response to the Abyssinia Crisis, BUF activists called for a new form of fascist international diplomacy. In doing so, they appropriated and inverted the language of liberal internationalism that underpinned the League of Nations and its mandate system. Drawn up in the aftermath of the First World War, Article 22 of the League of Nations’ Covenant declared that ‘advanced nations’ were responsible for the well-being of nations not yet ready for independence.[[596]](#footnote-596) This system of mandatory control was originally supposed to be subject to regular review by a permanent commission. It was hoped that ‘[m]andatory oversight’ would ‘make imperial rule more humane and therefore more legitimate… “uplift” backwards populations and… even… prepare them for self-rule’.[[597]](#footnote-597) In reality, the mandate system did not make for better or more humanely governed territories and the League did little to intervene when the rights of ‘backwards populations’ were violated. As Susan Pedersen writes, while the mandates system did not usher in a new era of kinder, gentler colonialism, it did bring into being a new ‘apparatus and level of international diplomacy, publicity, and “talk”’.[[598]](#footnote-598) It was this last innovation, a new language with which to frame colonial good intentions, which the BUF seized on.

While rejecting the League and the liberal vision that underpinned it, BUF activists appropriated the ‘talk’ of the mandates system in their discussions of an alternate fascist conception of international diplomacy, one heavily influenced by the history of British imperialism. In the summer of 1935, with Italian forces massing on the Abyssinian border, the League of Nations convened a special session in which Anthony Eden, then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, unsuccessfully tried to broker peace. Derisively dubbing him ‘Eden of Ethiopia’, Mosley criticised both the British government and the League of Nations from the pages of *Blackshirt*. Mosley condemned the League of Nations’ attempts at arbitration, arguing that Italy had the right to put down ‘a barbarous Negro State’.[[599]](#footnote-599) Following the invasion, he even wrote that Italy ought to be given ‘[a] Mandate to restore order to this anarchic country [Abyssinia]… as the nearest Power and the nation chiefly affected’.[[600]](#footnote-600)

Mosley’s objections to the League’s diplomatic interventions were bound up with his imperialist views. He added that the ‘democratic’ approach to international affairs on which the League was based would have, if applied in an earlier time, precluded much of European colonialism as well as ‘the acquisition or the development of our own Empire’.[[601]](#footnote-601) Imperialism, in Mosley’s view, had much more in common with ‘the “Leadership principle” of Fascism’. He likened Italian aspirations to the raising of ‘[g]reat areas of territory… to the heights of civilisation by the colonising genius of the British people’. In light of this, Mosley proposed that the League of Nations review its priorities and focus their attention on checking the atrocities of ‘backward and uncivilised nations’ as they ‘were once checked by the Imperialism of the Great Powers – notably of Britain’. What he meant by this was a League of Nations predicated not on liberal internationalism but on ‘Universal Fascism’, a by-word for a twentieth century restaging of the aggressive imperialism of the nineteenth century.

The idea of an alliance of fascist nations as an alternative League of Nations, occasionally referred to as ‘a League of National States’, reoccurs again and again in the BUF press during the latter half of the 1930s.[[602]](#footnote-602) In speech at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1935, Mosley declared that ‘[t]he real League of Nations will come from universal Fascism when every great nation [is] Fascist’.[[603]](#footnote-603) In 1936, Mosley elaborated on the idea of ‘universal Fascism’ in the *Fascist Quarterly*. He claimed that the expansionist aims of the Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were entirely complementary to British imperial interests. He argued that Germany should be allowed to expand within Europe and create ‘the union of Germanic peoples’ while Mussolini’s ‘nascent Roman Empire’ would ‘join with [the] British Empire to maintain the stability and peace of the Eastern Mediterranean and of North Africa’.[[604]](#footnote-604) A ‘Fascist Europe’, he added, would give real meaning to the League of Nations’ principle of ‘collective security’.[[605]](#footnote-605)

For Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, the BUF’s expert on military affairs, the British Empire formed the nucleus of a future fascist peace. [[606]](#footnote-606) He was one of a number of BUF activists who repeatedly lauded the Empire for its role in supposedly maintaining peace ‘over a quarter of the earth’s surface’.[[607]](#footnote-607) The BUF intended to build world peace from the British Empire outwards. For them, the purpose of this ‘peace’ was to preserve ‘white civilization’ and avoid ‘the cataclysm of another civil war of thewhite race’.[[608]](#footnote-608) ‘The Immense Majesty of Fascist Peace’ was to be built on the renewed colonial domination of the ‘barbaric’ and ‘backward’ (according to received imperial wisdom) peoples of Asia and Africa.[[609]](#footnote-609) While peace in a ‘Fascist Europe’ was to take the form of ‘manly friendship’ with countries like Nazi Germany, peace ‘in China, Abyssinia, or India’ would not be achieved without ‘a power strong enough to enforce it’.[[610]](#footnote-610) In ‘Universal Fascism’, Mosleyites envisioned British imperialism writ large or, rather, even larger. It was a global configuration designed to defend ‘the white man’ against ‘the forces of darkness’, namely ‘Negroes, Hindus… and Jewish razor-men’.[[611]](#footnote-611)

# **Conclusion**

The British fascists of the 1930s perceived the world through the lens of imperial constructions of race and a conspiracy-minded imperialism, imagining ‘organised Jewry’ in various guises as the British Empire’s chief antagonist. In this, they built on and developed the Radical Right ideas analysed in the first chapter. Leese continued along the path beaten by The Britons, combining imperial racism with the pseudo-scientific and pseudo-anthropological observations of white supremacist racial ‘theorists’. Significantly, Leese used these obscure and often contradictory theories to justify the prejudices he had acquired during his time living in the colonies. The superior character and conduct of the ‘Aryan’ or ‘Nordic’ race, written about by Waddell and Stoddard, was for Leese confirmed by the existence of the Empire and his experiences at the top of the British imperial racial hierarchy.

Mosley and his recruits drew far less on pseudo-scientific racial theory. Instead, they combined the originally anti-imperialist, antisemitic arguments of nineteenth century leftists and Hobsonian liberals with a high imperial fervour. Alongside this, they employed ‘traditional’ imperial racist stereotypes concerning the barbarous residents of the ‘Dark Continent’ and the alleged effeminacy of the Indian office clerks struggling against imperial rule. In their attacks on Haile Selassie and other Abyssinians, some BUF figures synthesised antisemitism with colonial racism against ‘savage’ Africans. Against the forces of ‘international Jewish finance’ and its allies in colonial nationalist movements, Mosley and his followers proposed an international alliance of fascist empires to enforce a white world ‘peace’.

Where this and the previous chapter have examined how the inter-war Radical Right’s worldview was shot through with imperialism, the next chapter examines their proposed antidote to a world menaced by rebellious ‘natives’ and anti-imperial ‘international’ Jews. This took the form of a return to idealised form of imperial masculinity. The British Radical Right looked to a mythologised conception of the ‘White Man’ of Empire in a variety of forms – pioneer, settler and soldier – as the figure who could hold back the tide of degeneration and restore Britain to greatness. As the next chapter will show, in the dynamic, violent and authoritarian figure of the ‘man on the spot’, Radical Right activists found a model for their ‘new man’.

# 3 The New Fascist Man on the Spot: Imperialism and Gender on the British Radical Right, 1923-1940

# **Introduction**

Within weeks of Mussolini’s ‘March on Rome’ in late October 1922, British commentators were thinking about fascism in terms of what it could do for the Empire. In letters to the Duke of Northumberland’s journal *The Patriot* in the weeks and months after Mussolini marched into power, correspondents praised the decisive actions of the Italian fascistswhile criticising British colonial policy. One Lieutenant-Colonel Heron Maxwell was unequivocal; he believed that a leader of Mussolini’s quality could do wonders for the British Empire. He commended Mussolini for ‘stemming the flood of Bolshevism’ and encouraged his fellow readers to compare ‘Mussolini’s “creed” with the cowardly vapourings of *our* “statesmen” and their abject attitude in Ireland and elsewhere.’ [[612]](#footnote-612) Another correspondent looked longingly at Mussolini’s crusade and wondered ‘Has England got sufficient vision, energy, enthusiasm and patriotism to save the Empire from ruin?’[[613]](#footnote-613) At the start of the following year, another of Heron Maxwell’s letters called for ‘“Martial law”… throughout the Empire’ and proclaimed the need for a British ‘Fascismo’.[[614]](#footnote-614) Now was the time, wrote Heron Maxwell, to find ‘Men’ – with a capital ‘M’ – to quieten India, Egypt and Ireland. In Italy’s fledgling fascists, Heron Maxwell and others saw a model of leadership and of masculinity in tune with British imperial tradition and that might act as antidote to imperial decline.

This chapter argues that this belief in the need for a revival of imperial masculinity throughout the Empire and in Britain itself was at the core of British Radical Right ideology throughout the inter-war period. Radical Right writers, activists and ideologues set out to create ‘new men’ in the mould of the old; to return an ideal of masculinity commonly associated with British imperial expansion during the late Victorian and Edwardian period. In their new movements, they sought to emulate the resolute, violent and illiberal spirit of the so-called ‘man on the spot’.[[615]](#footnote-615) The kind of model of imperial manhood set to verse by Kipling and preached to the youth by Baden-Powell. For the BF, the IFL, the New Party and the later BUF, a revival of this imperial masculinity formed the antidote to the Jewish plot that they imagined was afoot against the British Empire. In living by the example set by the pioneers, settlers and heroes of British imperial history, they hoped to thwart this plot, nullify anti-colonial nationalism, re-unify the Empire and revolutionise Britain itself. This translated into calls for the re-application of a ‘strong’ or ‘firm’ hand in imperial affairs and calls for Britain’s political leaders to emulate the manly ways of historical figures like Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and Robert Clive (better known as ‘Clive of India’).

In analysing the centrality of ‘old’ imperial masculinity to inter-war constructions of ‘new’ fascist masculinity, this chapters draws on earlier studies of fascism and gender by George Mosse, J. A. Mangan, Tony Collins and Julie Gottlieb. Both Mosse and Mangan noted that fascism had as its ultimate goal the creation of a ‘new man’. Mangan dubbed this figure ‘*Homo fascistus*’ while Mosse called it the ‘new fascist man’.[[616]](#footnote-616) Mosse argued that the figure of a ‘new man’ was ‘vital’ in Italian and German fascist ideology; the ‘new man’ was to mould to ‘new world’.[[617]](#footnote-617) In their work on the British Union of Fascists, Collins and Gottlieb outlined their conception of the ‘new fascist man’, both noting his imperial features. Collins detected ‘the militaristic masculinity of the late Victorian and Edwardian age’.[[618]](#footnote-618) Gottlieb recognised in the BUF’s ‘new man’ ‘an unreconstructed masculinity’ evocative of ‘a more confident imperial age in Britain’s pre-war past’.[[619]](#footnote-619) However, neither scholar enquired any further in this direction beyond these remarks. While Petra Rau’s work does not concern British fascism directly, she found that the writings of British observers of Nazi Germany during the early 1930s were laden with imperial nostalgia. Rau argued that in their admiration for ‘the new German body’, British observers expressed ‘a nostalgic desire for the glorious imperial British tradition’.[[620]](#footnote-620) They saw the pith-helmeted soldier-hero of British imperialism in the peak-capped and jack-booted Nazi, propelling Germany to greatness as the former had once done for Britain.

Recent scholarship on Radical Right constructions of masculinity has tended to neglect the possible influence of earlier imperial constructions of masculinity entirely. The edited collection *The "New Man" in Radical Right Ideology and Practice, 1919-45* (2018) contains scant reference to imperialism, even in its chapter on the BUF.[[621]](#footnote-621) This chapter examines the imperial nature of the British Radical Right’s ‘new man’ and, in doing so, draws on the abundant literature on British imperial masculinity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; a historiographical field previous historians working on the Radical Right have largely refrained from consulting. Armed with insights drawn from the work of scholars such as Robert H. MacDonald, John Tosh, Michael Roper, John MacKenzie, Max Jones, Bradley Deane, Graham Dawson, Catherine Hall and others, the chapter explores the valorisation of British imperial heroes, the pioneer lifestyle, and the resolution of the ‘man on the spot’ by those on the Radical Right.[[622]](#footnote-622) In doing so, it illuminates British Radical Right’s connection to an older tradition of imperial masculinity.

# **Early British Fascism and the Example of Empire**

The reactionaries dreaming about the potential imperial applications of fascism in *The Patriot*’s correspondence section were reacting against what Barbara Bush has termed the ‘feminization of Empire’. By this, she was referring to the move from a ‘bellicose, expansionist’ pre-war imperial ideal to a more ‘familial and peaceable’ one during the inter-war period.[[623]](#footnote-623) Peter Marshall has instead characterised this as a move towards a ‘libertarian’ conception of the British ‘imperial project’ from the 1920s ‘[i]n the higher reaches of politics’.[[624]](#footnote-624) As we have seen in previous chapters, in practice this ‘feminisation’ or liberalisation of Empire was reflected in a tactical desire to refrain from (but not totally avoid) outright violence in matters of colonial government. Instead, the British government employed concessions in an attempt to politically outmanoeuvre nationalists by granting or promising increased measures of self-government. This approach characterised British colonial policy throughout the inter-war period, especially concerning Indian constitutional reform.

These changes in colonial policy formed part of a wider political mood identified by historians during the inter-war period. Alison Light wrote that constructions of British national identity during this time were ‘at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine”.[[625]](#footnote-625) Jon Lawrence has argued that after 1922, many Britons sought to build a ‘peaceable kingdom’, eschewing the violence of the years immediately following the Great War.[[626]](#footnote-626) Stanley Baldwin, Conservative Party leader (1923-1937) and Prime Minister at various times during the 1920s and 1930s (1923-1924, 1924-1929, and 1935-1937), personified this new ‘liberal’ approach to national and imperial politics. Baldwin brought ‘a more domestic and feminised image’ to his party’s politics, abandoning its more ‘masculine’ character and causes from the Victorian era.[[627]](#footnote-627) Some historians, notably Susan Kingsley Kent, have challenged the notion of Baldwin as a kindly moderate and argued that British politics at home and abroad continued to be violently exclusionary until at least the early 1930s.[[628]](#footnote-628) Certainly, the kind of imperial masculinity idealised by those on the Radical Right continued to be popular in the books and magazines of young boys, and on the silver screen.[[629]](#footnote-629) Nevertheless, Radical Right activists believed that Britain had grown soft, saddled with flaccid political leaders at home who were intent on surrendering the Empire abroad. Rejecting ‘libertarian’ visions of a ‘peaceable kingdom’, they argued instead for a ‘return’ to an ‘authoritarian’ vision of Empire, predicated on the image ‘of a manly and powerful nation, embodying the values of hierarchy and order’.[[630]](#footnote-630)

The frustration of former ‘men on the spot’ with ‘feminised’ imperial policy fuelled the leading lights of Britain’s first self-proclaimed fascist group, the British Fascisti. In 1934, writing in the journal of the die-hard Indian Empire Society (IES), the BF’s second president Brigadier-General Blakeney, reflected on his time in Egypt.[[631]](#footnote-631) He experienced attempts to reconfigure British imperial rule first-hand while working in Egypt as an official for the Egyptian State Railways. He indicted the British government’s decision to grant Egypt’s formal independence in 1922 as the latest in a long line of surrenders.[[632]](#footnote-632) When Blakeney left Egypt, he did so thoroughly convinced in the folly of democracy. In his view, the ‘nerveless Coalition Government’ had surrendered to ‘a pack of greedy, inexperienced agitators’.[[633]](#footnote-633) He was appalled by terms of the Allenby Declaration that meant that ‘We, the senior officials of the expiring regime, accustomed to the exercise of wide powers and able to give immediate decisions in matters of routine’, were responsible to Egyptian ministers.[[634]](#footnote-634) Emasculated by what he perceived as the British imperial government’s capitulation to Egyptian nationalists, Blakeney returned to Britain and joined the BF, keen to reshape politics along anti-democratic lines and convinced of the need for ‘a very strong hand’ in matters of government.[[635]](#footnote-635)

Blakeney resigned his position as BF president in April 1926 after a disagreement over the group’s direction.[[636]](#footnote-636) He had advocated that the BF tone down its overtly fascist and paramilitary elements in order to participate in the government’s official strikebreaking efforts in the lead up to the 1926 General Strike. However, Lintorn-Orman and a majority of the membership disagreed. Even without Blakeney as a guiding influence, the BF continued to approach imperial affairs from the perspective of the ‘man-on-the-spot’. When they imagined their ideal future fascist leader of Britain, they cast him in the language of British imperial heroism.

The BF’s members built on an earlier imperialist legacy of drawing morals from the lives of imperial heroes. Just as the exploits of Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh had been retold and dramatised for the school-room and the stage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the story of their adventures became British fascist fables.[[637]](#footnote-637) Thus R. E. N. Braden called on BF members to aspire to the example of ‘Empire Builders’ like ‘Raleigh, Drake, Cook, Wellington, Nelson and others’.[[638]](#footnote-638) Meanwhile, another fascist wrote that Admiral Nelson, ‘our greatest National Hero’, ‘should be an example to’ Britain’s fascists.[[639]](#footnote-639) The BF looked to the example of Nelson and the ‘men of Nelson’s type who made and developed’ the Empire and condemned ‘the men of inferior type’ in Westminster, and particularly in the Labour Party, whom they accused of working to undo it.[[640]](#footnote-640)

John Tosh has noted that tales of the lives of imperial heroes – ‘of authority imposed in a colonial setting’ – ‘exerted a strong imaginative appeal on the metropolitan imagination’.[[641]](#footnote-641) They invited Englishmen to ‘applaud the firm smack of government and the resolution of the man on the spot’. Such stories provided Britons back in the metropole with access to ‘[f]antasies of violent reprisal which were completely inadmissible in England’ but ‘could be freely indulged in a colonial setting’. Where the BF differed was in its members’ belief in the need to extend that violence beyond its colonial setting in order to defend Britain against a Jewish-Bolshevik assault. In embracing the use of colonial violence in the metropole, they looked to more modern and controversial imperial figures, such as General Dyer, the hero of the die-hards. Back in 1919, Dyer and his supporters defended his conduct at Jallianwala Bagh as decisive action that had saved the British Empire from a repeat of the Indian Mutiny.[[642]](#footnote-642) The BF’s members shared these sentiments and held Dyer in much the same esteem as the foreign fascists they admired.

In a letter printed on the front page of the BF’s newspaper in 1925, Richard Glover wrote ‘The only Englishman fit to be put in to the scale with Mussolini in our time is General Dyer, whose heroism at Amritzar six years ago saved us from a second Indian Mutiny.’[[643]](#footnote-643) Another, writing a month after Dyer’s death in July 1927, wished that the British Empire possessed more ‘men of the General Dyer type’.[[644]](#footnote-644) For the BF, Dyer’s conduct represented not only a modern act of imperial heroism but also stood as the British colonial counterpart to the Italian *Squadristi*’s campaigns of beatings, assassinations and enforced dosages of castor oil. For them, Dyer’s violent reassertion of ‘law and order’ at Amritsar was merely the kind of action often called for in the course of colonial government. Moreover, it was the kind of action that they believed would soon be required to check the forces of subversion at home.

As well as imperial heroes, the BF’s newspaper lauded the ‘Greater’ Britons overseas and the masculinising environment of Britain’s imperial edges. One article in the BF’s *British Lion* newspaper, by an author writing under the pseudonym “Empire Warrior”, praised those carrying ‘on with the endless task of advancement, upholding our prestige, voluntarily and without question shouldering a responsibility handed down to them from the pioneer founders.’[[645]](#footnote-645) This romanticised rendering of imperial Britons played on old manly stereotypes of upright, steadfast and courageous of colonial settlers. Daily, “Empire Warrior” wrote, settlers faced ‘the possibility of sudden and violent death from innumerable sources’ and yet remained unswervingly faithful to ‘the Cause for which their forerunners lived and died, ever ready to defend it with their lives.’[[646]](#footnote-646) BF activists drew political lessons from the rugged frontier lifestyle of their far-flung imperial ‘kith and kin’. For instance, “Empire Warrior” was confident that, these hardy pioneers would have no qualms about using lethal force if faced with ‘alien’ anarchists.[[647]](#footnote-647) They believed that it was the BF’s duty to embody in the metropole the spirit of the pioneers of the ‘[t]he vast plains of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand’ in order to ‘sustain… a good and invincible England for posterity’.[[648]](#footnote-648)

Against what they held was the stultifying socialist spirt of collectivism, the BF looked to the ‘pioneer spirit of individualism’.[[649]](#footnote-649) British fascism, proclaimed the editor of *British Lion*, was ‘out to revive that pioneering spirit which alone is responsible for the knitting together of the greatest Empire the world has ever known.’[[650]](#footnote-650) The BF’s mission, they maintained, was to give birth to a new Britain that could ‘never, never stoop to the extinction of the manly individual spirit.’[[651]](#footnote-651) C. W. Higginbotham urged his fellow fascists cultivate a ‘conscious Imperialism’ and ‘to think and act Imperially at all times.’[[652]](#footnote-652) The BF saw themselves as above party politics embodying the ‘true spirit’ of Empire, although in practice they remained allied to the Conservative Party.[[653]](#footnote-653)

In their salutes to the spirit of the imperial pioneer and the legacy of imperial heroes, the BF sounded a lot of like the Boy Scout Movement. Indeed, they likened their organisation and their creed to that of Robert Baden-Powell’s Scout Movement. Describing the ideology of the British Fascists in a right-leaning journal in 1925, BF president Brigadier-General Blakeney wrote that ‘Fascism – is the adult growth of… the Scout Movement’, aspiring to the same ‘the same lofty ideals of brotherhood, service and duty’.[[654]](#footnote-654) Founded decades earlier in 1907, Baden-Powell’s Scout Movement set out to ‘train a large number of boys’ to follow in the footsteps of Britain’s scattered imperial pioneers and heroes like Raleigh, Drake, Cook, and Clive ‘as regards character and manliness’.[[655]](#footnote-655) Drawing on his experiences as a soldier during the South African War, Baden-Powell believed that the principles of ‘scoutcraft’ could be used to shore up masculinity in the metropole.[[656]](#footnote-656)

By the end of the First World War, however, the Scout Movement toned down their militaristic imperial image, replacing it with ‘an image of League of Nations internationalism and later world Commonwealth brotherhood’.[[657]](#footnote-657) The BF looked back admiringly to an earlier incarnation of the Scouts. One contributor to the BF’s *Fascist Bulletin* cited Robert Baden-Powell as a ‘magnificent example to us’.[[658]](#footnote-658) The BF invited ‘Mr Hubert Martin, C.B.E.’, the International Commissioner of the Boy Scouts’ Association, to address one of their meetings in London in 1927.[[659]](#footnote-659) The report of the meeting published in the BF’s *British Lion* quoted the chairman’s opening address on the similarities between ‘the aims and objects of the Boy Scouts’ Association, and those of the British Fascists’.[[660]](#footnote-660) This was not merely an attempt to vindicate fascism by association but pointed to real ideological affinities, at least insofar as the Scouts and the BF shared a belief in the regenerative power of imperial masculinity.[[661]](#footnote-661)

# **Sons *and* Daughters of Empire**

The legacy of the ‘man on the spot’ was not only open to fascist men. After all, the BF’s founder was a woman and, while a lack of reliable membership figures makes ascertaining the precise number of women members difficult, Barbara Farr identified one of ‘the types’ among the BF’s membership as newly-enfranchised women.[[662]](#footnote-662) According to Farr, the BF’s leader Lintorn-Orman and the group’s other women recruits represented ‘“genteel” survivors of Victorianism, attempting to redefine the responsibilities of women in post-war society’.[[663]](#footnote-663) When it came to fascist women’s role in the BF’s imperialist ideology and activism, the group’s stance was reminiscent of earlier feminine (but not feminist) pro-Empire activism developed by the Conservative Party after 1918 in order to appeal to newly-enfranchised women voters. On the other hand, Lintorn-Orman’s activism went beyond feminine imperialism and instead resembled the appropriation and celebration of imperial masculinity by Victorian and Edwardian imperialist women.

Some of the BF’s imperialist activism emphasised the traditional role of women. For instance, in January 1928, the BF encouraged its members to join the recently launched ‘League of Empire Housewives’, an ‘entirely non-political’ organisation jointly founded by the Fellowship of the British Empire and the Empire Day Medal Association.[[664]](#footnote-664) Their purpose was ‘to educate British housewives into giving a sentimental preference in their purchases first home products, secondly to Empire products’. Since one of the BF’s main planks was ‘Buy British Goods’, they pledged ‘their fullest support, wherever it is possible’ to the newly formed League.[[665]](#footnote-665) Elsewhere, BF members were urged to help support ‘and to push Empire trade’, buying goods and produce grown or made in the colonies and Dominions.[[666]](#footnote-666)

In their promoting of imperial shopping, the BF resembled the Primrose League, a Conservative Party-supporting philanthropic organisation, originally founded in 1883.[[667]](#footnote-667) Though women were barred from leadership positions in the League, they formed a significant element of its grassroots activists and were central to the League’s campaigning efforts. From the early 1920s, the League supported the Leopold Amery’s ‘Empire Shopping’ initiative. The idea behind ‘Empire Shopping’ was to stimulate the kind of imperial trade envisioned by proponents of tariff reform without undergoing the complex and controversial process of erecting tariff barriers.[[668]](#footnote-668) It was also a means of bringing ‘the Empire… into the home’.[[669]](#footnote-669) Playing on women’s supposedly ‘unique understanding of household affairs’, ‘the mothers of Empire found political expression through their shopping baskets’.[[670]](#footnote-670) Similarly, for the BF, ‘Empire Shopping’ enabled every fascist to become ‘an Empire Builder’.[[671]](#footnote-671)

As well as promoting ‘Empire Shopping’, the BF also formed its own ‘Fascist Children’s Clubs’ in 1925, in which Lintorn-Orman played a leading role. This initiative also mirrored the changing priorities of Conservative politics in Britain during the 1920s. Following the First World War, Conservative propaganda and publications sought to enlist women in the struggle against socialism by summoning them to their traditional role as the ‘parents and guardians of youth’.[[672]](#footnote-672) Like the Young Britons, the Junior Imperial League and other groups affiliated to the Conservative Party, the Fascist Children’s Clubs aimed to protect Britain’s youth from the Socialist Sunday Schools and similar left-wing, anti-imperialist initiatives.[[673]](#footnote-673) Initially started as ‘Fascist Sunday Schools’ in June 1925, the first club opened with 40 children in the East End of London in August 1925.[[674]](#footnote-674) By February 1926, the BF claimed that there were now 30 Children’s Clubs with an overall membership of 1,000.[[675]](#footnote-675) However, these estimates should be treated as suspiciously as the BF’s generous assessments of its own membership. In any case, clubs existed throughout the United Kingdom as far as Belfast and were still in existence as late as 1934, just one year before the BF foundered.[[676]](#footnote-676)

As well as organising their own clubs, the BF campaigned in favour of legislation against ‘seditious’ activism targeting the young. In 1924, they lent their support to the Conservative Lord Danesfort’s Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children Bill. The Bill proposed the introduction of special government powers to suppress the Proletarian Sunday Schools and journals such as the *Young Comrade* and *Young Worker*.[[677]](#footnote-677) After initially passing in the Lords, it was later defeated in the Commons in 1927.[[678]](#footnote-678)

In other ways, however, the BF’s fascist women subverted traditional gender roles. Like the women of the Edwardian Radical Right, such as Violet Milner, Lintorn-Orman rejected the maternal, humanitarian conception of imperialism and associated herself ‘with traditionally “masculine” imperialism’.[[679]](#footnote-679) Before becoming a fascist, in her youth Lintorn-Orman was involved with the Scout Movement, responsible for raising ‘the 1st Bournemouth Troop of Guides (Princess Louise’s Own)’.[[680]](#footnote-680) She also appears to have been one of a number of young women who anticipated the founding of the official sister organisation – the Girl Guides – in 1910 and identified as ‘Girl Scouts’.[[681]](#footnote-681) 6000 ‘Girl Scouts’ registered with the Scout Movement’s headquarters in 1909 while a small number unexpectedly attended the first ever Boy Scout Rally at Crystal Palace wearing homemade uniforms.[[682]](#footnote-682) Borrowing copies of *Scouting for Boys* from male relatives, they were equally ‘enthralled by the promise of adventure and fun it contained’.[[683]](#footnote-683) They wanted to live by the ostensibly masculine values of the frontier, ‘engaging with powerful ideas about the nation and the empire – ideas not intended for them’.[[684]](#footnote-684)

While Baden-Powell did not seem initially concerned with the prospect of girls studying Scoutcraft, a separate feminised movement for girls was formed after 1909. It was hoped that the Girl Guides would, as Carol Dyhouse put it, disassociate the Scout Movement from ‘anything female’ and prevent angering ‘“respectable matrons” who would surely find the idea of girls marching in uniform quite unseemly’.[[685]](#footnote-685) Along with other young women who adopted Baden-Powell’s Scout philosophy before it had been adapted for them, Lintorn-Orman appropriated the values of imperial masculinity. Her early experiences of doing so undoubtedly influenced her later adoption of an androgynous personal style, her public-spiritedness and her embrace of the paramilitary, pro-Empire politics of fascism.[[686]](#footnote-686)

Julie Wheelwright has argued that women of this time who adopted masculine ‘values’ and a manly aesthetic were rejecting the limitations of femininity in 1920s Britain. She took as her example the case of Valarie Arkell-Smith (who lived under the alias Colonel Barker), a cross-dressing member of the BF breakaway group, the National Fascisti. Wheelwright characterised Arkell-Smith’s cross-dressing as a ‘flight from femininity through the adoption of male identity’.[[687]](#footnote-687) In Arkell-Smith’s case, she rejected the gender norms that had trapped her in an abusive marriage. Wheelwright’s observations about Arkell-Smith could, with a slight modification, equally be applied to Lintorn-Orman. As Wheelwright wrote elsewhere, Arkell-Smith’s belief ‘that an active life could only be imagined in male terms’ was shared by ‘[a]n entire generation of women’.[[688]](#footnote-688) She also noted that the women, like Lintorn-Orman, who served as nurses in the Great War often harboured dreams ‘of becoming soldiers’. Through her experiences in the First World War and her earlier encounters with the Scout Movement, Lintorn-Orman became ‘caught up in the rhetoric of empire’ and the defence of realm. One could see the leading role she later played in founding the BF as an attempt, on her part, to continue living out this rhetoric while preserving an active role for women. Lintorn-Orman’s life illustrates the tension at the heart of fascist femininity. The women of the BF were at once deeply conservative and yet some were clearly attracted to the wearing of military-style uniforms and the idea of trying to live by the exhilarating example of imperial heroes.

The Fascist Children’s Clubs embody this contradiction. While playing on traditional gender stereotypes about the role of women as the protectors of children, the Clubs also emulated Baden Powell’s Scout Movement. The Fascist Children’s Clubs pledged ‘to uphold Christianity, H.M. the King, and [keep] the British Empire intact.’[[689]](#footnote-689) They also succeeded in getting the permission of Rudyard Kipling, the author of many a poetic tribute to imperial masculinity, to use a few lines from his poem ‘A Children’s Song’ as the motto of the Fascist Children’s Club Section.[[690]](#footnote-690) The activities of the Clubs closely mirrored those of the Scouts and included ‘games and handicrafts, with boxing, etc., for the older boys, as well as competitions and outings.’[[691]](#footnote-691) As with the Scouts, the Club’s activities were accompanied by moral instruction, with lessons drawn from the lives of the ‘great pioneers of the British Empire’ and their ‘deeds of heroism’.[[692]](#footnote-692)

# **The Fascisti and the bonds of Empire**

As well as moulding young minds in Britain, the BF tried to cultivate links with descendants of the imperial pioneers throughout the Empire, sending literature to South Africa and keeping an eye on the development of the Radical Right in other Dominions.[[693]](#footnote-693) In September 1925, the BF even formed a ‘General Council… for the Commonwealth’.[[694]](#footnote-694) An article in 1926 reported on the development of fascism in Australia by a Captain Hatcher, leader of an Australian BF branch, and extended a friendly welcome to ‘Dominion Fascists’.[[695]](#footnote-695) Another in 1928 informed readers of foundation of the Praetorian League of Canada, an organisation representing ‘British Fascism under another name’, and reprinted the organisation’s manifesto.[[696]](#footnote-696)

In addition to political links with fellow fascists, a recurrent feature of the BF’s published manifestoes was the policy of imperial preference.[[697]](#footnote-697) Their conception of this idea was more radical than that of its advocates in the Conservative Party. The BF promoted an economically unified Empire as part of larger imperial way of life.[[698]](#footnote-698) While they praised ‘the enthusiasm for our Country and that wideness of Thought that was possessed by Milner and Joseph Chamberlain’, their plans went far beyond tariff walls.[[699]](#footnote-699) They envisioned ‘Imperial unity, complete and entire’.[[700]](#footnote-700) This included plans for ‘an Imperial Senate’ either to replace or supplement the House of Lords. [[701]](#footnote-701) This body would be comprised of two elected representatives from each Dominion with powers over finance, fiscal policy, imperial settlement and development, and defence. In their plans for increased imperial unity, BF members hoped to bring the metropole a little closer, spiritually if not spatially, to the masculine spirit of the pioneering Britons. It is in this sense that the BF represented the ‘post-war successors’ of the Edwardian radical imperialists, aiming ‘to transplant the energies and ethical rectitude of the white man of the frontier to the home society’. [[702]](#footnote-702)

As well as the fostering of political and economic links, the BF constantly promoted the virtues of imperial migration. One letter from an anonymous author, who had reportedly spent much of their life in Africa, encouraged young men and women to go to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. According to the letter, imperial migration to the ‘great… British Dominions’ had the power to transform ordinary people into ‘Empire makers, the valiant vanguard of the greatest Empire ever founded’.[[703]](#footnote-703) As well as this, in practical terms, imperial migration offered a solution to the problem of unemployment in Britain. At one meeting in 1925, a Lieutenant Pearson, an officer with ‘large experience of British East Africa’, noted that the colonies offered a means of converting unemployed or ‘C3’ men – a reference to the eugenic language of ‘National Efficiency’ – into ‘real men and true Britishers’.[[704]](#footnote-704)

Britain’s first fascist movement conceived of the British Empire not as a relic of past glories but as the key to future greatness. It formed the basis of a new way of life, offering virile Kiplinesque imperialism as a political programme that aimed to transform not only the colonies but the metropole as well. The figure of the ‘man on the spot’ was central to the fascist conception of the British Empire and fascist politics more generally. Many had been ‘men on the spot’ themselves and the rest looked to the example of Britain’s imperial heroes. The spirit of the ‘man on the spot’ was not necessarily only open to men but was also claimed by the group’s founder, Lintorn-Orman. In policy terms, their desire to instigate an imperial spirit within Britain itself led them to support imperial preference and Empire migration.

Though the BF emerged out of a faction of frustrated Conservatives, most die-hards remained loyal to the Party. The BF, on the other hand, was never more than a small organisation, riven by splits. The split over the general strike, that saw Blakeney resign as president, was particularly serious. Robert Benewick has argued that after this the organisation was effectively moribund though it survived into the 1930s, dwindling to around 300 members by 1933.[[705]](#footnote-705) Negotiations about a potential merger between the BF and Mosley’s New Party ended in deadlock as Lintorn-Orman suspected Mosley of being ‘a near communist’.[[706]](#footnote-706) Increasingly eclipsed by new fascist groups and deeply in debt, the BF began haemorrhaging members to the IFL and BUF. Lintorn-Orman continued to oppose proposals for a merger with Mosley’s British Union of Fascists in 1934, which resulted in a further loss of members and the beginning of the end of the BF.[[707]](#footnote-707) The group finally disbanded after the death of Lintorn-Orman in 1935.[[708]](#footnote-708)

# **The Great Aryan Britons**

The Imperial Fascist League (IFL), formed of ex-members of the British Fascists and National Fascisti in the late twenties, also based their ideal of fascist masculinity on British imperial antecedents. Much like other aspects of their ideology, they couched their admiration for the ‘man on the spot’ in the language of racist pseudo-science. This reflects the influence The Britons’ had upon the IFL’s leader Arnold Leese. The Britons’ conception of the ‘man on the spot’ was less about the imperial ‘spirit’ and the glories of Britain’s culture or past and more about race. For them, the British Empire reflected the conquests and superiority of Nordic man.

For The Britons, ‘the sailor, the soldier, the adventurer and the pioneer’ illustrated the perfection of the Nordic race.[[709]](#footnote-709) They revered the citizens of Britain’s Dominions for their alleged qualities of racial purity and masculine virility, portraying them as somehow more genuinely ‘white’ than Britons themselves. The Britons saw rampant racial impurity all around them at home, on which they blamed Britain’s imperial decline. According to them, Britain suffered not simply from a lack of ‘man on the spot’ spirit but from a lack of ‘the type or race of man that made England great’.[[710]](#footnote-710) The result was that ‘English policy and action abroad’ appeared ‘decadent, effeminate and dishonourable’.[[711]](#footnote-711) Where they presented Britain as mired in degeneracy, racially impure and lacking in masculine vigour, out in the Empire a manly Nordic remnant still existed:

In the widespread outer zones of our great Empire, where manhood still is valued, truth and veracity still honoured and courage yet accounted a virtue, the fine old English spirit and traditions are still maintained. But here, at home, in the very heart of the Empire, there is a deadly canker at work, an infection of alien poison, that has corrupted good manners, has destroyed honour and truth, has banished candour, and shudders at bravery.[[712]](#footnote-712)

This same blend of white supremacist racism and idolising of imperial masculinity can found in Leese’s writing for IFL publications. He complained that ‘democracy never leaves the man-on-the-spot to get on with his job’, and associated democracy and the threats to Empire with all things female.[[713]](#footnote-713) The IFL displayed a marked strain of misogyny that largely precluded the kind of ‘feminine’ fascists prominent in the BF and BUF. Leese specifically linked what he perceived as the decline of the British Empire to the female voters and supposedly feminising influence of democracy. He blamed the 1928 Equal Franchise Act, which had given the vote to all women over the age of 21 regardless of property ownership, for a multitude of sins against the Empire. Leese was convinced that ‘the so-called “flapper” vote’ had left the British Empire weak and even more vulnerable to corrupt ‘Jewish’ influence.[[714]](#footnote-714) In Leese’s view, democracy, or as he referred to it ‘Women’s Rule’, ‘will lose us our Empire’.[[715]](#footnote-715) Democratic rule, as he understood it, ran directly counter to the ethos of the Nordic ‘man on the spot’ and the preservation of the Empire. When it came to governing the Empire, he argued that ‘[a] masculine policy… cannot come from a feminine majority.’[[716]](#footnote-716)

The IFL also looked to imperial heroes. Leese’s invoked the names of imperial heroes such as ‘Clive of India’ in opposition to Indian constitutional reform. Much of the IFL’s propaganda in the mid-1930s concerned the 1933 India White Paper, later the 1935 Government of India Act.[[717]](#footnote-717) Leese attacked the White Paper as a ‘*betrayal of all those great Aryan Britons from Clive onward*’.[[718]](#footnote-718) When it came to India, Leese took an even harder line than the Conservative die-hards of the Indian Empire Society; he argued that democracy in general, rather than intransigent Indian nationalism in particular, was the problem.[[719]](#footnote-719) Leese thus recommended the restoration of ‘*Aryan rule*’, which meant, apart from the eradication of allegedly pervasive Jewish influence, a return to the authoritarianism and violence of the early imperial pioneers.[[720]](#footnote-720)

Leese also drew inspiration from the lives of imperial ‘heroes’ on issues that did not directly pertain to the Empire. Another of his heroes was Major-General Sir William Henry Sleeman. Sleeman was responsible for the discovery and suppression of the *thuggee* during the 1830s. The British colonial authorities regarded the *thuggee* as ‘a fraternity of ritual stranglers who preyed on travellers along the highways of nineteenth century India’.[[721]](#footnote-721) Leese lauded Sleeman, whom he called a ‘great Nordic gentleman’, for his strategy of jailing ‘every male member of the Thug family… for life’.[[722]](#footnote-722) He added approvingly that ‘[t]his was done without regard to “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”’.[[723]](#footnote-723) Just as Sleeman had locked up every ‘Thug’, so Leese advocated confining every Jew, whom he believed constituted ‘the modern and meaner sect of Thug’, to Madagascar.[[724]](#footnote-724) The IFL represents one of the most extreme of Britain’s fascist groups but even their members could find inspiration in the actions of British imperial ‘men on the spot’, whether in their feats of pioneering or ethnic cleansing.

# **The Die-hards & ‘the doers’**

Outside the ranks of self-proclaimed fascists, another organisation that claimed to represent the ‘men on the spot’ was the Indian Empire Society (IES). The IES and its sister organisation, the India Defence League (IDL), often echoed British fascists on the issues of India and empire. The IES was founded in June 1930 by Lord Sydenham of Combe; Lord Meston, former Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of British India; Michel O’Dwyer; and R. H. Craddock, former Lieutenant-Governor of Burma.[[725]](#footnote-725) Several months earlier, the same group published a letter in *The Times* condemning the Irwin Declaration and its vague promises of dominion status as ‘a weak surrender’.[[726]](#footnote-726) They were imperialist reactionaries who opposed concessions in favour of ‘a clear and firm policy, prompt action against the leading revolutionaries, and renewed resort to the emergency powers vested in the Viceroy to ensure speedy justice.’[[727]](#footnote-727) The IES grew quickly, reporting a membership of 1,200 individuals by the spring of 1932, including twenty-four members of the House of Lords and twenty-six members of the House of Commons.[[728]](#footnote-728) The group also consisted of a large number of individuals with colonial experience in India and elsewhere as judges, police officers, soldiers, and governors. Some of their more prominent members included Rudyard Kipling, Henry Page Croft and Winston Churchill, who were among the IES and IDL’s vice-presidents.[[729]](#footnote-729)

Originally, only a footnote in the history of 1930s Conservatism, the IES is attracting increasing historiographical attention. [[730]](#footnote-730) The shared imperialist rhetoric between the IES and IDL and the Radical Right reflects the myriad of connections between the two. Lord Sydenham, introduced in the first chapter, was a notable Radical Right figure during the 1920s.[[731]](#footnote-731) One member of the organisation’s executive committee, O. C. G. Hayter, had been contributing on and off to the BF’s newspapers since 1925.[[732]](#footnote-732) Before this, Hayter had worked in the Indian Police Service between 1896 and 1925, including a brief spell as the Deputy-Commissioner of Police in Bombay.[[733]](#footnote-733) As previously mentioned, Blakeney, ex-president of the BF, joined the organisation in September 1934. The BF had in fact tried to affiliate to the IDL in 1933.[[734]](#footnote-734) While their attempt was unsuccessful, in the summer of 1933, the front page of their newspaper, *British Fascism*, featured an article by another founding member of the IES and British imperial proconsul, Sir Michael O’Dwyer.[[735]](#footnote-735)

The IES’ links to the British Radical Right go even further. In June 1932, the IES recommended a book entitled *The Surrender of an Empire* written by one-time BF member and conspiracy theorist Nesta Webster.[[736]](#footnote-736) The following month, Colonel A. H. Lane, a member of The Britons and the Imperial Fascist League, joined the IES.[[737]](#footnote-737) In the next month’s issue, the IES reviewed the third edition of Lane’s antisemitic tract, *The Alien Menace*, which also carried a foreword by Lord Sydenham.[[738]](#footnote-738) Their reviewer thought that the book deserved ‘careful study from those who still prefer the truth to opiates’.[[739]](#footnote-739) The IES’s *Indian Empire Review* continued to advertise Lane’s book regularly and Lane would go on to become a valued member of the Society.[[740]](#footnote-740) In addition, during the latter half of the decade, some disgruntled Tories in the IES and IDL made the jump to Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists. Vice-Admiral Reginald St. Pierre Parry and Sir Lionel Berkeley Holt Haworth, later prospective parliamentary candidates for the BUF, had both been members of the Portsmouth branch of the IDL.[[741]](#footnote-741)

In their praise for the methods and philosophy of the ‘men on the spot’ in India, some contributors to the IES’s journal *The Indian Empire Review* could slip into rhetoric very similar to that of Britain’s fascists. Contributors to the journal questioned the justification for ‘forcing’ democratic self-government on India in an age when nations like Germany and Italy were abandoning the concept altogether. One contributor and member of the IDL’s leading council, W. A. Le Rossignol, came closest to outright fascism with his attacks on British imperial weakness and corresponding calls to dispense with democracy as Germany and Italy had done already.[[742]](#footnote-742) Before his time with the IES, Le Rossignol had worked in the Indian Civil Service from 1893 and 1926, including twelve years in the Supreme Court of the Punjab and five years as a judge in the Punjab Chief Court.[[743]](#footnote-743)

Echoing the earlier allegations of the *Morning Post* and The Britons, Le Rossignol even speculated as to whether the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, were part of a Jewish conspiracy.[[744]](#footnote-744) His dabbling in antisemitic conspiracy theory was not exceptional in the pages of theIES’s journal,particularly when placed into the context of their endorsement of the works of writers like Webster and Lane. Alongside his antisemitism, Le Rossignol looked back fondly to the ‘great men on the spot – the doers’ who ‘won’ Britain’s colonies in Egypt and India.[[745]](#footnote-745) He called for a revival of their spirit to save the Empire from ‘the pigmies of Westminster – the talkers’.

Despite rhetorical similarities and organisational links, most Conservative die-hards did not make the leap to the Radical Right. N.C. Fleming has argued that the die-hard preoccupation with India ‘allowed right-wing Conservatives to work off their frustrations within a specific context’.[[746]](#footnote-746) The debate over the ‘India problem’ effectively contained potential converts to the Radical Right. Within the context of their commentary on India, their attacks on democracy were primarily a device for attacking nationalist claims to self-determination; they were not necessarily arguments for the setting up of a *Duce* or a *Führer* in Britain. Though some die-hards were prone to lapse into authoritarian rhetoric, the next of Britain’s fascist parties came not from the ranks of the die-hards but out of the frustrations of Sir Oswald Mosley, then a young Labour Cabinet minister.

# ***The New Party and the Old Toryism***

When Mosley began the political transformation that would end with his conversion to fascism, he was a young, ambitious and, in certain circles, popular Labour MP. He was close to Ramsay MacDonald, and he and his first wife, Cynthia, were popular speakers during the 1920s.[[747]](#footnote-747) Shortly after the election of the second minority Labour government in 1929, Mosley was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and tasked with assisting the Lord Privy Seal with his investigations into the problem of unemployment.[[748]](#footnote-748) The 1929 Wall Street Crash and its impact on Britain’s already rather frail economy served as the ‘defining moment’ for Mosley and his like-minded associates in the Labour Party.[[749]](#footnote-749) Convinced that ‘[n]ew men and new measures were needed’, he submitted a series of proposals to deal with the economic crisis to MacDonald in late January 1930, which the cabinet discussed in February and rejected the following May.[[750]](#footnote-750) Mosley then resigned from the MacDonald government and, on 28 February 1931, founded the New Party. Thus began Mosley’s transformation from a ‘Bright Young Thing’ of MacDonald’s Labour Party into a British fascist who spoke in terms of creating a ‘Greater Britain’ in the spirit of Drake, Raleigh and Clive.

There are, however, some traces of what was to come in the amorphous New Party. Matthew Worley has described the New Party as ‘an organization with a head but no body’; all ideas with little form.[[751]](#footnote-751) It was composed of multifarious ideological influences from the Labour and leftish intellectuals in Mosley’s circle to Conservatives like former Unionist MP for Belfast West, W. E. D. Allen. It also attracted ex-BF members, such as E. G. Mandeville-Roe, Neil Francis-Hawkins and others.[[752]](#footnote-752) The New Party brought together a range of individuals united by the belief that drastic change was needed to solve Britain’s problems. There was little agreement, however, as to exactly what shape this drastic change should take. The closer the New Party got to taking a definitive political shape, the more overt and fraught the intellectual schisms within became.

Even before the foundation of the New Party, a number of commentators noted the imperialist, even autocratic, tone of Mosley’s proposals. Mosley drafted the ‘Mosley Manifesto’ – published as *A National Policy* in early 1931 – with the help of like-minded Labour colleagues Allan Young, John Strachey, W. J. Brown and Aneurin Bevan. The manifesto contained calls for economic development of the Empire to create a‘largely self-contained unit’ reminiscent of popular Tory ideas of imperial preference.[[753]](#footnote-753) The manifesto was clear, however, that this would not mean a return to the exploitative ‘old pre-nineteenth century Colonial system’.[[754]](#footnote-754) When it came to India and other colonies, the manifesto was completely in line with Labour’s ‘gradualist version of anticolonialism’.[[755]](#footnote-755) It proposed the industrialisation and democratisation of Britain’s colonies. Alongside this were far-reaching plans to extend the powers of the ‘Executive to act with the swiftness and precision which modern conditions have made imperative’.[[756]](#footnote-756) In the plans of Mosley and his early followers, Britain was to be governed by ‘a small inner Cabinet Committee consisting of five or six men’.[[757]](#footnote-757)

James Maxton, leader of the Independent Labour Party, presciently denounced Mosley’s proposals as ‘imperialist in aim’ and ‘autocratic in tendency’.[[758]](#footnote-758) The right-wing *Saturday Review* noted that they could easily have ‘emanated from the Tory back-benches’ and called the programme ‘pure Young Tory nationalism’.[[759]](#footnote-759) The reception *A National Policy* received is illustrative of Mosley’s political idiosyncrasies. He had begun his career in politics as Conservative MP for Harrow under the slogan ‘socialistic imperialism’.[[760]](#footnote-760) Among his early campaign promises were the ‘prevention of immigration by undesirable aliens, and the promotion by all possible means of the strength and prestige of the British Empire.’[[761]](#footnote-761) Mosley was not a straightforward die-hard, however, and had expressed horror over the conduct of General Dyer at Amritsar in 1919.[[762]](#footnote-762) On 3 November 1920, he left the Conservative benches in the House of Commons to sit with the Independents in protest at the government’s use of Black and Tans in Ireland.

Despite Maxton’s criticisms or the observations of the *Saturday Review*, *A National Policy* was fairly restrained in its imperial policies. However, it was not the *only* ‘Mosley manifesto’. There was an earlier draft, penned by Mosley with input from the Conservative-aligned Scottish Unionist MP, Walter Elliot, and a Labour intellectual named George Caitlin.[[763]](#footnote-763) Mosley completed this draft in November 1930 and privately sent it to Lord Beaverbrook, proprietor of the *Daily Express*, and Gerald Barry, editor of the *Week-End Review*.

When it came to colonial policy, this version diverged from the more Labourite vision of *A National Party*. In the first instance, it proposed a break with Labour’s approach to India, arguing that Britain should proceed to consolidate and develop the Empire without regard to the ‘Labour fear’ that Empire consolidation and development meant ‘the exploitation of backward peoples of the Empire in the customary form of jingo imperialism’.[[764]](#footnote-764) Mosley radicalisation on imperial questions took place against the backdrop of political wrangling over the Indian constitution. He sent out his alternative draft a year after Lord Irwin’s re-declaration of Britain’s commitment to dominion status for India and in the same month as the first of the Round Table Conferences between British and Indian politicians to discuss the future constitutional reforms. Furthermore, at around this time, Gandhi mounted further mass civil disobedience against British rule.[[765]](#footnote-765) His proposals for a ‘Caesarist’ solution to the ‘Indian problem’ were a response to what he regarded as the hot-air of Conservative imperialists and the weaknesses of Labour’s colonial policy:

In essence Caesarism offers with one hand a reasonable settlement with anyone who can deliver the goods, provided that law and order are secured by that settlement and the fundamental structure of Empire is not disintegrated. In the other hand Caesarism simply carries a very thick stick which it is known will, if necessary, be effectively and ruthlessly used.[[766]](#footnote-766)

Mosley’s progressive-sounding suggestion that the British government should be prepared to negotiate with Gandhi and other nationalist leaders fundamentally jars with his argument that they were not to countenance any notion of independence or imperial disintegration. He also called for the application of the ‘firm hand’ and, above all, for the maintenance of ‘law and order’ with ‘if necessary ruthless severity’.[[767]](#footnote-767) The colonies were to be managed along the lines of ‘discipline and civilisation’ as in ‘a regular army or disciplined Police Force’.[[768]](#footnote-768) These principles would be ‘firmly applied and revolution suppressed’. The tone of the manifesto’s colonial policy proposals was far closer to that of the die-hard than the reformer.

Matthew Worley sees in this second manifesto the early signs of the splits to come between Mosley and his left-wing ex-Labour colleagues, Strachey and Young. However, he argues that it is unlikely that the published document, *A National Policy* constituted merely ‘a moderated foretaste of the real intent’ concealed in Mosley’s ‘private & confidential’ draft.[[769]](#footnote-769) However, the second draft corresponds much more closely to the rugged imperialist streak evident in Mosley’s thinking since his Tory days and that would only become more pronounced in the BUF’s programme. Similarly perceptible traces occur in elsewhere in the New Party’s literature.

In a pamphlet addressed to potential Tory recruits, penned by former Unionist MP W. E. D. Allen, the New Party was presented as representing the ‘true’ traditions and ideals of ‘the Tory Party’.[[770]](#footnote-770) Allen claimed that the Conservatives had strayed from the ‘true’ path and that the New Party would stay the course. He denounced the modern Conservative Party’s tariff policy as ‘half-hearted’ and ‘wavering’ and indicted Conservative politicians for merely ‘mouthing with pompous insolence the platitudes of Empire’ rather than acting in an imperial spirit.[[771]](#footnote-771) On the other hand, the New Party claimed to stand for those ‘on the spot’, ‘the… millions of unknown men and women, who have worked and died under every sun, and sailed and fought over all the seas’ to build the Empire and not with ‘these well-fed mongers of… stocks and shares’.[[772]](#footnote-772) The Tories were merely paying ‘lip-service’ to the Empire, he argued, while the New Party, as the party of action and defiance, was going to ‘to build up a new Britain and a new British Commonwealth’.[[773]](#footnote-773)

In practice, this meant a combination of imperial preference with more authoritarian measures in India. As Patrick Moir put it in a 1932 issue of the New Party’s *The New Times* newsletter: ‘Confident in the resources of our Empire, we mean to form trade agreements with the Dominions, bulk-purchasing as much from them as they will buy from us.’[[774]](#footnote-774) With imperial economic planning and ‘by using a firm hand in India’, the New Party hoped to ‘build up a Corporate Empire’.[[775]](#footnote-775) By this time, this combination of Tory imperialism and an increasingly vocal admiration for continental fascism had become the dominant flavour of the New Party’s ideological stew. Strachey and Young had resigned the previous July arguing that in the New Party’s youth wing and in its policies towards unemployment organisation, Russia and India, Mosley was leading the party ‘in a Conservative or Fascist direction’.[[776]](#footnote-776)

In January 1932, Mosley visited Italy accompanied by Harold Nicolson in order to study the ‘modern’ movements of the world.[[777]](#footnote-777) Mosley was shown the large-scale public works implemented by Italy’s fascist government and was granted an interview with Benito Mussolini.[[778]](#footnote-778) Unlike Nicolson, who left the New Party in disgust at Mosley’s fawning over the *Duce*, he was impressed by Mussolini and Fascist Italy.[[779]](#footnote-779) Upon his return, Mosley reorganised the New Party into the New Movement.[[780]](#footnote-780) The structure of the New Movement was closely based on the NUPA, the New Party’s quasi-paramilitary youth wing. Over the course of the summer, the New Movement became increasingly fascistic, with members holding a series of meetings with Arnold Leese’s Imperial Fascist League.[[781]](#footnote-781)

# **Building ‘Greater Britain’**

In October 1932, Mosley launched the British Union of Fascists (BUF). With the publication of *The Greater Britain*, Mosley gave the New Party’s policies a fascist update. He remained frustrated with the inefficiency of parliamentary democracy and planned to establish a powerful, authoritarian government run by a small executive body. This newly empowered executive would preside over an integrated imperial economy.[[782]](#footnote-782) Mosley’s plans for a national and imperial revival were driven by a ‘new’ conception of masculinity. The building of ‘Greater Britain’ required ‘men, not eunuchs’.[[783]](#footnote-783) As Mosley put it in the book’s second edition, the BUF sought to ‘to create in advance a microcosm of a national manhood reborn’.[[784]](#footnote-784) In colonisation, and the mythologised lives of the men who drove the process, Mosley and his recruits found an appropriate analogy with which to express how they hoped to transform Britain. In contrast to the ponderous democratic politicians, busy with committee meetings and interminable debates, Mosley wanted men who shared the decisive attitude and qualities of those ‘who carried the British flag to the furthest seas’.[[785]](#footnote-785)

Mosley’s recruits also imagined ‘new’ fascist masculinity in imperial terms. With the advent of Mosley’s fascist movement, Olive Hawks proclaimed that ‘Our Drakes, our Clives and Cromwells have risen again in the islands of their birth’.[[786]](#footnote-786) For Hawks, the fascist struggle ‘to maintain and to re-unify’ the Empire, would require ‘the questing, fearless spirit’ of Britain’s imperial pioneers, the spirit that also formed ‘the true essence of Fascism’.[[787]](#footnote-787) Alexander Raven Thomson, looked forward to a day when fascism would replace the class structure of ‘plutocratic’ capitalism with the rule of ‘The true aristocrat, the born leader of men’.[[788]](#footnote-788) Raven Thomson modelled his ‘true aristocrats’ on Elizabethan imperial heroes like Drake and Raleigh, men who, in his words, ‘suffered hardship and risked danger to lay the foundations of the British Empire’.[[789]](#footnote-789) As another BUF recruit put it, ‘It is the direct object of Fascism to revive the pioneering spirit upon which the magnitude of the British Empire is founded’.[[790]](#footnote-790) When they spoke of reviving the old imperial way of doing things, they had in mind domestic politics just as much as colonial policy. When one of their number referred to Mosley’s plans for the economic revival of Britain through the establishment of imperial autarky, he wrote of the ‘re-colonisation of Britain’.[[791]](#footnote-791)

Much like the BF, the BUF sought to foster links with the descendants of British pioneers in the colonies and Dominions. In 1933, they founded the New Empire Union with the Australian New Guard movement. For the BUF, this initiative represented an attempt to ‘knit’ the Empire together ‘not only by bonds of kinship and common interest, but by the great ideal of Fascism, which dedicates our generation to the rebuilding of our country and our race’.[[792]](#footnote-792) The New Empire Union also linked up with fascists in Northern Ireland. As well as Australia and Ireland, the BUF appointed the Earl of Erroll, Josslyn Victor Hay, to act as their representative in Kenya in June 1934. The article announcing Erroll’s appointment boasted of his credentials as a member of the East Africa Convention of Associations, a body dedicated to the protection of the interests of white farmers in Kenya.[[793]](#footnote-793) Elsewhere in Africa, they were in contact with the South African Greyshirt movement and the leader of the Greyshirts, L. T. Weichardt, contributed a piece to the BUF’s *Fascist Quarterly* in October 1936.[[794]](#footnote-794) However, the BUF’s enthusiasm for these projects was short-lived. Neither the New Empire Union, the New Guard nor the BUF’s Kenya delegate were mentioned again in the BUF press after the mid-1930s.[[795]](#footnote-795)

Unlike the BF, for the most part, BUF members did not conceive of the role of women within the movement either literally or metaphorically in terms of imperial pioneering. Like the BF, women formed a significant proportion of the BUF’s membership. While they never published their own membership figures, Richard Thurlow and Julie Gottlieb estimated that they accounted for twenty to twenty-five per cent of the movement’s members.[[796]](#footnote-796) While Blackshirt men aspired and were encouraged to emulate Britain’s imperial heroes, men of ‘the battlefield… the backwoods, or… the jungle’, women were idealised in their ‘traditional’ role building and maintaining hearth and home.[[797]](#footnote-797) Even on the one occasion when *Blackshirt* celebrated the life of Hester Stanhope, adventurer in the ‘Near East’ and the ‘housekeeper and favourite niece’ of Pitt the Younger, the article ended with the reminder ‘that home life is the career to which women are best adapted and most inclined’.[[798]](#footnote-798) As Agnes Booth wrote in the BUF’s *Action* newspaper, it was ‘in the running of their homes and the rearing of their children’ that women were ‘the Dictators’.[[799]](#footnote-799) Women were to aid the Empire through their practice of ‘the home life, the gentle teaching and guiding given in the home’.[[800]](#footnote-800) Gottlieb has called this ‘[t]he politicization of domesticity’ and/or ‘the domestication of politics’.[[801]](#footnote-801)

BUF activists valorised motherhood and proposed special political representation for mothers in a future fascist Britain in the ‘Corporate State’. Through ‘the Housewife’s Corporation’ they would be responsible for such things as the ‘problems of housing, food-prices, health, the Law-Courts (in all cases appertaining to children)’ and other perceived ‘women’s issues’.[[802]](#footnote-802) However, there was a contradiction between rhetoric and reality when it came to the role of women fascists in the BUF. Despite the talk of motherhood and the peace of domesticity, women activists were involved in violent scuffles at demonstrations and rallies in London, Liverpool and Manchester.[[803]](#footnote-803) The BUF also had its own Women’s Defence Force whose members were trained in the administering of first aid but also in the art of ju-jitsu.[[804]](#footnote-804) The contradiction persisted in the BUF’s policies on women.[[805]](#footnote-805) While valorising motherhood, they promised equal pay for equal work and planned to defend women’s right to work, even after they married and had children. In spite of all these golden promises, ‘[t]he fascist future was unabashedly masculine and youth oriented’.[[806]](#footnote-806) While not explicitly misogynistic, the BUF’s ideas of fascist masculinity ‘at one and the same time excluded women from an all-boys club, and enlisted them in the struggle to regenerate British manhood.’[[807]](#footnote-807)

As well as Drake, Raleigh and Clive, BUF men also claimed the legacies of two of Britain’s leading imperial ideologues. They idolised Rudyard Kipling and Robert Baden-Powell who, decades before the advent of British fascism, had aimed to bring the ‘on the spot’ spirit of heroic imperial masculinity to the metropole. The BUF’s Director of Publicity and Propaganda, A.K. Chesterton, penned Kipling’s obituary in *Action*, dubbing him ‘the poet of Empire’ and declaring that ‘Kipling himself’ would have been a fascist if he had ‘been born twenty or thirty years later’.[[808]](#footnote-808) Kipling was never a fascist and insofar as he was involved in British politics during the interwar period, he remained within the fold of die-hard Conservatism.[[809]](#footnote-809) Despite this, the BUF found an example full of fascist potential in Kipling’s odes to ‘the men who come, suffer, and find their manhood on the boundaries of Empire’.[[810]](#footnote-810)

The BUF were inspired by Kipling’s celebration of the ‘The Gentleman Rovers abroad’ and his proselyting for a renewed imperial spirit at home.[[811]](#footnote-811) For Chesterton, the ‘Kipling mood and… temperament’ were concerned with might not ‘“rights”’.[[812]](#footnote-812) Kipling’s writings, he went on, were ‘for those who aspired to be men, who aspired to deal with their fellows like men, and like men to work out their lives and always speak out the truth within themselves’.[[813]](#footnote-813) He pledged that the Kipling spirit would ‘live again, and still more greatly, in the future of British Fascism’.[[814]](#footnote-814)

The BUF’s praise of Baden-Powell was even more effusive. Writing in *Action*, Roger Corbet, a former Scout, afforded Baden-Powell the dubious honour of being ‘probably the first National Socialist England had’.[[815]](#footnote-815) Both Baden-Powell and Mosley, he wrote, were motivated by ‘similar ideas’, the difference being that Mosley took Baden-Powell’s ideas one step further ‘and applied his creed to politics’.[[816]](#footnote-816) The quest of the Scouts to inculcate the masculine values of the frontier in Britain’s youth was portrayed as the prelude to Mosley’s fascist odyssey to imperialise the nation along similar lines. Mosley, Corbet believed, was going to ‘lead the nation to a Greater Britain with the high ideals of Scouting’.[[817]](#footnote-817) Much like the Scouts, the figure of the frontiersman provided the BUF with a model for a new type of citizen, only in their case this meant a new fascist man.

As well as being portrayed as a fusion of Scout and statesmen, Mosley was cast as the latest and greatest in the long line of Empire-building ‘great men’. His recruits inducted him into their fascist ‘pantheon’ of imperial heroes, believing that he would ‘outshadow all the great Empire builders of the past’.[[818]](#footnote-818) As well as testifying to the cult of personality developed around Mosley in the BUF, his inclusion alongside traditional imperial heroes illustrated the degree to which the BUF were thinking imperially. Mosley, they hoped, would finish off the work of earlier ‘Empire Builders’ consolidating the Empire they had built. They regarded Mosley not just as a man but as a symbol of British manhood, representing a manly ideal whose natural habitat was on ‘the battlefield, or the backwoods, or with his hunters in the jungle’.[[819]](#footnote-819) BUF members presented his fascist mission as an imperial mission. The fight he was leading against the enemies within, ‘against the serpent of corruption, stagnancy, decadence, and Jewry’ was compared to the fight led by Admiral Nelson against an external foreign foe in the previous century.[[820]](#footnote-820)

The BUF’s colonial policy regarding India, aimed at arresting the decline of the Lancashire cotton industry, reflected their desire to return to an imperial policy unafraid of using force to maintain control. Contrary to British government’s strategy of introducing greater measures of self-government with the 1935 Government of India Act, Mosley argued that Britain must rapidly reassume strict control. He compared the need to take what he considered were the necessary measures with past necessity of putting down the Indian Mutiny.[[821]](#footnote-821) He recast the ‘Indian problem’ as a test of masculinity. As he put it in one 1935 speech: ‘We have to-day one-tenth of the problem which faced our ancestors; we have ten times their resources. If we failed to hold India we would be one hundredth the men they were.’ [[822]](#footnote-822)

As part of his plan to keep hold of India and to save Lancashire in the mid-1930s, Mosley proclaimed that a fascist British government would exclude Japanese cotton goods from India, remove Indian tariffs on Lancashire produced-goods, force Indian mill-owners to raise standards and pay better wages, and ban foreign textile goods from the Crown Colonies.[[823]](#footnote-823) In the face of potential resistance to these plans, Mosley threatened that he was not above ‘closing down every single cotton mill in India’.[[824]](#footnote-824) In addition, a BUF government would also suppress the Indian National Congress and confine Indian nationalists to solitary confinement.[[825]](#footnote-825) In essence, business as usual in British fascist India was to resemble the martial law excesses of the Punjab following the Amritsar massacre.[[826]](#footnote-826) Martin Pugh wrote that Mosley’s aspirations for the British Empire to conduct itself in the confident spirit of an earlier imperial age were ‘highly unrealistic’.[[827]](#footnote-827) Meanwhile Mosley’s biographer, Robert Skidelsky, summarised the BUF’s colonial policy as one of ‘holding India down by force’.[[828]](#footnote-828)

In their policies towards India and elsewhere, BUF activists intended to ‘revere and admire and… emulate’ the Empire builders, and ‘to live in their spirit and maintain their work’.[[829]](#footnote-829) In this regard, they attacked the leading politicians of the 1930s for falling short of their masculine imperial ideal. A.K. Chesterton even referred to leading National Government politicians such as Stanley Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald and Anthony Eden as ‘Mrs Baldwin’, ‘Mrs MacDonald’, and that ‘Tart Miss Eden’.[[830]](#footnote-830) M. Hobson-Cooke, writing in *Action*, lamented that ‘the England of Drake, of Wolfe, of Clive, of Nelson’ was being replaced by a nation of ‘[t]imorous and podgy stomached’ men.[[831]](#footnote-831) Hobson-Cooke hoped that fascism would ‘re-hew’ the British people into a figure resembling the ‘daring; self-sacrificing; athletic’ Empire-building Englishmen.[[832]](#footnote-832) Mosley urged that modern statesmen should live like athletes and compared the hardy heroes of British imperialism with the ‘youthful Foreign Secretary’ who can be incapacitated ‘for six weeks’ by ‘[a] rough journey in an aeroplane from Cologne to London’.[[833]](#footnote-833) There were no signs of mental fatigue or nervous breakdown, he maintained, when Drake faced the Armada or Nelson fought the Battle of the Nile. Next to imperial heroes, the politician lived an ‘ignoble’ and unmanly existence.[[834]](#footnote-834)

For A.K. Chesterton, the British Empire was the result of ‘the zeal, hard work, and heroism of our fighting men, our pioneers, our colonists, our colonial administrators and our handfuls of colonial police’.[[835]](#footnote-835) Moreover, it was a feat accomplished ‘in spite of the politicians’.[[836]](#footnote-836) In his view, politicians at home were not only weak, unfit and effeminate but an active impediment to Empire-building as well; a sentiment bluntly conveyed in his remark that ‘Men make Empires: politicians degrade and lose them.’[[837]](#footnote-837) The democratic politician stood in for the system he represented, seen by fascists as ineffective, weak and prone to collapse. He was the very opposite of the imperial hero, who was portrayed as the masculine antecedent to fascism’s new man.

This distinction, perpetually drawn between the imperial man on the one hand and the democratic politician on the other, speaks to the depth of British fascism’s engagement with imperialism. For BUF members, imperialism served as the fascist foil to the principles that underpinned democratic governments in the metropoles of Western world. They revelled in the stark difference between imperialism and democracy; ‘the death of democracy’, wrote William Joyce, ‘is the life of Imperialism’.[[838]](#footnote-838) For Mosley, the building of fascist Britain would require the spirit of ‘the men who… denied every conception of democracy and decadence’ to build the Empire.[[839]](#footnote-839) Out in the empire, British fascists found out the closest existing equivalent to their new fascist man and, in the authoritarian excesses of imperial government, the germ of the system they wanted to establish in Britain.

# **The imperial fraternity of ‘Fascist Peace’**

In the face of the Munich Agreement in 1938, and then the later German invasion of Czechoslovakia and eventual descent into world war in 1939, the rechristened British Union (BU) mobilised their imperial ‘new fascist man’ in their fight for a fascist peace.[[840]](#footnote-840) A vague anti-war commitment had been theme in the organisation’s propaganda since its inception.[[841]](#footnote-841) As a movement composed of a significant number of veterans of the First World War, including Mosley and Chesterton, BU activists were committed to preventing the outbreak of another war.[[842]](#footnote-842) Mosley’s followers had long framed their promotion of a ‘Fascist Peace’, as William Joyce termed it in 1937, in masculine terms.[[843]](#footnote-843) While they were disdainful of ‘ladylike’ pacifists, Mosleyites were equally opposed to what they perceived as war-mongering.[[844]](#footnote-844) They framed the act of refraining from violence in masculine terms. As Francis Yeats-Brown wrote in the BUF’s *Fascist Week* back in 1934, ‘Strong men… are not inclined to seek quarrel with their neighbours. It is the weak… who bicker and bluff.’[[845]](#footnote-845) Elsewhere, A.K. Chesterton wrote that keeping the peace was a task for ‘real men’.[[846]](#footnote-846) Compared to the German and Italian fascist valorisation of the warrior, Mosley and his recruits praised as masculine those who, while confident in their strength and prepared to defend themselves, did not rush to violence.[[847]](#footnote-847)

Thus, in early October 1938, BU activists initially praised Chamberlain for his part in the Munich Agreement.[[848]](#footnote-848) Michael Goulding commended Chamberlain in *Action* for his adoption of ‘the normal National Socialist form of diplomatic action – direct approach’.[[849]](#footnote-849) They believed that his man-to-man meeting with Hitler had yielded ‘peace in our time’, where democratic caution had failed to halt the crisis. Maintaining that Britain had ‘everything to lose and nothing to gain by war’, they urged him to go further and forge a ‘friendship of equal manhood’ with Germany.[[850]](#footnote-850) However, they soon decided that Chamberlain’s commitment to appeasement was wavering. According to Mosleyites, peace needed ‘a strong man, not a wobbler’.[[851]](#footnote-851) They called on Chamberlain to match his ‘desire for peace with real action’. For the BU, this meant the return of Germany’s lost colonies and a free hand for Germany in Eastern Europe while Britain concentrated on developing its Empire.[[852]](#footnote-852)

They presented Empire development as the alternative to a war with Germany. In contrast with the unmanly war-monger, the BU valorised those who built and maintained a peaceful and orderly Empire. In the issue of *Action* published around two weeks before the Wehrmacht occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Jorian Jenks wrote ‘Jews, Czechs and debunked Spanish democrats’ were worthy neither of sympathy or solidarity.[[853]](#footnote-853) Instead, he encouraged his readers to spare a thought for the imperial pioneers ‘who [set] out to tame a square mile of virgin wilderness’ or the solitary colonial official ‘administering a district larger than one of our countries, with the welfare of thousands of backward people dependent on his day-to-day decisions’. For Jenks, their struggles to maintain order and safeguard British prestige represented real peace-making. In the febrile international atmosphere of the spring and early summer of 1939, Jenks and his fellow BU activists urged restraint. One *Action* editorial urged readers to ‘recover the spirit of Sir Francis Drake’, who, it was said, calmly finished a game of bowls after receiving news of the advancing Spanish Armada.[[854]](#footnote-854)

Along with stories supportive of the Nazis’ expansionist aims, *Action* reported on affairs in Britain’s colonies. Its coverage emphasised Britain’s ‘neglect of Empire’.[[855]](#footnote-855) Directing its readers’ attentions to imperial affairs, they sought to make the point that by embroiling itself in an Eastern European conflict, Britain was leaving the Empire exposed. In doing so, they seized on things like industrial unrest over wages and conditions in the Caribbean over the course of 1938 and 1939 and the clashes with Japan during the Tientsin incident in China in June 1939.[[856]](#footnote-856) BU activists argued that events such as these could only be avoided by economically developing the Empire and shoring up its defences.

Addressing a meeting in March 1939, Raven Thomson called for Britain to pass beyond National Socialism to ‘Imperial Socialism’.[[857]](#footnote-857) This meant ‘acting contrary to all Democratic theory’ and returning to the use of the ‘strong hand’.[[858]](#footnote-858) Strength, they argued, lay not in the military intimidation of Nazi Germany but in ‘the development of our Imperial resources’.[[859]](#footnote-859) By doing so, they claimed, ‘we need fear no nation upon earth’. Through ‘Imperial Socialism’, they hoped to ‘recapture the strength, the power and the idealism of those great men who founded Britain’s greatness’. On one occasion, as a jibe at Neville Chamberlain, the front cover of one edition of *Action* even featured a quote from his late father, Joseph Chamberlain, exhorting Britain to ‘mould’ its Empire.[[860]](#footnote-860)

Britain’s declaration of war with Germany on 3 September 1939 produced no significant change in the BU’s line. If anything, their advocacy of ‘Imperial Socialism’ only intensified. The BU’s peace campaigning continued as Mosley issued instructions to members to follow orders and ‘do nothing to injure our country or to help any other Power’.[[861]](#footnote-861) In the same issue as Mosley’s instructions were printed, the BU also stated its ‘Peace Aims’. They were to campaign for Britain and Germany to enter negotiations and ‘to demarcate their relative spheres of economic interest and imperial responsibility.[[862]](#footnote-862) They claimed that this would be straightforward, as Hitler had ‘repeatedly emphasised his respect for the British Empire’. In defending their opposition to the war from charges that they were merely acting as a ‘fifth column’, the BU again reached for an imperial precedent. The front page of one late 1939 issue of *Action* featured a letter comparing Mosley to William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, one of Mosley’s favourite historical personalities whom he credited with founding the British Empire.[[863]](#footnote-863) The letter compared Chatham’s opposition to the continuation of the American War of Independence in 1777 to Mosley’s imperialist opposition to war with Germany in 1939.[[864]](#footnote-864) Restating his peace aims in early May 1940, Mosley declared that the BU desired ‘Peace with British Empire intact, our people safe, and our Army, Navy and Air Force undefeated in the field’.[[865]](#footnote-865)

Despite a spike in membership during the course of the BU’s peace campaign in 1939, their activists’ repeated assertions that the true place of the British imperial pioneer was really alongside the thuggish Italian *squadrista* or swaggering Nazi *gauleiter* cut no ice with the British public.[[866]](#footnote-866) The BU’s emphasis on the patriotic nature of their opposition to war also failed to convince the authorities. Concerned that Britain’s fascists might act as fifth columnists in the event of Nazi invasion, the British government interned Mosley and a number of other leading BU figures on 23 May 1940.[[867]](#footnote-867) On 10 July 1940, they also proscribed the British Union. Defence Regulation 18B, under which Mosley and his followers were interned, did not only target the BU. Arnold Leese had wound up the IFL back in September 1939 and gone underground.[[868]](#footnote-868) The authorities apprehended him at home in November 1940.

# **Conclusion**

The inter-war Radical Right represented more than scattered groups of isolated reactionaries pursuing an esoteric, racist and authoritarian ideology. Its activists built their political challenge to British liberal democracy out of masculine ideals that, decades earlier, were both mainstream and, at one time, dominant. They sought to revive the illiberal, masculinised spirit of ‘New Imperialism’, which flourished between 1870 and 1914, as an antidote to the domesticated politics of the metropole and a ‘feminised’ colonial policy. Their ‘new fascist man’ could just as easily be referred to as the ‘New Imperial’ man as, when British fascists spoke of their ideal man, they were thinking more in terms of Drake or Dyer than of Mussolini.

By applying what they understood to be the values of imperial masculinity to the metropole, they believed they could revolutionise Britain and save the Empire. In fighting anti-colonial nationalists, ‘weak’ democratic politicians, socialists or ‘international Jewish finance’, those on the Radical Right drew inspiration from the example of imperial heroes and the faceless, nameless imperial Britons scattered across the globe. Masculine virtues were to serve as an imperial antidote to decline. Even at its most rabidly antisemitic, as when Leese looked forward to the extermination of the Jews in 1936, Radical Right activists could still find encouragement in the forceful example of the ‘man on the spot’.

However, by the inter-war period, these ideas were outmoded. This is not to say that in Britain imperialism ceased to be popular or that British culture ceased to idealise masculinity. Particularly by the late 1930s and the beginning of the Second World War, popular constructions of both British imperialism and heroic British masculinity were fundamentally at odds with Radical Right representations. The image of the British Empire projected throughout the war was one of a ‘people’s empire’, ‘a temperate empire that was neither racist nor oppressive’.[[869]](#footnote-869) In addition, British wartime propaganda presented British men as ordinary, hardy and stoic defenders of home in opposition to both ‘a hyper-masculine Nazi-like image, and to images of emasculated or effeminate men personified by old men and cowardly pacifists’.[[870]](#footnote-870) This image of the British ‘David’ defending green and pleasant domesticity from the Nazi ‘Goliath’ was also quite at odds with the British Radical Right’s celebration of the violence and authoritarianism of the ‘men on the spot’.

While the political failure of the Radical Right in Britain during the inter-war period was not simply down to its adherents’ ideas, it is worth mentioning that their campaign for an unashamed return to the ways of aggressive ‘Empire-builders’ was entirely unfashionable. The next two chapters explore the re-emergence of the British Radical Right during the closing years of the Second World War. Mosley, Leese and Chesterton returned and they and their followers continued to campaign for an imperial revival into the 1950s and 1960s. They looked increasingly to southern Africa for the modern equivalent of the ‘Empire-builders’ of old. In settler societies where combative white supremacy had never been out of fashion, the British Radical Right found the lodestar for their new efforts to revive Empire in the age of decolonisation.

# 4 ‘Empire or Eclipse’: The Radical Right and the British Empire in war and peace, 1943-1953

# **Introduction**

In October 1949, the journalist Mervyn Jones attended two meetings of Oswald Mosley’s new Union Movement (UM), reporting on them for the *New Statesman & Nation*. Mosley had launched the UM in the February of the previous year after gathering together his scattered followers. His new post-war political vision was predicated on the idea of a united European return to Africa. By occupying the continent’s supposedly vast swathes of empty, fertile land and harnessing its abundant natural resources, once again the Empire was to be used to save Britain. Imperial pioneering provided the panacea to Britain’s post-war ills. Jones gave the following account of the meeting:

As I looked at the faces around me, I saw that persuading the audience that Mosley alone has a real policy is only half the trick. The other half is to make each eager youngster envisage himself, suitably clad in khaki shorts and topee and carrying a whip or revolver, striding managerially across a vast plantation where countless black backs bend in rhythm. Mosley restores the psychological outlet which India and Burma for 150 years provided for the spirited younger sons of the British middle class. Even the ageing shopkeeper and the dear old lady see themselves as vicarious rulers of a new empire.[[871]](#footnote-871)

Jones’ shrewd observations about the UM provide a good impression of the overall character of Radical Right politics during the years immediately following the Second World War. As Jones’ account suggests and this chapter goes on to demonstrate, from the last few years of the war through to 1953, Radical Right activists retained their enduring faith in the revivifying elixir of Empire. During this period, they also responded to new challenges to the Empire brought by the Second World War. Radical Right groups continued to attack the tolerant, ‘liberal’ image of the British Empire which was a central part of British wartime propaganda and the post-war reconfiguration of the colonial Empire into a ‘Commonwealth of Nations’. This period also saw them attacking the reformist colonial policy of both Labour and Conservative governments, the increasing international economic and political power of the United States of America, the liberal internationalism of the United Nations, and early African nationalism. All of this was taken as a sign that the catastrophic collapse of the Empire that they had long prophesied had finally arrived. Once again, Radical Right activists blamed these phenomena on the sinister and mythical force of international Jewish power. It will be shown that, in their defence of British colonial rule, Radical Right activists increasingly identified with white settlers, particularly in southern Africa. This chapter also briefly addresses the first stirrings of the Radical Right’s opposition to Commonwealth immigration though this is dealt with fully in Chapter 5.

Beginning with A.K. Chesterton’s entrance into the semi-respectable world of Conservative political journalism after his return from military service in 1943, it follows developments in his political thinking during his time as editorial assistant at the Conservative periodical *Truth*. From there it moves on to cover the attempts of Leese and then Mosley to revive their political careers and keep their ideas alive. Arnold Leese and the ‘Racial Fascists’ continued to form the ‘lunatic fringe’ of the Radical Right. The revival of The Britons as the Britons Publishing Society represents one of their few ‘achievements’ during this period. They continued to call on the white race to take action to save itself and to deal with Jews once and for all by an all-Aryan revival of the British Empire. Finally, the chapter deals with activities of Mosley’s followers and his eventual return to politics with the foundation of the Union Movement, the advocates of a united European re-conquest of Africa mentioned in the chapter’s opening.

If the imperialist nature of inter-war Radical Right ideology has, until very recently, gone more or less overlooked, the same oversight is even more striking when it comes to the post-war period. There are a number of important studies of the post-war British Radical Right by Anne Poole, David Renton, Nicholas Hillman, Graham Macklin, and Janet Dack.[[872]](#footnote-872) While these scholars have thoroughly analysed the continued political failure of the Radical Right, they have neglected the persistence of the Radical Right’s imperial obsessions. Thus, A.K. Chesterton’s romanticising of white settlers in opposition to African nationalism or Mosley’s post-war obsession with united European neo-colonial experiments in Africa are mentioned in passing, as the peculiar features of failed movements or of an impotent political tendency. They have missed the ways in which Radical Right ideologues formulated many of their ideas during this time *directly* in reaction to British colonial policy and the changing fortunes of European colonial empires. During these years colonial policymakers made ultimately unsuccessful, half-hearted and often inconsistent attempts to remake the Empire into a benign association of liberal democracies. The ideas of Chesterton, Leese, Mosley and their followers rested primarily on bitter opposition to such attempts and on the conviction that Britain’s salvation lay in returning in spirit and vision, if not in terms of time and territory, to the halcyon days of Empire.

# **Among the ‘Drawing-Room Fascists’**

A.K. Chesterton’s journey from the ranks of the British Union to the world of those the security services nicknamed the ‘Drawing-Room Fascists’ began in 1938.[[873]](#footnote-873) That year, after serving in various positions in the group’s hierarchy since joining in 1933 and writing Mosley’s official biography in 1937, Chesterton left the BU. [[874]](#footnote-874) He gave his reasons in a pamphlet published by the National Socialist League (NSL), a group formed in 1937 by two fellow former members of the BU, William Joyce and John Beckett. Chesterton criticised Mosley’s leadership and accused him not sufficiently valuing his ‘best’ organisers and propagandists.[[875]](#footnote-875) In addition, he attacked the BU as ‘a parody of National-Socialist thought and principle’ populated by overly-ambitious ‘nondescript women’.[[876]](#footnote-876) This schism likely saved Chesterton from internment, as he was one of the few prominent BU activists not interned by the British government during the war.[[877]](#footnote-877)

Though he continued to move in antisemitic pro-Nazi circles, soon after war broke out, Chesterton joined the Army Officers Emergency Reserve and was soon serving as a commissioned officer.[[878]](#footnote-878) Though he retained his fervent antisemitism, Chesterton views on German National Socialism began to sour after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia.[[879]](#footnote-879) He was convinced that only by participating in the British war effort could he rid himself and, by extension Radical Right ideas, of the taint of treason.[[880]](#footnote-880) In his view, ‘the only hope for [British] Fascism was to make every effort to win the war’.[[881]](#footnote-881) While never interned, the security services placed Chesterton under surveillance and continued to monitor him for short time even after he joined the army.[[882]](#footnote-882) When the opportunity came up for a posting in East Africa in 1940, Chesterton quickly volunteered.

After a bout of malaria and colitis in early 1943, Chesterton was discharged from the army on medical grounds.[[883]](#footnote-883) Once he recovered and came back to Britain, he returned to his pre-fascist career in freelance journalism. Two publications, *The Weekly Review* and *Truth* provided a home for the journalism of Chesterton and a number of other Radical Right figures who had avoided internment. *The Weekly Review* was a politico-literary journal, originally founded in 1925 as *G.K.’s Weekly* by Chesterton’s second cousin, G.K. Chesterton. *The Weekly Review* approached current affairs from the distributist political angle of its founder. *Truth*, on the other hand,was a political periodical known for its investigative journalism. Originally founded in 1877 by Liberal politician, Henry Labouchère, by the middle of the Second World War, *Truth* was associated with the pro-appeasement right-wing of the Conservative Party. In June 1937, Sir Joseph Ball, head of the Conservative Research Department had ‘secretly’ bought a controlling interest in *Truth*.[[884]](#footnote-884) It is unclear whether this acquisition was the result of Ball’s own initiative or whether he was acting with the backing of party leadership. In any case, he used the paper to promote the policies of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and was not opposed to using antisemitic stereotypes to do so. The journal continued its rightward direction under the editorship of William Collin Brooks from 1940.[[885]](#footnote-885) Collins Brooks had previously worked for publications owned by Lord Rothermere and had been a Mosley sympathiser during the 1930s.[[886]](#footnote-886)

Douglas Hyde, writing in the Communist Party’s *Daily Worker*, remarked upon the preponderance of ex-fascist writers and editors on *The Weekly Review* and *Truth*. Hyde accused the editors of the *Review* of providing a platform for those he called the ‘Free Fascists’ to propagate a veiled version of old Mosleyite policies.[[887]](#footnote-887) He further speculated that such journals might be used as a springboard for a fascist ‘come back’. Hyde had a point. *The Weekly Review* featured contributions from Jorian Jenks and Robert Gordon-Canning and advertised the Constitutional Research Association, partly organised by Major-General Fuller in order to undermine the ongoing Nuremberg Trials.[[888]](#footnote-888) Besides Chesterton, *Truth* was also host to a number of former ‘fellow travellers of the right’.[[889]](#footnote-889) After Hyde’s allegations were repeated in *The Jewish Chronicle*, *The Weekly Review* brought a libel action against them and the *Daily Worker*. This ended with the offending journals paying ‘a substantial sum by way of damages’.[[890]](#footnote-890) For his part, Chesterton resolutely maintained that his fascist past was behind him and was at pains to deny his former political involvement with William Joyce.[[891]](#footnote-891)

Despite disavowing his fascist past, Chesterton continued to write for a number of extreme antisemitic publications under a string of pseudonyms including Philip Faulconbridge and Caius Marcius Coriolanus.[[892]](#footnote-892) He was involved in the formation of the semi-clandestine National Front After Victory (NFAV) in the autumn of 1944, a short-lived group that brought together conservatives like *Truth*’s editor Collin Brooks with ‘thorough-going National-Socialists and Hitler-worshippers’.[[893]](#footnote-893) The NFAV was also close to the British People’s Party (BBP), founded in 1939 by ex-Mosleyite John Beckett and the Duke of Bedford. [[894]](#footnote-894) While Chesterton had yet to break with his old friends, he was in the process of revising his ideas. Fascism, as he saw it, was ‘discredited’ and ‘destroyed’.[[895]](#footnote-895) He claimed to have discarded fascism - its coloured shirts, ‘ballyhoo and repression’ – while remaining true to its underlying conservative, traditionalist values.[[896]](#footnote-896)

# **World Conspiracy & White settlers**

Chesterton continued to develop his ideas along traditionalist, conservative lines as the editorial assistant and leader-writer at *Truth*. After accepting Collin Brooks’ offer of the position in the summer of 1944, Chesterton was now responsible for writing the journal’s leading articles. [[897]](#footnote-897) Alongside these, many of its unsigned articles on Africa and Empire bear his literary hallmarks. Over his nearly decade-long tenure at the journal, he developed an analysis of world affairs in which he sought to explain the direction of Britain’s foreign policy with reference to growing American power and influence in international politics. Directing America’s every move and all of Britain’s imperial ‘surrenders’, Chesterton argued, were the Jewish financiers of Wall Street. He made frequent use of antisemitic conspiracy theory in defending the cause of white settlers in southern Africa from the liberal aspirations of British colonial policy, the early stirrings of African nationalism, and perceived American interference. By the time of his resignation from the journal in 1953, Chesterton had gained a reputation as somewhat of an expert on imperial affairs.[[898]](#footnote-898)

Following the Second World War, Chesterton’s ideas were developing in the direction of what his biographer David Baker calls ‘a mixture of right-wing Tory Empire loyalism and conspiratorial anti-Semitism’.[[899]](#footnote-899) In the course of his ideological development, Chesterton drew on the ‘occult’ conspiracy theories of Nesta Webster, but also heavily on the more ‘materialist’ theories of Arthur Kitson and A. N. Field.[[900]](#footnote-900) According to Richard Thurlow, antisemitic conspiracy theory can be separated into two overlapping traditions, ‘occult’ and ‘materialist’.[[901]](#footnote-901) The former attributes sinister plots to demonic forces, secret societies, cults and so on, while the latter locates its plotters in high political office or international economic institutions. Kitson was an inventor and monetary theorist who, in a series of books and pamphlets from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, argued for monetary reform in order to curb the undue political influence supposedly exerted by a small group of financiers – also referred to as ‘Money-Power’.[[902]](#footnote-902) While he never referred to the Jews explicitly, his membership of The Britons and the role he played in introducing Arnold Leese to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* suggest that antisemitism lay at the root of his economic theories.[[903]](#footnote-903)

Arthur Nelson Field was another considerable influence on Chesterton’s post-war ideological development. A prolific antisemitic writer, Field was a New Zealander of Anglo-Irish descent and a patriotic British imperialist.[[904]](#footnote-904) Inspired by the work of Kitson and his correspondence with British Radical Right figures including Henry Hamilton Beamish, Field argued that Jewish finance dominated world affairs.[[905]](#footnote-905) More specifically, he advocated a ‘fundamentally Empire-loyalist’ brand of antisemitism predicated on the idea that Jewish financiers based in America were working ‘to undermine and destroy the British Empire, British institutions and economy and the British way of life’.[[906]](#footnote-906) Chesterton credited the work of Kitson and Field in his 1946 pamphlet *The Menace of the Money-Power* and Field’s influence especially is evident in his writing elsewhere during this period.[[907]](#footnote-907)

In America’s increasingly powerful influence in international politics, Chesterton perceived the beginnings of a Jewish ‘World Government’. Slightly updating Field’s work, Chesterton believed that he had identified the precise agents of this conspiracy among Wall Street financiers. In Bernard Baruch, Chesterton claimed to have found the head of this international financial hydra.[[908]](#footnote-908) In reality, Baruch was an American banker and an adviser to a string of US presidents. For Chesterton, though, Baruch was ‘America’s Elder Puppet-Master’.[[909]](#footnote-909) Apart from a few more overt expressions, when Chesterton engaged in antisemitism in the pages of *Truth*, he did so euphemistically.[[910]](#footnote-910) Nevertheless, there are evident and unmistakable signs of the antisemitic core of his theories about the ‘New York… money trust’.

He claimed that the ‘final objective’ of these financiers was ‘World government’, echoing the plan outlined in *The Protocols*.[[911]](#footnote-911) In addition, he also cited the founding myth of the ‘materialist’ tradition of antisemitic conspiracy theory, the idea that the Russian revolution was bankrolled by the New York-based investment bank, Kuhn, Loeb and Company.[[912]](#footnote-912) The main target of New York finance’s campaign, as outlined by Chesterton, was the British Empire. In Chesterton’s view, ‘the great new world imperialisms’ of the USA and USSR were pursuing a deliberate policy of liquidating European colonial possessions.[[913]](#footnote-913) With European colonial powers out of the way, theorised Chesterton, Wall Street financiers would be free to pursue their own ambitions, namely the foundation of a ‘Dollar Empire’.

Though often not expressed in conspiratorial terms, the concerns about American hegemony that lay behind Chesterton’s articles in *Truth* were widespread.[[914]](#footnote-914) During the late forties and early fifties, there was real concern about America’s stated intentions concerning the political and economic reform of European colonialism.[[915]](#footnote-915) In *Truth* and beyond, critics worried that the terms of the $3.5 billion loan America made to Britain in 1946 would reduce the nation ‘to the status of an economic satellite’.[[916]](#footnote-916) Worries such as these provoked major parliamentary divisions in the Conservative Party during the mid-to-late 1940s.[[917]](#footnote-917) The great irony, of course, is that the British Empire only survived after 1945 ‘as part of the Anglo-American coalition’.[[918]](#footnote-918) Buoyed by American money, the maintenance of British imperial proxies became a key part of the United States’ strategy in the ensuing Cold War. Nevertheless, the prevalence of anti-American imperialist paranoia meant that Chesterton’s accusations about the role American financiers and their ‘fifth columnists’ in Britain’s ‘scuttle’ from Empire were less than controversial. *Truth*’s proprietors and editors as well as Chesterton’s colleagues andreaders seemingly excused, or perhaps privately agreed with, his additional theories that behind this ‘scuttle’ lay a Jewish world plot.

As a means of reviving Britain and avoiding financial dependency on the USA, many British politicians of the time looked to the Empire.[[919]](#footnote-919) With the loss of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon over the course of 1947 and 1948, their attentions now turned to Africa.[[920]](#footnote-920) Africa also became the focus of Chesterton’s writing. His attachment to Africa, and especially South Africa, went deeper than optimistic hopes for its economic potential. As he put it in the unpublished account of his soldiering in the Second World War: ‘England is the land of my aspiration and my race, as well as of most of my adult life, but by birth I belong to Africa.’[[921]](#footnote-921) Many Conservatives shared Chesterton’s sentimental attachment to the white settler communities of British colonies in eastern and southern Africa.[[922]](#footnote-922) His military service in East Africa, which saw him involved in the push across Kenya through the desert of Ogaden and into Somaliland, had refocused Chesterton’s thinking on African issues. During this time he was reacquainted with the authoritarian ways of a racially stratified society where it was perfectly acceptable to beat one’s native servants in a fit of impatience. [[923]](#footnote-923) His return to his Africa roots reawakened what his biographer David Baker called Chesterton’s ‘“colonial outsider” vision of England’.[[924]](#footnote-924)

This is evident not only in his journalism but also in his other writing. Soon after his return, Chesterton wrote *Leopard Valley: A Play in Three Acts*. The playwas performed in Southport in 1944, where he was living at the time, by the touring Sheffield Repertory Company.[[925]](#footnote-925) *Leopard Valley* tells the story of a white settler community in South Africa struggling against a movement committed to ‘Africa for the Africans’.[[926]](#footnote-926) Through Derek Romley, the play’s protagonist, Chesterton mounted an impassioned defence of the settler lifestyle, stubbornly arguing that Britons have ‘[a]s much right’ to be in Africa ‘as we have to be in England’.[[927]](#footnote-927) He also poured scorn on African nationalists whom he stereotyped as superstitious, savage, effete and pseudo-intellectual.[[928]](#footnote-928) Chesterton used his platform at *Truth* to advance such views, defending white settlers throughout British Africa while denigrating native Africans.

The fate of Africa and its white settlers became the central cause of Chesterton’s post-war political activism. The roots of his post-war development from fascist to ‘Empire loyalist’ can be found in his articles for *Truth* excoriating British colonial policy in Africa. Following the Second World War, colonial policies of the 1945-1951 Labour government and, to a lesser extent, those of its immediate Tory successor, promoted the ‘*political advancement*’ of Africans. This was envisioned as a ‘gradual, smooth and efficiently controlled’ process with the exact timing in each case ultimately decided by the British government.[[929]](#footnote-929) The end goal was independence but ‘within a Commonwealth framework’.[[930]](#footnote-930) It represented the culmination of the liberal internationalist imperial rhetoric of ‘trusteeship’ and development that defined inter-war colonial policy, and the talk of a benevolent, paternalistic ‘people’s empire’ that formed part of British wartime propaganda.[[931]](#footnote-931) As well as this, ‘political advancement’ was part of Cold War strategy. Its long-term aim was to create a black African bulwark against communism composed of ‘broadly-based, stable, viable, friendly, non-Communist’ self-governing states ‘firmly within the Commonwealth.’[[932]](#footnote-932)

However, there were tensions at the heart of the imperial project following the Second World War. The Union of South Africa, as the British dominion was then known, was at this time instituting apartheid, an intensified system of racial segregation. Even before the war, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Afrikaner nationalists had been moving in a steadily more radical direction. During the 1930s, their opposition to the British Empire outweighed their interest in the threat posed by Nazi Germany and, in any case, many actively sympathised with the Nazis’ doctrines of racial superiority and antisemitism.[[933]](#footnote-933) When war broke out between Britain and Germany in 1939, the question of whether South Africa would also declare war against the Nazis fractured the ruling party. After the South African parliament voted to join the British war effort back in 1939, the Prime Minister J. B. M. Hertzog resigned in protest and then left the United South African National Party (formed in 1934 after Hertzog and his supporters merged with Smuts’ South African Party).[[934]](#footnote-934) Hertzog and his supporters then combined with Malan’s radical Afrikaner nationalist ‘Purified’ National Party to form the Reunited National Party.

After the war in the 1948 general election, Malan’s National Party triumphed over Jan Smuts’ pro-British United Party. Following their victory, the new National Party regime began rapidly implementing laws to extend racial segregation.[[935]](#footnote-935) Apartheid was completely at odds with the racial paternalism of British colonial policy. Nonetheless, Britain tried to maintain good relations with South Africa due to their economic reliance on its natural resources and fears that the Union might absorb British colonies to the north.[[936]](#footnote-936) In particular, they feared that South Africa might act upon its long-maintained claims on the nearby High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland.[[937]](#footnote-937) Additionally, British desires to economically exploit its African colonies and implement political reforms had to be balanced against the danger of driving white settlers in other British colonies into the welcoming arms of South Africa.[[938]](#footnote-938)

Nothing illustrates the mess of countervailing pressures acting on British colonial policy better than the creation of the short-lived Central African Federation (CAF). Planned under a Labour government and inaugurated by a Conservative one, the CAF came into being on 1 August 1953 and brought together Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. British policymakers hoped that the CAF would assuage settler pressure in Northern Rhodesia and the semi-autonomous colony of Southern Rhodesia in favour of the creation of an amalgamated self-governing Dominion, act as a barrier to the expansion of South Africa, and safeguard the rights of Africans.[[939]](#footnote-939) Legal safeguards were put in place with the aim establishing a system of racial ‘partnership’ between white settlers and native Africans. For British policy-makers, this vague term denoted a moderate alternative to African nationalism, the ‘steady evolution of blacks towards social and political equality’, but white settlers understood it to mean ‘European leadership for the indefinite future’.[[940]](#footnote-940) However, ‘the simultaneous privileging of both black and white’ was as impossible as it was unsustainable.[[941]](#footnote-941) The result was an ‘apartheid-lite’ regime, beset by African nationalist unrest from 1959, and ignominiously dissolved in 1963.[[942]](#footnote-942)

Chesterton abhorred the idea of the ‘political advancement’ of Africans. He conceived of Africans in paternalistic, racist terms, views ‘derived from childhood experiences as the “little master” of coloured servants and black mine workers’.[[943]](#footnote-943) His unpublished autobiography, *Blame Not my Lute*, contains a number of scenes in which Chesterton acts as a little white Lord Fauntleroy to a host of black houseboys, Zulu policemen, and others.[[944]](#footnote-944) Chesterton had at multiple times in his life wielded the kind of white power he wrote in favour of; first as the young son of British settlers in South Africa, then later in his failed career as a prospector, and afterwards as a journalist in Johannesburg. When he returned to Africa during the Second World War, he quickly readjusted to the racial order of things.

As far as Chesterton was concerned, his extensive colonial experiences qualified him as an expert on ‘the African’. He was convinced that Africans were a ‘simple’ people’.[[945]](#footnote-945) For him, the first African nationalist stirrings of the late forties and early fifties were the chiefly the result of ‘white mischief’.[[946]](#footnote-946) He blamed Labour colonial policy for trying to foist civilisation on ‘the simple blacks’.[[947]](#footnote-947) His view of Africans was one of noble savages; to introduce them to ‘Western’ ideas like democracy and equality, he argued, would be to turn them into ‘bad parodies of Europeans’.[[948]](#footnote-948) For Chesterton, the principle of the essential inequality of the races was essential for the maintenance of ‘European prestige’ on which colonialism rested.[[949]](#footnote-949) He accused ‘World Jewry’ of working to undermine ‘European prestige’ in east and southern Africa by fomenting nationalist unrest locally and promoting anti-racist ideas through the UN.[[950]](#footnote-950)

While an unapologetic white supremacist and defender of settler supremacy in Africa, Chesterton had an uneasy relationship with Afrikaner nationalism. He was supportive of apartheid and believed that it was only by such measures that Britain could ‘save white civilisation in Africa from being terminated’.[[951]](#footnote-951) However, he did not share Afrikaner nationalists’ republican antipathy towards the British Empire. As well as instituting apartheid, after 1948 the National Party also ‘rapidly Afrikanerized the state’, forcing British South Africans out of various positions in government and society, replacing them with Afrikaners or party supporters.[[952]](#footnote-952) Over the course of the 1950s, this was accompanied by other moves to distance the country from Britain, including the abolition of the Union Jack and the anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ from official ceremonies in 1957.[[953]](#footnote-953) Though he admired the South African stand for ‘white civilisation’, Chesterton believed that only by a revival ‘in Britain’ of ‘the torch of the traditional British spirit’ could ‘white’ Africa be saved.[[954]](#footnote-954)

*Truth* provided Chesterton with a place to develop his post-fascist political creed, a synthesis of British imperialism, white settler racism, and antisemitic conspiracy theory. His time at the journal forms the prelude to his later founding of the League of Empire Loyalists, discussed in the next chapter, in 1954. He began floating ideas for such an organisation in *Truth* back in 1949. He believed that ‘British people all over the world’ ought to unite to meet the ‘prodigious assault upon our political and economic independence’ emanating from ‘internationalists’ based in ‘the West’.[[955]](#footnote-955) Such a threat was to be met, he suggested, with ‘a militant league’ of ‘British loyalists’ which would transcend party politics in its quest to defend the nation and empire against international financiers.[[956]](#footnote-956)

Chesterton’s post-fascist political rehabilitation, probably the most successful of the prominent inter-war fascists, rested on his efforts to restyle himself as a spokesman for unreconstructed Tory imperialism. Given his long period of employment at *Truth*, there is every sign that some Conservatives, dissatisfied with the post-war direction of British foreign and colonial policy, approved of the radical imperialism of a lapsed Mosleyite. They were certainly, at the very least, willing to overlook his antisemitism. At no point did Chesterton’s journalism result in him being dismissed, rebuked or censored by the paper’s advertisers, his colleagues, or his superiors at *Truth*. Neither does it seem to have dented *Truth*’s reputation. When the journal reached its seventy-fifty birthday in 1952, it attracted plaudits from then Deputy Prime Minister, Anthony Eden; the newspaper proprietor, Lord Rothermere; and the chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Woolton, among others.[[957]](#footnote-957) Though *Truth*’s readership is difficult to assess, these tributes from Tory grandees suggest that the journal remained a ‘reputable’ and ‘mainstream organ’ that ‘was widely read in respectable clubs, libraries and bookshops’.[[958]](#footnote-958) It also seems that it had retained its ‘loyal and influential readership’, which at one time had included Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.[[959]](#footnote-959)

By 1953, however, there are suggestions that this had changed. Journalist Bernard Levin, who early in his career worked on *Truth*, later reflected that under Brooks and Chesterton, the publication had ‘dwindled, and eventually was nothing but a shell’.[[960]](#footnote-960) In the same year, the journal was sold to publisher Ronald Staples. With this change in proprietors came the cleaning up of what Levin referred to as *Truth*’s ‘extremely whiffy political and racial line’.[[961]](#footnote-961) Brooks retired and Chesterton resigned in frustration over *Truth*’s increasing political moderation and the editorial toning down of his antisemitism.[[962]](#footnote-962) After his resignation, he penned an angry tirade entitled *“Truth” Has Been Murdered* which was published by the Britons Publishing Society (the successor to The Britons). In the pamphlet, Chesterton attacked the new *Truth* for abandoning the cause of Empire and supporting NATO, Europe and the Jews.

Turning his back on *Truth*, Chesterton continued championing of the interests of white settlers in Africa. In late February 1953, he secured a temporary post as information and public relations officer to the London Committee of the United Central Africa Association (UCAA).[[963]](#footnote-963) Its parent organisation, the UCAA, was formed in Northern Rhodesia in 1948 to make the case for a federated central Africa in which European settlers retained supremacy.[[964]](#footnote-964) Roy Welensky – Southern Rhodesian politician, a trade unionist, and later Prime Minister of the eventual Central African Federation – founded the London Committee of the UCAA after a visit to the capital in May 1952.[[965]](#footnote-965) The London Committee’s task was to lead the British wing of the UCAA’s campaign for a central African federation based on settler supremacy. To this end, its members engaged in parliamentary lobbying, public relations and research. They also sought, with mixed success, the patronage of various prominent statesmen and women.[[966]](#footnote-966)

During his brief time with the UCAA, Chesterton anonymously authored a pamphlet entitled *The Birth of a Nation: The British Purpose in Central Africa*. Featuring a foreword from one of the London Committee’s vice-presidents, the eminent Tory imperialist Leopold Amery, it set out the Committee’s case.[[967]](#footnote-967) *The Birth of a Nation* was an ode to the ‘hardy’ British ‘pioneers’, commending them for their role in ‘civilising’ ‘savage’ southern Africa.[[968]](#footnote-968) Any British plans for a central African federation, maintained Chesterton, should aim to reward *their* descendants, not African natives and especially not the ‘pseudo-sophisticate’ nationalist intelligentsia.[[969]](#footnote-969) The decision to publish the pamphlet anonymously is interesting. Perhaps the London Committee were wary of Chesterton’s fascist past, in any case they appreciated his work. At the request of the London Committee, five dozen copies of Chesterton’s pamphlet were distributed to the secretariats of the Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland by the Colonial Office.[[970]](#footnote-970) Chesterton’s time with the group was short and the London Committee of the UCAA itself was disbanded soon after the Central African Federation was founded in August 1953.[[971]](#footnote-971)

Chesterton had a ‘good’ war in comparison to other temporarily incarcerated members of the Radical Right. To an extent he was able to bury his fascist past (albeit in a fairly shallow grave) and forge a career as a journalist in a ‘respectable’ Conservative journal. Having abandoned Mosleyite fascism, Chesterton found a new audience among the Tory right who embraced him for his imperialism while sharing, accepting or excusing his antisemitic conspiracy theorising. He even enjoyed a short stint as Lord Beaverbrook’s literary advisor in the early 1950s between his departure from *Truth* and his return to political activism.[[972]](#footnote-972) Eager to start a publication in keeping with the old *Truth*, Chesterton founded a new journal, *Candour*,in October 1953 with the patronage of R. K. Jeffrey, an eccentric British expatriate in Chile.[[973]](#footnote-973) As the presence of a bevy of prominent Tory reactionaries in the LEL’s ranks illustrates, his time spent moving in Conservative circles proved invaluable in this next phase of his political activism.[[974]](#footnote-974)

# **Racial Fascism Resurgent**

Unlike Chesterton, Leese and many of his loyal followers were interned for a number of years during the Second World War. Apprehended by the police in late 1940, Leese was imprisoned until 1944. His internment prompted almost no change in views and, if anything, only hardened them. Leese’s abrasive personality and ideological purism meant that his activism remained limited to a small group of former IFL activists in Britain, though he attempted to sustain his international links with likeminded racists abroad. These ‘Racial Fascists’ continued to look to the Empire as a means of racial revival and, perhaps rather predictably, attacked Indian and African nationalist movements and anti-racist ideas as part of a Jewish plot. [[975]](#footnote-975) This period saw Leese found a new journal, aid in the foundation of a few short-lived new fascist parties, and help revive The Britons as the Britons Publishing Society.

Upon the end of his internment, Leese rapidly returned to his political activism. The first issue of his new journal, *Gothic Ripples*, appeared in mid-1945. In its pages, Leese carried on with many of his old themes. He blamed ‘Universal Suffrage’ for the decline of Britain’s imperial power and accused the Jews of starting the Second World War and precipitating what he perceived as the racial decline of Europe.[[976]](#footnote-976) He continued to vent his frustrations with Indian nationalists with the declaration of Indian independence in 1947. Echoing The Britons’ die-hardism, Leese blamed the loss of India on Edwin Montagu, the reforming Secretary of State for India during the 1920s, but fundamentally saw it as the result of Jewish and Freemasonic propaganda about racial equality.[[977]](#footnote-977)

Leese believed that hope lay with ‘the British Dominions’, outposts of ‘the Nordic Race’ who were ‘still in a state of progressive evolution’.[[978]](#footnote-978) He praised Australia for its apparently ‘healthy race-consciousness’ and for its ‘White Australia’ policy, a series of measures restricting non-white immigration enforced from 1901 to 1973.[[979]](#footnote-979) Like Chesterton, he also looked towards South Africa. *Gothic Ripples* followed the progress of the National Party from its earliest issues, commending them in 1945 for their ‘anti-Communist & anti-Jewish’ outlook but noting that ‘[u]nfortunately they are also against the Imperial connection’.[[980]](#footnote-980) Leese put the republicanism of Afrikaner nationalism down to ‘Jewish and Masonic influence in Imperial affairs’. When it came to apartheid, he described himself as ‘with Dr. Malan all the way in his policy of racial discrimination as regards the coloured’.[[981]](#footnote-981) His only issue was that, in his view, Malan and the National Party were insufficiently antisemitic.[[982]](#footnote-982) After Malan’s National Party won further victories in the 1953 election, Leese praised their campaign to keep the tide of ‘racial degeneration’ at bay and ‘*the White Man on top*’, adding ‘May the British and the United States Governments learn something from this.’[[983]](#footnote-983)

Leese despised the United Nations chiefly for the role it played, right from its earliest sessions in 1946, in criticising South African racial policies.[[984]](#footnote-984) He argued that the UN were also trying to spread anti-racist ‘propaganda’ through UNESCO aimed at toppling white rule in Africa.[[985]](#footnote-985) This was a reference UNESCO’s efforts to undermine the intellectual foundations of racism following the atrocities of the Second World War. In 1950, they released a *Statement on Race* composed by a group of ‘eminent’ sociologists and anthropologists and, a year later, another document *Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Difference* compiled by a group of biologists and geneticists. The aim of these documents was to demonstrate that ‘mankind was one and all people belonged to the same species’.[[986]](#footnote-986) This infuriated Leese, who denounced the promotion of what he regarded as the Freemasonic-Jewish ‘Lie of Equality’ and drew up lists of supposed ‘Jews’ among the academics and researchers involved in the project.[[987]](#footnote-987)

In *Gothic Ripples*, much as in Leese’s earlier writing, pseudo-scientific racism existed alongside crude imperialist bigotry. He continued to recommend the work of theorists like Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard and Hans F. K. Günther and discuss world affairs with reference to a complicated set of obscure racial categories.[[988]](#footnote-988) For instance, referencing Stoddard’s *Revolt Against Civilisation*, he blamed ‘the Undermen’ for the collapse of imperial rule India.[[989]](#footnote-989) In response to the anti-colonial revolt of ‘the Undermen’, Leese called for a revival of ‘Aryan Imperialism’ in order to teach Africans ‘who is master’.[[990]](#footnote-990) In his reportage on South Africa, he continued to regard people of colour living within Britain’s colonies and Dominions as either sinister or simpletons. He seized on reports of anti-apartheid violence as evidence of the barbarian instincts that he believed were an inherent feature of African psychology. During the African National Congress’s 1952 Defiance Campaign, riots broke out in the South African cities of Port Elizabeth and East London.[[991]](#footnote-991) Rioters killed and reportedly partially cannibalised a nun, Elsie Quinlan, who worked as a doctor at hospital in East London. In *Gothic Ripples*, Leese lingered over the lurid details of her death, recounting the story of how Quinlan’s flesh was allegedly ‘hacked off’ and ‘*eaten* by a large number of filthy savages’.[[992]](#footnote-992) At the same time, as he had in the 1930s with Indian nationalists, Leese argued that Africans had ‘no instinctive urge for… freedom’. Instead, ‘[t]he Jew’ was nurturing a class of ‘Babu niggers’ to foment unrest.[[993]](#footnote-993)

Leese was one of the early Radical Right figures to comment on post-war immigration in the context of Empire. While people of colour had lived in Britain for many years before the late 1940s, increasing numbers of people from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan were attracted to Britain at this time by the promise of employment and the extension of citizenship under the 1948 British Nationality Act. [[994]](#footnote-994) Coming very steadily at first in groups of a few hundred, by the early fifties 1,000 to 2,000 arrived annually.[[995]](#footnote-995) The presence of black Britons now extended beyond the series of port towns and cities around which they had previously been clustered. Shortly after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, Leese complained that ‘492 black Jamaicans’ had been imported into the country. For him this was an illustration of Britain’s lack of ‘race-sense’.[[996]](#footnote-996)

*Gothic Ripples* offered a foretaste of the Radical Right campaigns against immigration to come later on in the 1950s. For instance, Leese warned that by allowing people of colour into Britain risked importing anti-colonial unrest from the colonies into the metropole.[[997]](#footnote-997) Colin Holmes even credits Leese with coining the slogan ‘Keep Britain White’, which became a popular slogan on the Radical Right and beyond, in 1952.[[998]](#footnote-998) The true origins of the slogan are unclear. Two years later, it appeared in the UM’s newspaper and a year after that, as Harold Macmillan recorded in his memoirs, Winston Churchill suggested ‘Keep Britain White’ as the Conservative campaign slogan for the 1955 general election.[[999]](#footnote-999) It is highly unlikely that Churchill was quoting Leese, or that he had ever come across a copy of *Gothic Ripples* for that matter. At the same time, however, Macmillan’s anecdote illustrates that the kind of language used by Radical Right activists at this time was not a million miles away from mainstream discourse.

Home Office investigations in 1950 found that *Gothic Ripples* had only ‘a small circulation’.[[1000]](#footnote-1000) They noted that Leese had failed in his attempt to exploit antisemitic reactions to the unrest in Palestine in 1947 and that the journal mostly circulated ‘among the group of minor fascist organisations for whom the works and money of Arnold Leese are still an inspiration’. Leese also attempted to disseminate his writing beyond Britain to Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.[[1001]](#footnote-1001) His contact in South Africa was a Natal-based farmer named Raymond K. Rudman, also leader of the South African fascist group, the Boerenasie.[[1002]](#footnote-1002) Through Rudman, Leese found publishers for his books and pamphlets in South Africa and was kept abreast of the South African political situation.[[1003]](#footnote-1003) MI5 believed that Leese intended to found ‘a kind of National Socialist “International”’ though, beyond these contacts, nothing of the kind ever materialised.[[1004]](#footnote-1004) Despite his marginality, Leese was still dangerous. In 1947, Leese, another of his supporters named Anthony Gittens, and several others were arrested and imprisoned for sheltering two Nazi P.O.W.s who had escaped from a camp at Kempton Park.[[1005]](#footnote-1005)

Outside of his writings, maintaining transnational ideological links, and his occasional criminal exploits, Leese had essentially retired from a leading role in political organising. He spent the years before his death in 1956 assisting and promoting new ‘Nordic’ leaders. He did so using the ‘considerable sum’ of money left to him by Henry Hamilton Beamish, founder of The Britons, who died in Southern Rhodesia in 1948.[[1006]](#footnote-1006) One of these groups was the National Workers’ Movement (NWM) founded in 1948 and led by Anthony Francis Xavier Baron, formerly of the British People’s Party.[[1007]](#footnote-1007) On its Advisory Council, responsible for drafting policy, was Gittens; a former NFAV member, H. H. Lockwood; and an ex-IFL member, George Pile.[[1008]](#footnote-1008) The NWM was antisemitic, white supremacist and aimed to strengthen and consolidate the British Empire.[[1009]](#footnote-1009) The group claimed to have branches in Liverpool, Manchester and the West Riding, but the security services reported that there was no sign of any activity in these areas by 1950.[[1010]](#footnote-1010)

The NWM was wound up in the spring of 1951 following tensions between Baron and the newly-reconstituted Britons Publishing Society.[[1011]](#footnote-1011) Leese then instigated the formation of the British Empire Party (BEP) led by former IFL stalwart, P. J. Ridout.[[1012]](#footnote-1012) During the brief period of its existence, the BEP put out its own newspaper *Bridgehead*. Like the IFL and NWM before it, the BEP’s ideology was the same mixture of imperialism and obsessive antisemitism. In the first issue, Ridout wrote that the group had been founded in response to the ‘very perilous position’ of the British nation and Empire.[[1013]](#footnote-1013) At the same time, they viewed the British Empire as the answer to all problems. For them, the Empire was ‘the natural political expression of the Anglo-Saxon race’ with all the resources necessary to materially and spiritually restore Britain.[[1014]](#footnote-1014)

To the twin threats of communism to the east and ‘Jewish finance’ to the west, the BEP proposed ‘a federated Empire policy’.[[1015]](#footnote-1015) They essentially stood for imperial preference plus eliminationist antisemitism and support for South African apartheid.[[1016]](#footnote-1016) Jews were portrayed as the chief antagonists of the Empire out to set up a ‘universal state’ out of ‘repugnance for the White Man’s civilisation’.[[1017]](#footnote-1017) However, the BEP appears to have had little more success than the NWM. *Bridgehead* contained almost certainly inflated reports of well-attended BEP meetings in North and East London during the summer of 1951.[[1018]](#footnote-1018) In September that year, *Bridgehead* also reported on a 2,000 strong ‘most attentive and interested’ audience at a BEP rally in Trafalgar Square. Despite *Bridgehead*’s optimistic accounts of the BEP’s development and Leese’s endorsement and financial support, the group had disappeared by 1952.[[1019]](#footnote-1019)

# ***Free Britain* and British Revival**

Using the money from Beamish’s estate, Leese also helped revive The Britons, which re-emerged as the Britons Publishing Society in 1948. An attempted revival had taken place two years earlier in 6 May 1946, after some of Leese’s disciples met with other Radical Right activists including Chesterton and John Beckett.[[1020]](#footnote-1020) Gittens reported to Leese that the meeting achieved nothing and that Chesterton and Beckett were overly cautious.[[1021]](#footnote-1021) The new version of The Britons, the Britons Publishing Society, continued the old group’s role of publishing and disseminating racist literature and, in its first few years, also initially propagandised for the NWM. Its new president was the Richard T. Cooper (formerly the antisemitic cartoonist in the IFL’s *Fascist* newspaper), Gittens was the honorary secretary, and another member of the old IFL inner circle and formerly of the NFAV, H. T. Mills, served as secretary.[[1022]](#footnote-1022)

The BPS produced a cyclostyled news-sheet entitled *Free Britain*. In its first issue, the authors described the purpose of *Free Britain* as to struggle against the ‘International Parliamentarians’ who claimed that Britain was ‘finished as a nation and an empire’.[[1023]](#footnote-1023) They called for Britain to fight ‘[t]he Jewish aim of world dominion’ by rising ‘up again as a powerful imperial people under a strong Monarchy, [and] self-sufficient as an Empire’.[[1024]](#footnote-1024) The Empire was in mortal danger, the BPS declared, and a renewed imperialism was the only way out. The ‘restoration of the British Empire’ was presented as the secret weapon against Jewish-directed ‘world government’.[[1025]](#footnote-1025)

As well as promoting a closer relationship with the Dominions in the form of ‘Empire Free Trade’, like Leese, the BPS enthusiastically defended South African apartheid.[[1026]](#footnote-1026) When it came to apartheid and other restrictive racist legislation, the BPS explained that South Africa merely wanted ‘to remain a White Man’s country’ and expressed their gratitude ‘that there is at least one part of the world that has taken this stand’.[[1027]](#footnote-1027) They even drew favourable comparisons between apartheid in the late 1940s and early 1950s and Hitler’s anti-Jewish legislation in the 1930s.

In their analysis of the British Empire and global politics in the post-war period, the BPS advised its readers to go back and consult writers like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard. For them, Grant and Stoddard had warned decades earlier of the potential vulnerability of the ‘white man’s authority’ in the face of ‘the coloured races’ who vastly outnumbered him.[[1028]](#footnote-1028) Alongside imperial regeneration, the BPS proposed that whites throughout the world band together into an ‘Anglo-Nordic Alliance’ composed of Britain and the Dominions along with their Aryan brethren in ‘the Kingdoms of Northern Europe’.[[1029]](#footnote-1029)

Like Leese, the BPS were quicker than other sections of the Radical Right to voice their opposition to Commonwealth immigration. In doing so, they also anticipated many of the arguments and much of the rhetoric that became a major part of Radical Right politics in Britain from the mid-1950s. In July 1949, an article in *Free* Britain accused the British government of committing ‘an act of Genocide (race murder) against the British people’ by importing ‘Negro labour’.[[1030]](#footnote-1030) Commonwealth immigration, they argued, was murder ‘in the genetic sense’. *Free Britain* proclaimed in late 1949 that the ‘Colour Question’ had suddenly come to Britain and again recommended the work of Lothrop Stoddard.[[1031]](#footnote-1031) Like Leese, the BPS looked to the Dominions for a racist example to followed. For instance, in early 1950, they called for Britain to follow South Africa and Australia and implement a ‘White Britain’ policy.[[1032]](#footnote-1032)

However, the BPS, like its predecessor, chiefly remained a book club for extreme racists, a society rather than a political movement. During this time, the BPS acted as a forum where various shades of Radical Right opinion came together. David Renton has noted that whatever intellectual and ideological differences separated the different sections of the Radical Right, these rarely got in the way of practical collaborations.[[1033]](#footnote-1033) The BPS illustrates the Radical Right’s catholic tendency as highlighted by Renton. As already mentioned, the BPS published Chesterton’s bitter attack on *Truth* following his resignation in 1953. They also went on to print *Candour* and publish a range of pamphlets by members of Chesterton’s League of Empire Loyalists.[[1034]](#footnote-1034) The BPS’s interactions with mainstream politics were limited and like the old Britons usually involved the promotion of renegade Conservative Party candidates like Captain Roy Farran and Andrew Fountaine.[[1035]](#footnote-1035)

The chief importance of Leese and the BPS lies in their maintenance into the post-1945 period of the most extreme current of Radical Right ideology in Britain. Leese and his followers undertook campaigns to rescue the obscure racist texts from which they drew ideological succour from oblivion.[[1036]](#footnote-1036) The Britons Publishing Society continued to issue new editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* until the group fizzled out in the late seventies.[[1037]](#footnote-1037) While in the 1940s and early 1950s, their ideas merely provided fuel for a series of short-lived groupuscules, as seen in the next chapter, they went on to act as a significant influence on a new generation of Radical Right activists and a host of new political groups.

# **From ‘Greater Britain’ to ‘Europe-A-Nation’**

In 1943, a year earlier than Leese, Mosley was released from prison on health grounds but refrained from returning to politics immediately. His followers showed no such restraint. Ex-BUF members Jeffrey Hamm and Victor Burgess, both of whom had been interned, managed to take over the British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women during the 1940s.[[1038]](#footnote-1038) The League has originally been founded in 1937 to campaign for the rights of ex-servicemen but under Hamm and Burgess it was converted into a Mosleyite front organisation. In 1946, Burgess also founded another group named the Union of British Freedom (UBF), which counted among its members veteran Mosleyites like Alexander Raven Thomson.[[1039]](#footnote-1039)

Alongside the League and the UBF, there were a range of Mosleyite groups including forty-seven ‘Mosley Book Clubs’, the Oxford Corporate Club, the Imperial Defence League and the Sons of St. George.[[1040]](#footnote-1040) In 1947, Mosley and his followers began the process of merging these groups into a new movement. With the release of a new book *The Alternative* in 1947 and circulation of the *Mosley Newsletter*, Mosley began his journey back to politics. This culminated with the official launch of the Union Movement in February 1948. Mosley now proclaimed that the future of Britain lay in a united Europe. This new creed, referred to by the slogan ‘Europe-A-Nation’, replaced his earlier vision of a ‘Greater Britain’.

Mosley’s European turn stemmed from his analysis of the failure of inter-war European fascism. According to Mosley, fascism had failed in the 1930s as a result of being overly and ‘narrowly’ nationalistic.[[1041]](#footnote-1041) This line of thinking, he claimed, built on his earlier ideas about forging peace in Europe via a union of fascist empires.[[1042]](#footnote-1042) As he and his recruits regularly repeated, Mosley had now passed ‘beyond Fascism and Democracy’.[[1043]](#footnote-1043) While certainly well ‘beyond’ democracy, it was unclear just how far ‘beyond’ fascism Mosley had really gone. Before even getting to the realm of ideas, UM members continued to use the straight-arm salute and penned new pro-European lyrics to the tune of the Nazi anthem, the Horst-Wessel-Lied.[[1044]](#footnote-1044)

Mosley was very careful to differentiate his ‘new’ internationalism or ‘European kinship’ as he dubbed it, from the ‘old internationalism’.[[1045]](#footnote-1045) By internationalism, he wrote, he expressly did not mean ‘[t]he argument that every savage was in every way the brother and equal of the European’.[[1046]](#footnote-1046) This was an imperialist and, moreover, white supremacist form of internationalism. ‘[T]he Idea of Kinship’ was expanded to include not only Britons’ ‘kith and kin’ in Africa but also the residents of Europe and even the United States.[[1047]](#footnote-1047)

Mosley’s new European ‘faith’, as he referred to it, was also a response to the international political changes after 1945. He blamed what he regarded as the ruination of Britain and the Empire on the decision to fight Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Britain had missed a great opportunity and chosen, in his words, ‘European Destruction’ over ‘Empire Construction’.[[1048]](#footnote-1048) Mosley contended that the opportunity for ‘Empire Construction’ was still there for the taking in the form of Britain’s African colonies. He looked to the uniting of Europe and pooling of European colonies in Africa as the solution to the range of problems facing both Britain and Europe in the late 1940s. For Mosley, ‘Africa [was] the key to all’.[[1049]](#footnote-1049) The imperial ‘re-development’ of Africa formed the utopian core of Mosley’s post-war political vision.

His plans for a ‘return’ to Africa required a new authoritarian ‘Creative State’ in order to facilitate the adventuring of a new generation of European imperial pioneers.[[1050]](#footnote-1050) Mosley even referred to the state itself as a ‘great Pioneer’ or occasionally as the ‘Pioneer State’.[[1051]](#footnote-1051) He envisioned his new European state along authoritarian lines; it would prize the ‘Imperial Socialism of the Leadership principle’ above democracy and bureaucracy.[[1052]](#footnote-1052) Reminiscent of the proposals he made in *The Greater Britain*, Mosley called for the formation of a united European ‘Executive Government’ to govern ‘Euro-Africa’.[[1053]](#footnote-1053) It is likely that this would likely have been immensely tyrannical, composed of small group of ministers under the ‘Leader’ (Mosley) and wielding near absolute power. Though Mosley and his recruits enthusiastically promoted ‘industrial democracy’, there is no reason to suspect that this would have differed much from the authoritarian syndicalism of Fascist Italy which served as the inspiration for the BUF’s ideas about ‘Corporate State’.[[1054]](#footnote-1054) Macklin has characterised Mosley’s ideas, which Mosley himself idiosyncratically referred to as ‘European Socialism’, as ‘no more than a geographically enlarged National Socialism’.[[1055]](#footnote-1055)

# **European ‘Empire Builders’**

Reminiscent of the imperialist rhetoric of the BUF, Mosley and his recruits wrote and spoke of his African plans in terms of ‘new Men’ and imperial pioneers, invoking the names of Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Milner, Cecil Rhodes, Robert Clive, David Livingstone and so on.[[1056]](#footnote-1056) In *The Alternative*, Mosley offered his own ‘historical’ account of British decline in which the victories of heroic imperial pioneers in the nineteenth century were subsequently squandered over the following decades by a greedy financial elite.[[1057]](#footnote-1057) While antisemitism continually reared its head in UM propaganda and Macklin has documented Mosley’s forays into Holocaust denial, direct references to Jews or Jewish conspiracy were rare.[[1058]](#footnote-1058) UM activists blamed ‘International Finance’ and its ‘Socialist Lackeys’ for the decline of the British Empire and identified them as the chief obstacle to the achievement of ‘Euro-Africa’.[[1059]](#footnote-1059) In order to thwart the designs of ‘International Finance’ and develop Africa, Mosleyites believed, a new kind of state and new generation of European imperial pioneers were needed.

This ‘Creative State’ was to be a government of ‘men of action’ and the whole endeavour would require ‘the spirit of our early pioneers’.[[1060]](#footnote-1060) For UM activists, the salvation of war-torn Europe lay in the return of imperial pioneers to Africa. Britons would lead the new ‘movement of pioneers’ from ‘the bomb-battered cities of Europe’ to Africa and a ‘greater Empire of the future’.[[1061]](#footnote-1061) Robert Row, editor of the UM’s newspaper *Union* from 1955, characterised the UM as ‘essentially a revolt against Tory lethargy’ in ‘the spirit of the great sea-captains, the pioneer-builders of our Colonies’.[[1062]](#footnote-1062) Raven Thomson called on a new European ‘pioneering generation’ to go forth and ‘conquer’ Africa.[[1063]](#footnote-1063) He recast the continent of Europe as a ‘pioneering nation’.[[1064]](#footnote-1064)

The return to Africa was also promoted as a panacea to the problems of young British men unfulfilled with the supposedly stagnant quality of life under the new welfare state. Discussing the problem of juvenile delinquency, Victor Burgess suggested that the real problem was that British youth had no outlet for their ‘natural spirit of adventure’.[[1065]](#footnote-1065) In *Union*, juvenile delinquency was described as a ‘revolt’ against the decadent conditions of the post-war world.[[1066]](#footnote-1066) In the grand plans of its supporters, a UM administration with a greater sense of imperial ‘spirit’ would put these ‘young boys’, who might otherwise drift into a life of crime, to work in the ‘pioneering enterprise in Africa’.[[1067]](#footnote-1067) Raven Thomson likened ‘Clive of India’ to the modern juvenile delinquent and speculated that he ‘would certainly have ended up in Borstal had he lived today’.[[1068]](#footnote-1068) He added, however, that ‘We do not apologise. We want more Clives’. Victor Burgess explained that a future UM government would instruct the young men of Britain that they were ‘the Empire Builders of today’ following in the boisterous footsteps of ‘Drake, Hawkins, Raleigh [and] Frobisher’.[[1069]](#footnote-1069) They should, he wrote, be directed to Africa and ‘adventure’.

When it came to women, however, pieces in UM publications imagined their contribution in terms of homemaking, childrearing and the domestic sphere rather than imperial adventuring. UM activists, both male and female, continued to politicise domesticity as they had done in the BUF. Despite the vocal and visible presence of women activists in the BUF, from early on in the post-war Mosleyite revival, there were signs of a lack of female interest and involvement in the new nascent movement. An advertisement in an April 1947 issue of the British League of Ex-Servicemen’s *British League Review* ‘urgently’ appealed for ‘Women speakers’.[[1070]](#footnote-1070) In particular, the League wanted female volunteers to speak or write on ‘women’s issues’, to tell stories of the privations of everyday domestic life.

Over a year later, writing in the newspaper of the recently founded UM, Jeffrey Hamm issued another plea complaining of the lack of women among the UM’s membership. Again, women were said to have a ‘special right to be heard on such questions as housing, wages and prices, education, etc.’[[1071]](#footnote-1071) When it came to their involvement in Euro-African development, however, Hamm envisioned their participation in the form of a women’s page in their newspaper ‘reserved for discussion of the Union Movement’s plans for developing the vast resources of our African Empire, in order to fill the shops with the necessities of life and free the house-wife from the hours-long drudgery of the queue.’[[1072]](#footnote-1072) Despite its rather condescending conception of the role of women, the UM had its own short-lived Women’s Section, founded in 1949.[[1073]](#footnote-1073) Like the BUF, it also claimed to stand for equal pay for equal work and the right of women to pursue careers.[[1074]](#footnote-1074) Beyond these efforts to include women members and making progressive-sounding promises, leading UM activists did not conceive of much of an activist role for women beyond the home and domestic issues. If UM men were the potential pioneers of a new ‘Greater Empire’ then women were to be the canvassers who ‘sold’ ‘Euro-Africa’ to the housewives of Britain, relating the imperial to the everyday.

# **Africa: The Estate of the European**

Mosley’s interest in the potential European economic exploitation of African resources was far from unusual in the context of British politics during the late 1940s. Macklin detected the influence of Nazi intellectuals and the German Colonial Office and argued that ‘Europe A Nation’ represented the continuation of a continental fascist tradition.[[1075]](#footnote-1075) However, following the Second World War, ideas of European integration and imperial consolidation were not the sole preserve of fascists. There are marked similarities between Mosley’s ideas and that of the post-war Labour government. Between 1945 and 1949, Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary in the first post-war Labour government, pursued the idea of founding a ‘Third World Power’ independent of the USA and the USSR.[[1076]](#footnote-1076) This was to consist of a united Europe under Anglo-French leadership, economically sustained by the resources of pooled European colonies in Africa.

In the end, due to an overall lack of clarity about the proposals as well as inter-departmental disagreements over practical details, Bevin’s ‘Euro-African’ dreams came to nothing.[[1077]](#footnote-1077) Poor relations with France, a lack of government initiative and commitment, and the fact of Britain’s economic reliance on America all conspired against the project.[[1078]](#footnote-1078) The signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 underscored the reality that the future of British foreign policy lay in alliance with and dependence on the US, and not in European neo-colonialism.[[1079]](#footnote-1079) After this, the British government’s interest and enthusiasm for ‘Euro-African’ ideas simply fizzled out.[[1080]](#footnote-1080)

As well as the diplomatic obstacles to European cooperation in Africa, there were a number of practical concerns that prevented the European harnessing of African natural resources. The failure of the Labour’s government ‘groundnut scheme’ aptly illustrates the problem. Launched in February 1947, the Labour government hoped to cultivate just over three million acres of land stretching across Tanganyika, Kenya and Northern Rhodesia for the growing of groundnuts. [[1081]](#footnote-1081) By doing so, they hoped to address the post-war economic crisis and acute shortages in Britain of vegetable oils and fats.[[1082]](#footnote-1082) The project proved a colossally expensive failure and underlined that Britain was nowhere near well enough equipped, neither in terms of experience nor technology, for the large-scale economic exploitation of Africa.[[1083]](#footnote-1083) For the UM’s Robert Row, however, the failure of the groundnut scheme was primarily down to Labour’s lack of imperial ‘spirit’, though it seems highly unlikely that a UM government would have fared any better.[[1084]](#footnote-1084) In his plans for ‘Euro-Africa’, Mosley added delusions of imperial grandeur to what had already proven to be overly-ambitious, impractical and unworkable policies.

While the UM’s plans resembled some of Labour’s ideas about colonial economic development, when it came to social and political reforms, they stood in complete contrast. Labour’s colonial policy was guided by the ideas of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, one of the founders of which was Arthur Creech Jones, Colonial Secretary between 1946 and 1950.[[1085]](#footnote-1085) The Fabians believed in the retention of as much of the Empire as possible and the modernisation of Britain’s colonies. Though they prioritised economic development, as they understood it, modernisation also entailed the preparation of Africans for eventual self-government. It was hoped that Africans would thus be gradually socialised into British forms of political and societal organisation. This would then neutralise the threat of African nationalism and communism as well as maintain the loyalty of eventually-independent nations within a Commonwealth framework.

Mosley was unequivocal in his rejection of the idea that Britain should act as a ‘trustee’ to African wards advancing towards self-government. Britain had, he wrote in *The Alternative*, no ‘“sacred trust” to keep jungles fit for negroes to live in’.[[1086]](#footnote-1086) Instead, he advocated ‘a new and very different principle of Trusteeship in Africa’.[[1087]](#footnote-1087) Mosley wanted ‘Trusteeship’ but ‘on behalf of White civilisation’ in which ‘rich lands’ would be developed ‘for Europeans’.[[1088]](#footnote-1088) Africans were not totally excluded from his Euro-African plans. They were to be directed by whites under ‘a strong, but beneficent, and necessarily paternal Government’.[[1089]](#footnote-1089) Africans were, in fact, to have a separate special place in Mosley’s plans. Like Chesterton and Leese, Mosley supported apartheid, but he also advocated for its extension throughout the *whole* of Africa.[[1090]](#footnote-1090)

To this end, Mosley began collaborating with a South African politician and former Nazi sympathiser by the name of Oswald Pirow. Born in 1890, Pirow was of mixed German and Afrikaner heritage.[[1091]](#footnote-1091) Educated in South Africa and Germany, he had served as Minister of Defence in the Hertzog coalition government from 1933 and resigned when South Africa joined Britain in declaring war against Germany in 1939. Reportedly a friend of Hitler’s, Pirow had acted as a ‘quasi-official envoy’ for Chamberlain’s appeasement policy during the late thirties.[[1092]](#footnote-1092) In 1942, he founded his own political movement, the New Order Group, an anti-communist, white supremacist, and authoritarian organisation of National Socialist ‘intellectuals’.[[1093]](#footnote-1093)

The two had begun a ‘spasmodic correspondence’ after Pirow wrote to Mosley in 1947. In his letter, Pirow praised *The Alternative*, which he had read after receiving a copy from a former BUF member in Pretoria.[[1094]](#footnote-1094) Like Mosley, Pirow’s ideas rested on plans for a large-scale transformation of Africa. He harboured ambitions to become the leader of the Europeans in Africa and looked forward to a continent-wide extension of racial segregation.[[1095]](#footnote-1095) Together with Pirow, Mosley formulated a series of proposals to transform Africa in which racial segregation was to play a central part. Under their system of Africa-wide apartheid, Europeans would get southern Africa while Africans would be allocated the Western Equatorial belt and tribal reservations such as Zululand and Basutoland.[[1096]](#footnote-1096) There was also to be an ‘Islamic zone’ in northern Africa.[[1097]](#footnote-1097)

Mosley and Pirow made superficial attempts to present their plans as the fairest solution to the ‘colour question’ but their proposals represented nothing more than a continuation and extension of white supremacy. In the ‘Black areas’, as Pirow elaborated at a press conference during a visit to Britain in April 1948, ‘white men would have no rights, except as administrators aiding the negro in the attainment of civilisation and eventual self-government’.[[1098]](#footnote-1098) In ‘White areas’, ‘negroes would have no civil rights, except as transitory unskilled workers’. This was held to be a ‘just’ solution to the ‘colour problem’, promising economic development for the ‘negroes’ and access to vast resources for the European.[[1099]](#footnote-1099) Pirow admitted that the ‘old colonialism’ was dead but his and Mosley’s proposals were clearly dedicated preserving its white supremacist essentials.[[1100]](#footnote-1100) In their outlines of ‘Africa, the Empire of Europe’, Europeans ruled while Africans were economically exploited, driven from their land, and deprived of their civil rights. In addition, the precise details about the size of the ‘White Areas’ were also unclear given that Mosley declared that ‘all of Africa where the white man can live belongs to the European’.[[1101]](#footnote-1101)

The UM fostered links with Pirow’s New Order Group with a view to establishing an anti-communist league with Mosley as its president in London and with an American wing led, they hoped, by Charles Lindbergh or some of a similar standing. While this never materialised, Pirow visited Britain in April 1948. Plans for Mosley to visit Pirow in South Africa later on ran into difficulties and the visit never took place.[[1102]](#footnote-1102) Mosley and Pirow remained in contact until the latter’s death in 1959.[[1103]](#footnote-1103) As the next chapter discusses, by this time, Mosley’s circle had widened to include far more prominent South African politicians than fascist fellow-travellers like Pirow.

Irrespective of Mosley’s rather fruitless attempts at collaboration with Pirow, like other sections of the Radical Right, UM members were fascinated with South Africa. In the first instance, they were keen supporters of apartheid. As one UM member wrote in *Union*, apartheid was ‘the only way by which the white man can permanently retain his place in Africa’.[[1104]](#footnote-1104) The only thing the UM criticised about apartheid was what they regarded as its limited nature.[[1105]](#footnote-1105) Frederick Hamer wrote in *Union* that apartheid constituted merely the ‘beginning’; it was but the prelude to the much hoped-for extension of racial segregation throughout Africa.[[1106]](#footnote-1106)

Mosley and his UM recruits were not unduly concerned with the republicanism of Afrikaner nationalism. Rather naively, one activist hoped that while Malan was a nationalist and a republican, he would cooperate in the UM’s goal of re-energising the British Empire and uniting Europe.[[1107]](#footnote-1107) Unlike the ‘prim, political spinisters’, the UM did not fear the idea ‘of Dr. Malan bringing realism into the South African racial scene by formally incorporating the high commission territories’.[[1108]](#footnote-1108) If it came to a choice between the British liberalism and Afrikaner nationalism, they were unequivocally in favour of the latter. Mosley believed that his Radical Right Europeanist internationalism was in fact the key to resolving any tensions between Britons and Afrikaners. By realising their common European heritage, he hoped that they would reunite in the ‘heroic task’ of building ‘the new Euro-Africa’.[[1109]](#footnote-1109)

South Africa was idolised in the UM press. Contributors to *Union* portrayed the country as the virile polar opposite to metropolitan liberalism:

The winds moan down from the Drakensbergen and over the Kalahari, but never do they carry even a whisper of that most delicately whisperable word in the English language – liberalism.[[1110]](#footnote-1110)

In contrast, the ‘old girl[s] of the Tory and Labour benches’ were accused of surrendering to ‘the African’.[[1111]](#footnote-1111) Robert Row wrote that rather than solving the problems of the continent, Britain’s concessionary approach to colonial policy had merely exacerbated them. The apartheid state, he maintained, had so far prevented anything like the Mau Mau Uprising, which had recently prompted the declaration of a state of emergency in Kenya. The Mau Mau Uprising was a war, lasting from 1952 to around 1960, between the British colonial authorities and anti-colonial insurgents known as ‘Mau Mau’ by the white settler community. The conflict was fuelled by anger over historic injustices concerning access to and distribution of land among a section of Kenya’s largest and most politically active tribe, the Kikuyu.[[1112]](#footnote-1112) The majority of the violence took place between rival factions of the Kikuyu community.[[1113]](#footnote-1113) On the one side, those who opposed white minority rule and, on the other, those who remained loyal to the colonial regime; Britain pursued a deliberate policy of exacerbating these divisions.[[1114]](#footnote-1114) In Row’s view, however, the war was caused precisely because the British Empire had strayed from the kind of white supremacy Malan promoted. The ‘old women of Westminster’ and their ‘liberal’ colonial policy were apparently to blame.[[1115]](#footnote-1115) In reality, there was nothing ‘liberal’ about the British repression of the Kenyan rebels. In the period of the most intense fighting, between 1952 and 1956, Kenya became ‘a police state in the very fullest sense of that term’.[[1116]](#footnote-1116) The colonial government outlawed African political organisations and imprisoned political activists and, over the period of the emergency, hung 1,090 Kikuyu.[[1117]](#footnote-1117) In addition, tens of thousands of Africans (and only 32 European settlers) were killed in the rebellion and 70,000 Kenyans were confined to detention camps, most without trial.[[1118]](#footnote-1118)

Despite the demonstrably illiberal way in which the British Empire of the 1950s was still capable of conducting itself, in UM publications Westminster politicians became synonymous with surrender to African nationalism. South Africa’s white inhabitants, on the other hand, were hailed as the virile descendants of ruggedly independent ‘stubborn Boer farmers’.[[1119]](#footnote-1119) With the rise of the National Party in 1948, went one *Union* editorial, ‘[t]he destiny of South Africa is back in the hands of those who won it after fantastic battle against drought, flood, pestilence, wild beasts and murdering savages’.[[1120]](#footnote-1120) The example of these ‘Boer farmers’ and their quest to build a ‘great white domain’ stood as an inspiring example for the united European re-colonisers of Africa.[[1121]](#footnote-1121) Raven Thomson looked forward to the day when new UM-inspired British pioneers, ‘following the vision of Rhodes from the Cape to Cairo’, would join up ‘with the Voortrekkers in the settlement and Union of a New Africa’.[[1122]](#footnote-1122)

Their support for white supremacists in southern Africa did not go unheeded and reports of UM meetings noted the presence in the audience of South African and Southern Rhodesian supporters.[[1123]](#footnote-1123) Interaction between UM members and South Africans was enthusiastically reported in the newspapers. In 1953, when a South African law student named P. J. Botbyl addressed a UM discussion group in East London, *Union* gleefully reported how close his views were to UM policy.[[1124]](#footnote-1124) *Union* took it as a ‘tribute’ to ‘the realism and soundness of Union Movement policy that it can stand up to comparison with the views of “the man on the spot”’.[[1125]](#footnote-1125)

Despite, or perhaps because of, Mosley’s grandiose vision, the UM failed to achieve much support beyond the circle of Mosleyite loyalists hardened into fanatics by the experience of internment. In 1950, MI5 estimated that the UM had around 1,200 active members with 2,000 subscribers but later estimates were more conservative, putting the membership at no more than 1,000.[[1126]](#footnote-1126) In May 1949, UM candidates had fared so dismally in their attempt to contest several seats in the London Municipal elections that Mosley decided that the UM would refrain from fielding any candidates in the 1950 general election.[[1127]](#footnote-1127) Indeed, he seemed to have lost interest in the UM and spent most of his time abroad, posing as an intellectual leading light of the neo-fascist European right. In 1951, he moved to Ireland for tax reasons and, in 1953, moved again to France.[[1128]](#footnote-1128)

The group relied on the energies of a few enthusiastic activists like L. A. Flockhart, Jeffrey Hamm and *Union*’s editor Raven Thomson.[[1129]](#footnote-1129) Their *Union* newspaper was in desperate need of funds and its continued appearance was thought to be almost entirely down to Raven Thomson.[[1130]](#footnote-1130) Elsewhere, the security services estimated that the paper’s print order was for around 4,000 copies, many of which were complementary copies to be sent to sympathisers in other countries.[[1131]](#footnote-1131) In 1951, MI5 were doubtful that the UM was even still a security concern.[[1132]](#footnote-1132)

In addition to his failure to attract new supporters, Mosley’s European turn left some veteran members disillusioned. Those who were used to hearing ‘Britain First’ were not so receptive to ‘Europe-a-Nation’ even if the core of Mosley’s ideology – authoritarianism and British-led Empire development – had barely altered. In his *Memoir of a Fascist Childhood*, Trevor Grundy recorded his father’s disappointment after returning from Mosley’s first political appearance since before the war. Grundy’s father complained that ‘[Mosley] virtually condemned Fascism and said we’d gone beyond it. Beyond Fascism, beyond democracy. I’d say beyond comprehension…’[[1133]](#footnote-1133) The security services also noted the grassroots’ ‘dissatisfaction’ with Mosley’s ‘new line’ in January 1949.[[1134]](#footnote-1134) At the time still working at *Truth*, Chesterton was equally baffled by Mosley’s political revival. He mockingly summed up Mosley’s European ‘turn’ as ‘Federal Union plus Sir Oswald!’[[1135]](#footnote-1135)

Unable to attract new supporters and with new slogans discouraging old members, Mosley also faced anti-fascist opposition. The combined but uncoordinated efforts of a broad coalition of anti-fascists effectively undermined the UM’s ability to hold public meetings or otherwise garner support.[[1136]](#footnote-1136) The activism of groups like AJEX (Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen) and its offshoot the 43 Group severely curtailed ‘the operational capacity of various pro-Mosley bodies’, denying fascists the use of public space and mobilising local public opinion against them.[[1137]](#footnote-1137) Macklin has even suggested that Mosley’s turn to international neo-fascist politics was driven by the utter failure of his political comeback on the streets of Britain.[[1138]](#footnote-1138) However, as the next chapter will show the issue of immigration provided the UM with the means for an attempt at a re-revival. ‘Coloured immigration’ offered the UM, and the Radical Right more broadly, a means of linking colonial issues to the realities of everyday life in Britain. From the late 1950s, Radical Right activists took to the streets stirring up sometimes fatal racial violence against newly-arrived black Britons.

# **Conclusion**

The years between 1943 and 1953 saw the attempted revival of the British Radical Right. Imperial obsessions remained a central part of Radical Right discourse. For Radical Right activists, the Empire continued to be both at risk of imminent ruination and, simultaneously, the source of Britain’s salvation. ‘International Jewish finance’ still lurked behind all threats to the Empire, its American headquarters now identified. In repelling these threats and reviving Britain, Chesterton, Leese and Mosley were busy drawing up plans for imperial regeneration. From their perspective, Britain lay shattered, the result of a needless war they had opposed and tried to avert. Britain’s salvation lay, as always, in the Empire, in the harnessing of its economic resources, its ‘race-consciousness’ and its masculine ‘spirit’.

The refocusing of the attentions of British colonial policymakers on Africa and the rise of South African apartheid acted as important influences on the British Radical Right during this period. For a variety of reasons, far more than the other remaining colonies of the British Empire, Africa captured the imaginations of Chesterton, Leese and Mosley. South Africa in particular, then ruled by an Afrikaner nationalist regime with an unfavourable stance towards the British Empire, appeared to the activists of the British Radical Right as the embodiment of the true ‘spirit’ of British imperial rule. For them, white settler communities embodied everything that Britain was not, composed of hardy imperial pioneers rather than progressive politicians and unashamedly intolerant and illiberal in their dealings with native Africans.

Africa continued to exert a powerful hold on the imaginations of these activists and ideologues into the latter part of the 1950s and into the 1960s. As Chapter 5 details, the pace of both decolonisation and Commonwealth immigration increased from the mid-to-late 1950s. As African nationalists struggled against stubborn white settler regimes, the Radical Right continued to defend their ‘kith and kin’. As growing numbers of Commonwealth immigrants arrived in Britain, the Radical Right began to identify their experiences in opposing immigration with those of white settlers resisting decolonisation. Metropole and colony collided as the followers of Chesterton, Leese and Mosley imagined themselves as white settlers struggling against the equivalent of the ‘Mau Mau’ on the streets of Britain. The seeds of what was to come, especially in regard to their obsession with ‘white’ Africa, had been planted between 1943 and 1953 as various Radical Right activists regrouped, revised, or just re-stated their ideas.

# 5 ‘In Darkest Britain’: Immigration, decolonisation, and imperial disillusionment on the British Radical Right, 1954-1968

# **Introduction**

On 24 April 1968, *The Times* reported on the Radical Right reaction to a speech made a few days earlier by Enoch Powell, Conservative MP and Shadow Defence Secretary, before a meeting at the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham. A number of leading Radical Right activists welcomed Powell’s racist tirade against Commonwealth immigration, which became known as the ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. The article quoted A. K. Chesterton, by this time chairman of a new group, the National Front (NF), who remarked, ‘What Mr. Powell has said does not vary at all from our views’.[[1139]](#footnote-1139) The article also quoted Oswald Mosley, from his home in France. He claimed that Powell was ‘saying nine years later what I have always said’. Mosley, Chesterton and their respective followers had indeed been campaigning against immigration since the early 1950s. They saw it as the final insult, racial pollution at home to crown the surrender of imperial rule abroad.

Powell’s ideological development from fervent imperialist to xenophobic nationalist provides an interesting parallel to developments on the Radical Right between 1954 and 1968. Postcolonial analyses of Powell’s politics have shown that the nativist racism of the ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech represented Powell’s frustration at the end of the British Empire and his efforts to move beyond it.[[1140]](#footnote-1140) Before the early 1960s, Powell was an ardent believer in Britain’s imperial ‘mission’ and even harboured ambitions of someday becoming Viceroy of India. His time serving as an officer in the Indian Army between 1943 and 1946 was central to his political development.[[1141]](#footnote-1141) Powell was traumatised by the eventual declaration of Indian independence.[[1142]](#footnote-1142) The loss of India and, later on, the impact of the Suez Crisis shook his imperialist faith to its core.

From the early 1960s in his public speeches and articles, Powell began to denounce the Empire as a ‘myth’ detrimental to Britain’s future.[[1143]](#footnote-1143) He rejected the Empire and looked into deeper into the national past in search of ‘Britain’s historical sense of self’.[[1144]](#footnote-1144) Powell believed he had found the ‘real’ Britain in pastoral visions of a pre-imperial, white England of oak trees and village churches.[[1145]](#footnote-1145) Nevertheless, the rhetoric he employed in the ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech teemed with unresolved trauma about the loss of Empire. The speech represented the culmination of Powell’s rejection of the Empire. If Britain could no longer wield imperial power, Powell saw no reason why it had any obligation to take in its former imperial subjects who had, he argued, no connection to the ‘real’, ancient Britain.[[1146]](#footnote-1146) Powell articulated a narrative of victimhood. In his portrayal, Britain was no longer an Empire but a vulnerable nation in danger of being overrun. In painting this dystopian picture, Powell raised the spectre of the colonial order turned upside down; as he warned ‘In this country in fifteen or twenty years’ time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.’ [[1147]](#footnote-1147)

Drawing on studies of the imperial influences on Powell’s thinking, this chapter analyses the ways in which those on the Radical Right experienced a similar disillusionment with Empire in the context of decolonisation and Commonwealth immigration. It surveys the Union Movement, the League of Empire Loyalists, and a collection of new groups including the White Defence League, the National Labour Party, the British National Party and the Greater Britain Movement. It begins with a discussion of how Radical Right activists refracted the issue of Commonwealth immigration through the lens of colonial racial strife. The groups mentioned above sought to illustrate the consequences of immigration using a range of metaphorical references and allusions to what was going on in British and other European colonies in Africa. In doing so, as will be shown, they wrote and spoke of the ‘coloured’ or ‘black invasion’ and the formation of immigrant ‘colonies’ throughout Britain. Furthermore, they reimagined the white residents of places like Brixton, Nottingham and Notting Hill as a ‘species of white settler’.[[1148]](#footnote-1148)

Where Powell retreated into reveries of a prelapsarian pastoral Britain, this chapter demonstrates how Radical Right activists continued to think and envision solutions in colonial, or rather neo-colonial, terms. At the same time, they rejected the Commonwealth remnants of Empire and declared that Britain’s interests really lay with white settlers opposed to the colonial policy of the British government. In the white supremacist separatism of South Africa and Rhodesia, the Radical Right also saw a picture of Britain’s future at the head of an alternative white alliance that would replace the ‘coloured’ Commonwealth. Like Powell, they too appropriated the injury of the colonised, portraying Britain as the ultimate victim of Empire. Unlike Powell, in doing so they used antisemitic conspiracy, imagining Britain as a besieged white settler colony bullied by Jewish-controlled international institutions and soon to be overpowered waves of ‘coloured’ immigrants imported by Jewish financiers.

As with other aspects of the Radical Right’s relationship with British imperialism, its activists’ response to imperial decline has received little in the way of scholarly treatment.[[1149]](#footnote-1149) One of very few articles to deal with their response, written by Joe Mulhall, draws on ‘minimal impact’ theory, the idea that the birth, life and death of the British Empire had a little effect on Britain itself. ‘Minimal impact’ theorists, such as the historian Bernard Porter, have argued that ‘the mass of people… cared very little’ about the Empire’s end.[[1150]](#footnote-1150) Arguing along the same lines, Mulhall argues that decolonisation was ‘rarely’ a pressing issue for most of the Radical Right and that their response to it was ‘muted’.[[1151]](#footnote-1151) For Mulhall, a number of other issues, immigration foremost among them, dominated the Radical Right’s political agenda instead. He emphasises his point by comparing the British reaction to decolonisation with the case of France and the Algerian crisis.[[1152]](#footnote-1152)

The most striking implication of Mulhall’s article is the implicit argument that opposition to immigration from the ‘new’ Commonwealth during 1950s and 1960s had little or nothing to do with the Empire or imperial decline. In the first place, the very fact that thousands of West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians settled in Britain during this period had everything to do with the ties of Empire. As Kobena Mercer put it, ‘*we are here because you were there*’.[[1153]](#footnote-1153) As a number of historians have noted, during this time the issues of immigration and decolonisation were intimately linked. As Bill Schwarz has argued, it is impossible to separate post-war Commonwealth immigration from decolonisation.[[1154]](#footnote-1154) Immigration to Britain from current and former colonies led to the intense ‘intertwining of decolonization and metropolitan life’ during the 1950s and 1960s.[[1155]](#footnote-1155) Mulhall’s article illustrates the poverty of the ‘minimal impact’ thesis as a tool of analysis. This chapter takes a different approach. It concurs with a number of other historians and cultural critics who argue that the end of the Empire had profound, complex and often contradictory effects on the British metropole.[[1156]](#footnote-1156) In terms of the Radical Right, this approach involves looking not only at their regular discussions of colonial current affairs but focusing on how imperialism permeated their worldview more widely even at the Empire’s end.

Applying their insights yields a far richer analysis, revealing a new way of looking at the history of Britain’s Radical Right during the 1950s and 1960s. By remaining attentive to decolonisation’s influence on the metropole, the Radical Right appear as an extreme voice in a debate over race, racism and ‘race relations’ that raged in Britain during this period. A debate, moreover, that was transnational in its dimensions, encompassing postcolonial (or perhaps, more accurately, ‘late’ colonial) Britain as well as decolonising southern Africa and the United States as well.[[1157]](#footnote-1157) The Radical Right organisations discussed in this chapter were among some of the earliest political groups to campaign for the restriction and repatriation of Commonwealth immigrants.[[1158]](#footnote-1158) Along with campaigning backbench MPs such as Cyril Osborne, their activism formed part of a chorus of xenophobia.

Radical Right activists constructed Commonwealth immigration as a threat to the metropole, drawing on the tropes and using the language of colonial warfare, employing what Wendy Webster has dubbed ‘siege narratives’.[[1159]](#footnote-1159) They also framed their opposition to immigration in the language of white settler racism years before the Conservative Monday Club or the other supporters of Rhodesia’s Ian Smith.[[1160]](#footnote-1160) In doing so, they made regular reference to events and locations throughout the decolonising world, mobilising their own version of what Kennetta Hammond Perry has called a ‘transnational topography of race’ in reference to the later international symbolic use of Little Rock.[[1161]](#footnote-1161) Its reference points included South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Kenya, and America’s urban ghettoes and ‘Deep South’ a decade or so before these places entered ‘the imaginative racial geographies’ of other white Britons.[[1162]](#footnote-1162) All this and more disappears when looking through the clouded lens of the ‘minimal impact’ thesis.

Where historians of the Radical Right have downplayed the significance of the decolonisation to the Radical Right, historians of race and Empire have left the Radical Right out of their studies altogether. They have done so despite the Radical Right’s unsettling proximity to the mainstream when it came to their anti-immigrant rhetoric. Its activists were also never far from the centre of current events, for instance, in the visible role they played in provoking and exacerbating racist violence in the infamous riots of 1958.[[1163]](#footnote-1163) In addition to this, Saul Dubow recently highlighted the UM’s counter-demonstrations against the British anti-apartheid boycotts of the 1960s as part of the largely untold history of what he calls the ‘*pro*-apartheid’ movement.[[1164]](#footnote-1164)

However, in some ways this neglect is understandable. Historians of race and Empire have had to contend with the powerful and enduring myth of Britain as a historically tolerant and progressive society except for an extremist minority. In 1987, Paul Gilroy warned against such simplistic national narratives, arguing that racism did not begin and end with groups like the National Front.[[1165]](#footnote-1165) His influential approach to the study of the afterlife of imperial racism in Britain entailed a renewed focus on everyday manifestations of racism and traces of latent imperialism.[[1166]](#footnote-1166) As a result, historians and cultural theorists examining the postcolonial hangover of imperial racism have been keen to avoid ‘othering’ British racism as the pastime of an extremist minority.[[1167]](#footnote-1167) While attempting to avoid ‘othering’ British racism, this chapter seeks neither to overinflate nor to disown the Radical Right. It aims to analyse the ways in which the Radical Right of the 1950s and 1960s drew heavily on the cultural memory of imperialism as they grew increasingly disillusioned with the ailing Empire and opposed Commonwealth immigration.

# **‘Keep Brixton White’**

Due to their focus on the colonial situation overseas, from the outset Radical Right activists approached Commonwealth immigration chiefly as a *colonial* issue. In the publications of the Union Movement, League of Empire Loyalists and a series of new groups, Radical Right activists discussed immigration in the militaristic vocabulary of inverted imperialism. Immigration thus became invasion, occupation and reverse colonisation. For them, areas where immigrants settled became ‘Harlems’, ‘Africas’ and ‘colonies’. In constructing immigration in these terms, Radical Right activists also drew on contemporary events and issues like the Mau Mau Emergency, South African apartheid, and the ‘White Australia’ policy.

The Union Movement was one of the first post-war British Radical Right groups to begin actively campaigning against immigration, incorporating the issue into their electioneering efforts. To begin with, the initiative came from below.[[1168]](#footnote-1168) A few articles complaining about ‘coloured men’ sponging off the welfare state and ‘negroes dancing with white girls’ appeared in *Union* in 1950 and 1951.[[1169]](#footnote-1169) Mostly, however, the focus was still on news from Africa and the necessity of uniting Europe. While Mosley remained preoccupied with ‘Europe-Africa’, he did issue a clarification of the UM’s line on the ‘Colour Question’ in February 1952 in a memorandum circulated to UM branches. While asserting that he was against ‘any offensive abuse of Negroes’, Mosely expressed resolute opposition to ‘the mixture of races’ brought on by immigration.[[1170]](#footnote-1170) The UM, Mosley went on, favoured the adoption of ‘[t]he policy of “apartheid”’ for Britain just as they supported one for South Africa. For Mosley, in the British context, ‘apartheid’ meant the racial separation of metropole and colony and the return of ‘Negroes’ back to Africa or the West Indies.

Later that same year, the UM’s London County Council election candidates in Brixton led the charge in actively campaigning against immigration. Under the slogan ‘Keep Brixton White’, UM activists campaigned ‘to preserve Brixton from becoming the “Harlem” of London’.[[1171]](#footnote-1171) Their candidates complained that ‘this invasion of Negroes’ had ‘turned a whole Brixton street into a “Little Africa”’.[[1172]](#footnote-1172) This kind of language sat unevenly with claims by countless UM activists and candidates that ‘the Union Movement had no racial hatred of the coloured people’.[[1173]](#footnote-1173) Their objection to immigration, as another of their candidates expressed, was that ‘coloured’ immigrants had left ‘their proper place, which was Africa’. That most of the immigrants to whose presence UM activists objected actually came from the West Indies was insignificant; for the Radical Right, Africa was more of a symbol than an actual continent.

The UM revived their ‘Keep Brixton White’ campaign three years later and broadened it out under the slogan ‘Keep Britain White’.[[1174]](#footnote-1174) As part of the campaign, they held open-air meetings in places like Brick Lane Market in Bethnal Green on the subject of ‘the “coloured invasion” of East London’.[[1175]](#footnote-1175) In their speeches, the UM’s candidates and activists continued to argue that they were not racist but essentially believed in the principle of ‘separate but equal’. Their constant refrain was that they planned to give immigrants a ‘fair deal’ once they were restored to their ‘proper places – either in Africa or the West Indies’. A ‘square deal’ for the West Indies became part of the UM’s broader plans for the union of Europe and the development of Africa.[[1176]](#footnote-1176) However, their rhetoric of colonial development appeared completely hollow next to their virulent racism and continual portrayal of immigrants as lascivious, drug-pushing semi-savages.

In their attempts to convey the consequences of immigration, UM activists often invoked the ‘Black Peril’. This colonial concern for white womanhood and a concomitant fear of black sexuality characterised anxieties about immigration beyond the publications of the Radical Right. Earlier debates over the presence in Britain of non-white colonial troops and African American GIs during the Second World War prefigured the gendered anxieties about immigration in the 1950s.[[1177]](#footnote-1177) As Elizabeth Buettner has argued anxieties about sexual liaisons and romantic relationships between black men and white women in Britain during the 1950s were fuelled by the paranoid racism of old colonial discourse.[[1178]](#footnote-1178)

UM activists’ discussions of Commonwealth immigration were laden with salacious rumours about black men and the vulnerability of white women. Keith Gibson wrote in *Union* that Brixton was becoming a place where ‘[y]oung girls scarcely dare to walk the streets alone at night’ because of lurking ‘coloured elements’.[[1179]](#footnote-1179) Alexander Raven Thomson accused Commonwealth immigrants of pimping ‘white girls’ and then living off their ‘immoral earnings’.[[1180]](#footnote-1180) Other scurrilous rumours circulated in the UM press included the tale of ‘a “white slave market” in Birmingham’ selling girls as a young as sixteen ‘as “wives” to coloured men’.[[1181]](#footnote-1181) In the fevered imaginations of Mosleyite racists, this black occupation of the bodies of white women was the intimate accompaniment to establishment of ‘negro colonies’ throughout a number of British cities.[[1182]](#footnote-1182)

When it came to their opposition to immigration, Britain’s colonies were a source of cautionary tales and inspiring examples for the UM. This could sometimes take the form of highly alarmist speculations, as in one article from the UM’s local newspaper *East London Blackshirt*. Published in the midst of the violence of the Mau Mau Emergency in Kenya, the article raised the alarming prospect of ‘British Communists… organising a Mau Mau organisation’ within Britain ‘among coloured people… doped with propaganda’.[[1183]](#footnote-1183) Elsewhere, UM activists pointed to South Africa and even beyond the Empire to the southern states of America as evidence that ‘intolerance and racial strife’ were the natural and inevitable consequences of close proximity between people of different races.[[1184]](#footnote-1184) As one 1954 article solemnly warned, ‘the British people are very closely akin to the whites of South Africa and of the Southern States of America, so that we cannot expect them to react in any other manner than their cousins overseas’.[[1185]](#footnote-1185) By this, they meant with racist violence and the imposition of ‘colour bars’.[[1186]](#footnote-1186)

Drawing inspiration from the Britain’s more ‘race-conscious’ Dominions, a number of writers in *Union* demanded that Britain claim ‘Dominion status’ along with ‘[o]ther white countries’ such as Australia, South Africa and Canada.[[1187]](#footnote-1187) ‘Britain,’ argued Gibson, ‘no less than Australia, must remain “white”’.[[1188]](#footnote-1188) The UM proposed a ‘White Britain’ policy as a metropolitan homage to the ‘White Australia’ policy.[[1189]](#footnote-1189) A similar policy for Britain, hoped the UM’s Alexander Raven Thomson, would guard against the transformation of Britain into a ‘convenient “cess-pool” for Commonwealth undesirables’.[[1190]](#footnote-1190)

In white settler racism, Mosley and his followers found a veneer of respectability with which to cloak their repugnant ideas. The cause of white settlers struggling against the tide of decolonisation provided Mosleyites with an emotive set of metaphors through which to discuss immigration but also with a means of distancing themselves from inter-war fascism and its unattractive associations with Nazi Germany. Support for South Africa was not a fringe position in the 1950s. Until the late 1950s, Britain supported South Africa on the international stage such as when its internal policies were criticised at meetings of the UN.[[1191]](#footnote-1191) Though, as discussed in the last chapter, a number of conflicting concerns underlay Britain’s stance towards South Africa, this nevertheless illustrates that at the time such support was not necessarily a signifier of political extremism. Mosley re-contextualised his ideas, claiming that they were no more fascist than those of the ruling politicians of South Africa or Australia. [[1192]](#footnote-1192) They substituted Mussolini for Malan and Wehrmacht for ‘White Australia’. In the meantime, however, their supporters and candidates continued to eulogise inter-war fascists, engage in antisemitism, and even brazenly re-adopt the ‘Blackshirt’ moniker in the BUF’s old East London haunts.[[1193]](#footnote-1193)

Opposition to immigration was yet to become a popular or populist issue. Beyond the Radical Right, it remained the preserve of backbench Conservative MPs. During the mid-1950s, the MP for Louth, Cyril Osborne, and a small group of Conservative MPs campaigned tirelessly in Parliament and in the press for the restriction of immigration on the grounds that Commonwealth immigrants brought crime, disease and housing shortages.[[1194]](#footnote-1194) While publicly denounced by the ruling Conservative government, there is evidence of private sympathy with their arguments among Cabinet members.[[1195]](#footnote-1195) The UM were no more successful outside Parliament than Osborne and his fellow racists were, at least initially, within it. Their anti-immigration campaigns did not result in electoral victories for UM candidates.[[1196]](#footnote-1196) Very occasionally, though, UM candidates achieved impressive results. In Moorfields in 1955, the UM’s Harry Jones won thirty-three per cent of the vote, beating the Conservative candidate and coming not far behind the Labour victor.[[1197]](#footnote-1197) However, such results were very much the exception rather than the rule.

# **Empire Loyalists and Immigration**

Unlike Mosley and his recruits, long accustomed to street politics, the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL) did not mount a campaign against immigration until the late 1950s. Using funds provided by his eccentric benefactor, R.K. Jeffrey, Chesterton founded the LEL in May 1954.[[1198]](#footnote-1198) He conceived of the LEL as a pressure group, working to sound the alarm against the Jewish financiers supposedly directing Britain’s imperial ‘scuttle’ and to influence public and party political opinion in a pro-Empire direction.[[1199]](#footnote-1199) Nicholas Hillman has compared the LEL’s membership with that of the inter-war group the British Fascists.[[1200]](#footnote-1200) Like the BF, the LEL was an elitist group. Retired soldiers and others with direct experience of Empire formed a significant element of its membership. To begin with, Chesterton’s new group busied itself with campaigning against British colonial policy and in favour of the cause of white settlers across Britain’s African colonies.

Apart from Chesterton, the LEL attracted several prominent members with colonial backgrounds. In the summer of 1956, Field Marshal William Edmund Ironside joined its National Council. Ironside’s distinguished military record featured service in the Anglo-Boer War, the First World War, the Russian Civil War and a number of years commanding the Meerut district in India.[[1201]](#footnote-1201) Another member of the LEL’s National Council was Sir H. Richmond Palmer, former Lieutenant Governor of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria (1925-1930), and Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Gambia (1930-1933) and Cyprus (1933-1939).[[1202]](#footnote-1202) A year later, Lieutenant-General Sir Balfour Hutchinson also joined the League’s General Council. Balfour Hutchinson had served in Mesopotamia in the Great War, then during the Palestine Rebellion between 1938 and 1939, and then in the Middle East, Sudan, Eritrea and India during the Second World War.[[1203]](#footnote-1203) In 1958, the LEL also added Major Richard Hilton to the ranks of its General Council.[[1204]](#footnote-1204) Hilton had reportedly ‘spent nearly fifteen years in India, for the most part in command of Indian troops’.[[1205]](#footnote-1205)

The other contingent of the LEL’s membership was drawn from the political fringes. The group was close to the Britons Publishing Society (BPS). Among the LEL’s founders and on its National Council were Captain Arthur Rogers, a ‘long-standing member of The Britons’; George Pile, an associate of Arnold Leese and an author whose books on race were sold by The Britons; Lieutenant John Creagh Scott, whose book *Hidden Government* was published by the BPS in 1954; and Derek Tozer, a regular contributor to the BPS’s *Free Britain*.[[1206]](#footnote-1206) Announcing the first official meeting of the LEL in October 1954, *Free Britain* noted that ‘our readers will recognize the names’ of ‘many’ of the members of the LEL’s National Executive Committee.[[1207]](#footnote-1207) In addition to this, the BPS printed the LEL’s journal *Candour*.[[1208]](#footnote-1208) Nick Toczek has speculated that Chesterton used some of Jeffrey’s funds to support the BPS and wrote of the LEL as ‘partially at least… a spin-off from The Britons.’[[1209]](#footnote-1209)

The LEL’s early activism was almost totally devoted to the staging of publicity stunts and interruptions at Conservative Party events and the meetings of anti-colonial groups like the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF). They also demonstrated in favour of white settlers and their political leaders, and forged links with ‘kinsmen overseas’. Until 1957, they did not even contest elections and after that only did so by endorsing ‘Independent Loyalist’ candidates. One of their headline-grabbing stunts included handing a coal scuttle to Prime Minister Anthony Eden to commemorate Britain’s ‘scuttle’ from Empire at a Conservative Party fête in 1956.[[1210]](#footnote-1210) On another occasion one activist named Rosine de Bounevialle infiltrated a Conservative women’s rally at the Albert Hall in 1957 disguised as an Indian woman in a silk sari and blackface.[[1211]](#footnote-1211) LEL interruptions during the 1958 Blackpool Party Conference were so disruptive that they provoked Conservative Party Central Office into taking decisive steps to curb their influence among party members.[[1212]](#footnote-1212)

The League’s women activists took centre stage, literally and figuratively, in these activities. Lacking reliable figures or a breakdown of the LEL’s membership, there is no way of ascertaining what proportion of their activists were women. However, activists like de Bounevialle and the League’s organising secretary, Leslie Greene, featured heavily in press reports of their antics. One gets the sense that there was something calculated in the prominent role accorded to women activists in LEL stunts. The spectacle, for instance, of Prime Ministers or prominent politicians unable to answer the heckles of a lone woman was emasculating. Equally shameful were the scenes of multiple stewards removing female interrupters. There is a sort of gleeful indignation in the reports in *Candour* of gangs of stewards using force ‘against one lone woman who dared to raise her voice’.[[1213]](#footnote-1213) In addition, the symbolic potential of these confrontations doubled when the stewards happened to be non-white. During Harold Macmillan’s speech to the 1957 Conservative Party Conference, an article in *Candour* told of how de Bounevialle was seized first by a steward with ‘swarthy features… of a kind not displayed by Britons’ and then by a further ‘sixteen Tory braves’.[[1214]](#footnote-1214)

The LEL also cultivated links with its ‘kinsmen overseas’ struggling against the tide of change. The group had links to politicians in the colonies such as Major R. P. Roberts, chairman of the Federal Independence Party of Kenya and later founder of the Kenyan branch of the LEL.[[1215]](#footnote-1215) LEL activists demonstrated in support of settler leaders as in 1956 when they saluted South Africa Prime Minister J. G. Strydom for his part in the maintenance of ‘the maintenance of White leadership in Africa’.[[1216]](#footnote-1216) From 1956, the organisation also possessed a New Zealand branch and the following year a branch in the Central African Federation with its headquarters in Southern Rhodesia.[[1217]](#footnote-1217) In May 1957, Chesterton declared that the LEL constituted ‘a world-wide movement’ with branches in Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia.[[1218]](#footnote-1218) In 1957, its enthusiastic activists in Africa managed to raise money enough to fund a speaking tour of Kenya, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia by Chesterton and Leslie Greene.[[1219]](#footnote-1219) During this trip, Chesterton and Greene met with the Acting Governor-General of the CAF, the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, the Mayor of Salisbury, and the former President of the CAF, Lord Malvern.[[1220]](#footnote-1220)

As in Chesterton’s BUF days, the inhabitants of Britain’s imperial fringes functioned as masculine exemplars. Britain itself, on the other hand, was portrayed as a feeble, ‘soft’ country populated by ‘soft men’.[[1221]](#footnote-1221) The LEL’s found their ‘hard’ men out in the colonies. In a report following his visit to Kenya, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia in 1957, Chesterton lauded the settlers as free of ‘the flabby sentimentalism’ of the United Kingdom.[[1222]](#footnote-1222) On the frontier, there were no ‘sucklings of the Welfare State’. It was a land, he held, of ‘true men and… true women’, of ‘stalwart Rhodesians’ and Kenyan settlers prepared to act without paying any notice of ‘how Westminster or Mayfair or Bloomsbury may regard their actions’.[[1223]](#footnote-1223)

The LEL did not mount an official campaign against immigration until 1958, despite vociferous opposition to what its members called the ‘Black Invasion’ in the pages of *Candour*. [[1224]](#footnote-1224) In February 1958, the LEL’s Director of Organisation, W. J. Harrison, announced a new campaign strategy. Harrison – a former soldier with twenty-three years’ experience in Sierra Leone, Gambia, India and Malaya behind him – instructed members to use ‘the “Black Invasion”… as our main line in introducing people to the wider issues of our Imperial betrayal’.[[1225]](#footnote-1225) By May 1958, this evolved into a fully-fledged campaign under the responsibility of a League activist named Gordon Colquhoun.[[1226]](#footnote-1226) *Candour* began to feature an increasing amount of pieces on immigration that drew comparisons between the metropolitan and colonial situations.In one of these, Chesterton warned that immigration would transform Britain ‘into a Coloured Republic’ where ‘those who were once the owners of the country are themselves contained within White colonies or reserves.’[[1227]](#footnote-1227) There would ‘be no question of granting self-government, let alone independence,’ he continued, ‘to such barbarians’.

However, for the younger and more radical contingent within the LEL this was too little, too late. Two groups, led by activists who had cut their teeth in anti-immigration campaigns before joining the LEL, broke away during 1957 and 1958. The first to leave was Colin Jordan, the LEL’s Midlands Organiser and a member of its National Committee, who founded the White Defence League (WDL) in 1957. Before joining the LEL, Jordan had moved in Radical Right circles while studying at Cambridge University in the 1940s, briefly joining both the Mosleyite League of Ex-Servicemen and Women and the British People’s Party.[[1228]](#footnote-1228) Put off by Mosley’s European turn, he later founded his own ‘Nationalist Club’ and collaborated with the BPP.[[1229]](#footnote-1229)

After leaving university, Jordan formed the Birmingham Nationalist Club (BNC) and became a leading contributor to the BPS’s *Free Britain*. Arnold Leese was a significant ideological influence on Jordan. The two corresponded until Leese’s death in 1956 with Leese passing on to Jordan his ‘knowledge’ of the ‘Jewish menace’.[[1230]](#footnote-1230) That he shared Leese’s extreme racial prejudice is event from his pieces for *Free Britain*. In one such piece, entitled ‘Africa Invades Britain’, he recast West Indians as African insurgents, thundering:

They are taking over whole districts in these major cities of Britain where the whites are on the retreat giving up house after house and street after street as the blacks move in. In these rapidly expanding Harlems they are rapidly reproducing the conditions of the jungle.[[1231]](#footnote-1231)

Through the BNC, Jordan also engaged in local campaigns against immigration, such as supporting a racist strike by West Bromwich bus drivers in early 1955.[[1232]](#footnote-1232)

Two other prominent LEL activists, John Bean and John Tyndall, broke away in March 1958 and founded the National Labour Party (NLP) on 24 April (Empire Day) 1958.[[1233]](#footnote-1233) Bean was the young man who had attempted to present Eden with a coal scuttle as a part of an LEL publicity stunt a few years earlier.[[1234]](#footnote-1234) Before his turn to Radical Right activism, Bean was a member of the Royal Navy making frequent trips to the West Indies and later worked at a paint factory in newly independent India. During this time, he witnessed the waning of British imperial power first-hand.[[1235]](#footnote-1235) Bean’s encounters with (former) colonial subjects informed his analysis of decolonisation and Commonwealth immigration.[[1236]](#footnote-1236)

Bean’s first foray into Radical Right activism came when he joined Mosley’s UM during the summer of 1950.[[1237]](#footnote-1237) During this time, he volunteered in their ‘Keep Brixton White’ campaign.[[1238]](#footnote-1238) He later left the group, dissatisfied with Mosley’s leadership and the state of the organisation in general. After a brief period in the Conservative Party, Bean joined the LEL in late 1955.[[1239]](#footnote-1239) Besides taking an active role in their publicity stunts and heckling, he was a vocal opponent of Commonwealth immigration, writing a series of articles on the issue for *Candour*.[[1240]](#footnote-1240) He was also part of a group of activists agitating for the LEL to devote more of its time and effort to ‘a campaign against coloured immigration’.[[1241]](#footnote-1241)

The NLP’s co-founder, John Tyndall, was an aimless middle-class ex-serviceman who drifted towards right-wing extremism. Together, Bean and Tyndall were dissatisfied with the LEL’s limited goal of changing the minds of Tory grandees on colonial policy and instead wanted to found a political party that would contest elections.[[1242]](#footnote-1242) Despite these disagreements in terms of tactics and strategy, the LEL, WDL and NLP shared very similar views on the Empire. Though they departed from the LEL, Bean and Tyndall reaffirmed their dedication ‘to the British and Imperial cause’ and the WDL’s publication *Black & White News* advertised *Candour* and promoted the LEL.[[1243]](#footnote-1243)

# **From Notting Hill to Nyasaland**

Robert Miles and Bill Schwarz have argued that the ‘race’ riots of late August and early September 1958 were a significant moment in the ‘racialisation’ or ‘re-racialisation’ of Britain.[[1244]](#footnote-1244) The riots occurred first in Nottingham and then in Notting Hill after crowds of white residents began attacking West Indians in the streets and in their homes. The Radical Right, especially, the UM, WDL and NLP, played a role in fuelling the violence by whipping up rioters and disseminating their racist propaganda. In the aftermath of the riots, as they were dissected in the press and in Parliament, commentators diagnosed them as the symptom of ‘a “colour problem”, i.e. a problem with the presence of *colour* in Britain’.[[1245]](#footnote-1245) Miles identifies the debate over the riots as ‘a crucial turning point’ and a prelude to the first legal restrictions on Commonwealth immigration implemented in the 1960s.[[1246]](#footnote-1246)

This ‘re-racialisation’ of British political discourse took place against the backdrop of decolonisation with its attendant seismic political shifts and civil unrest. Harold Macmillan became Prime Minister following Anthony Eden’s resignation in the wake of the Suez Crisis. Influenced partly by the Suez debacle but also by a range of other international political concerns, Macmillan pressed ahead with colonial reforms.[[1247]](#footnote-1247) In 1957, after nearly ten years of guerrilla warfare with anti-colonial communist insurgents, Malaya gained its independence from the British Empire. That same year, Ghana also achieved independence and a new constitution was agreed for Nigeria, which included promises of independence.[[1248]](#footnote-1248) In Kenya the following year, in an effort to co-opt ‘moderate’ Africans against Mau Mau insurgents, the colonial government introduced greater African political representation.[[1249]](#footnote-1249) Intensified efforts by emboldened Kenyan nationalists led to the achievement of independence five years later, with the election of nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta as the new president.

In the year following the riots in Britain, amid exaggerated fears of a ‘murder plot’ by African nationalists in March 1959, the colonial government of Nyasaland in the Central African Federation declared a state of ‘emergency’. This led to the shooting of 51 Africans and the injury of 79 more as well as the arrest of local nationalist leaders and the proscription of their organisations; actions later derided as ‘police state’ methods by the official government report on the ‘emergency’. [[1250]](#footnote-1250) Elsewhere there were serious riots in Durban in South Africa and the following year saw the infamous shooting of over 70 Africans in Sharpeville.[[1251]](#footnote-1251) The violence extended to Southern Rhodesia too, with riots in its capital city, Salisbury. Thus, as the UM, LEL, WDL and NLP reacted to the riots and stepped up their campaigning against immigration in response, their interpretation of events in the metropole was refracted through the lens of violent colonial unrest.

The NLP, in collaboration with the WDL, had begun campaigning in Notting Hill shortly before the riots.[[1252]](#footnote-1252) The UM was also an established presence, holding meetings ‘[t]hroughout 1958’ in Notting Dale.[[1253]](#footnote-1253) Local press reports implicated UM activists in some of the worst of the rioting, which took place in Notting Hill outside the Latimer Road Underground station on the evening of Monday 1 September.[[1254]](#footnote-1254) Jeffrey Hamm, secretary of the UM, addressed a crowd of 700 people. While *The Times* reported that Hamm ‘said nothing that could be construed as an appeal to violence’, the local *Kensington News and West London Times* recounted events very differently. In their account, a UM speaker whipped an ‘excited audience’ up into an angry mob with his calls of ‘get rid of them (the coloured people)’ and after leaflets were thrown into the crowd they charged off, shouting ‘Kill the niggers!’ [[1255]](#footnote-1255)

The riots were not caused by the Radical Right but, as a number of contemporaneous accounts and analyses testify, the UM, LEL, NLP and WDL played a considerable role in exacerbating existing tensions.[[1256]](#footnote-1256) The press also noted that, in response to the riots, ideas ‘which sounded unpleasantly close to the policy [of] the Union Movement’ were being promoted by local MPs in Nottingham and Notting Hill.[[1257]](#footnote-1257) Even in the wake of the riots, Radical Right groups continued to be an unhelpful and inflammatory presence. The UM, WDL and NLP were later implicated in the murder of Kelso Cochrane, an Antiguan immigrant who was stabbed to death on a street in North Kensington.[[1258]](#footnote-1258) The sociologist Ruth Glass blamed Radical Right groups for contributing to the violent atmosphere while a few years later the *Sunday People* reported uncorroborated rumours that Cochrane’s murderer was in fact a UM member.[[1259]](#footnote-1259) Mosley stood for parliament in North Kensington in 1959 and, provocatively, held a meeting on the site of Cochrane’s murder.[[1260]](#footnote-1260)

For the activists of the NLP, with the riots, residents of Nottingham and Notting Hill had suddenly been thrown into the same battle as their ‘white kinsmen’ overseas. The group campaigned on behalf of the nine white youths arrested for instigating the rioting in Notting Hill.[[1261]](#footnote-1261) NLP activists revelled in what was, for them, a long-awaited outbreak of violent racism:

The old party politicians and the hack writers of the Press, who in their vitriolic tirades against our white kinsmen in South Africa and the Southern States of America had repeatedly bragged “it couldn’t happen here”, were momentarily struck for words.[[1262]](#footnote-1262)

Chesterton concurred, writing in *Candour* of Britons’ newfound affinity with the defenders of ‘the “White Australia” policy’, white settlers opposed to racial ‘“integration” in East Africa and the Rhodesias’, and even the segregationists of the ‘Deep South’.[[1263]](#footnote-1263) The riots provided an impetus for the LEL to finally step-up their campaigning against immigration. While the LEL professed to deplore the ‘street fighting’ seen in the riots, their activists were now out campaigning against immigration on the streets of London and beyond.[[1264]](#footnote-1264)

The UM interpreted the riots as a vindication of their support for a British apartheid. The way forward, they argued, was to emulate the policies of Strydom and abandon ‘effete liberalism’.[[1265]](#footnote-1265) One activist took the occasion to remind *Union*’s readers ‘that Union Movement is no more “Fascist” than the National Party’.[[1266]](#footnote-1266) Writing under the pseudonym ‘European’ in the UM’s ‘high-brow’ journal *The European*, Mosley praised the ‘virile’ members of ‘the “Teddy boy” movement” who were widely blamed for the worst of the rioting.[[1267]](#footnote-1267) He claimed that their violent acts were merely the reflection of their ‘life and character’ and were a ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ reaction to ‘the spectacle of white women being paraded half-naked by black pimps’.[[1268]](#footnote-1268) He much preferred these ‘vigorous young men’ to the civil servants of the Foreign Office or Fleet Street journalists whom he heavily implied were homosexuals.

UM activists continued to issue warnings that Britain was in the process of being colonised. Letters to *Union* fretted that Britain would soon become a ‘coffee-coloured’ nation where ‘white peoples’ would ‘not even exist as a tolerated minority’.[[1269]](#footnote-1269) Their newspaper was also full of tales of domesticity, often personified by white women, defiled by the presence of ‘coloured immigrants’.[[1270]](#footnote-1270) From mid-1957, tales of this sort could often be found in the women’s column of the UM’s newspaper, written by Celia Goodway. Goodway’s column set out what she argued were the domestic consequences of the ‘coloured invasion’. The column featured complaints about long council house waiting lists, the unavailability of hospital beds for pregnant women, and the crisis in public health caused by the introduction into Britain of ‘tropical’ diseases by ‘coloured immigrants’.[[1271]](#footnote-1271) Once again, the political horizons of Mosleyite women were confined to the domestic sphere. When Goodway strayed too far domestic topics in her column, she received critical letters from other male UM members.[[1272]](#footnote-1272) Her column disappeared in early 1959 without explanation.[[1273]](#footnote-1273)

In the course of Mosley’s unsuccessful bid for the seat of North Kensington in 1959 general election, UM activists continually made comparisons between the situation supposedly being ‘forced’ on whites in Britain and the ‘sell-out’ strategy of British colonial policy. ‘The Europeans in Africa’ were refusing ‘to be swamped by the black majority’, went one article in *Action*, just as ‘the people of Notting Hill and Nottingham have declared their opposition to coloured immigration’.[[1274]](#footnote-1274) While UM activists celebrated racist riots in Britain, another article warned that ‘racial mixing’ risked exposing white Britons to the violent African ‘way of life’.[[1275]](#footnote-1275) The UM’s activists regarded people of colour as ‘primitive savages’ and believed that by inviting them into Britain, its rulers risked releasing Mau Mau-style violence onto the streets of Britain with ‘near-maniacs running berserk with choppers and knives’.

Having collaborated extensively in their campaigning following the Notting Hill riots, the NLP and the WDL merged on 27 February 1960 to form the British National Party (BNP). The new group’s activists continued to conflate events in metropole and colony. Like the NLP and WDL before it, the BNP was pledged to ‘stand against the Black invasion of Britain and the betrayal of our White kinsmen overseas’.[[1276]](#footnote-1276) Colin Jordan was its National Organiser while Bean served as Deputy Organiser.[[1277]](#footnote-1277) The BNP’s President was Andrew Fountaine, an ex-Conservative Parliamentary candidate and Francoist veteran of the Spanish Civil War.[[1278]](#footnote-1278) Arnold Leese’s wife, May Winifred Leese, was the organisation’s vice-president and her husband’s influence on the movement’s ideology was evident.[[1279]](#footnote-1279) For instance, when Colin Jordan set out the BNP’s pro-‘Nordic’ racial policies, he recommended some of Leese’s favourite writers as further reading including Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard and L. A. Waddell.[[1280]](#footnote-1280) Their journal also featured pro-Nazi and Holocaust-denying contributions from BNP members, and the group hosted a ‘Northern European Camp’, an international meeting of National Socialists, in May 1961.[[1281]](#footnote-1281)

BNP activists pointed to news of anti-colonial violence across Africa as an example of the kind of thing being ‘imported’ into Britain as a result of Commonwealth immigration. *Combat*, now the organ of the BNP, seized on the Congo crisis in particular. Beginning in July 1960, the Congo crisis occurred following a series of military mutinies after the declaration of the Congo’s independence from Belgium.[[1282]](#footnote-1282) The subsequent violence resulted in the deaths of a number of Europeans and 300 reported rapes by Africans against European women.[[1283]](#footnote-1283) *Combat*, now the organ of the BNP, drew comparisons between the reports of the rape and murder of ‘White women’ by ‘Black troops’ in the Congo and the figurative ‘wounding and murder’ of white people in Britain by the continued arrival of ‘coloured immigrants’.[[1284]](#footnote-1284) *Combat* wondered ‘how long it will be before we see examples of Congo antics enacted here’.[[1285]](#footnote-1285) As the caption under of a photograph of an injured white woman printed on the front cover of one edition of *Combat* asked: ‘Africa Today – Tomorrow Britain?’[[1286]](#footnote-1286) Allegedly ‘under attack’ at the centre and the periphery, the BNP imagined an ‘assault on the White world’. In response, they called for ‘White solidarity’ not only with places with which Britain had imperial ties, like South Africa, Kenya or Rhodesia, but even with ‘the Southern States of the U.S.A.’

Like the BNP, LEL activists writing in *Candour* also imagined the re-enactment of colonial violence on Britain’s streets. *Candour* announced the outbreak of ‘tribal war’ in Brixton and indicted ‘the coloured invasion’ for ‘increasingly bringing barbarism to Britain’.[[1287]](#footnote-1287) Elsewhere, direct comparisons were made between reports of a resurgence of witchcraft in Nyasaland and rumours of the practice of ‘Black Magic’ by West Africans living in Birmingham and London.[[1288]](#footnote-1288) ‘Darkest Britain’, as Chesterton sardonically referred to it, was said to be host to ‘voodoo orgies and riots’.[[1289]](#footnote-1289) Radical Right activists constructed their opposition to immigration in colonial terms; in other words, for them, immigration meant Mau Mau moved to the metropole. Britons were thus transformed into the metropolitan equivalent of embattled white settlers.

# **The ‘Coloured’ Commonwealth**

Along with the Radical Right’s appropriation of the experience of white settlers went a turning away from the existing Commonwealth towards plans for an alternative alliance of white nations. Behind these plans lay a growing dissatisfaction with the Commonwealth remnants of the Empire. Radical Right activists felt that with Britain’s transformation from Empire to Commonwealth, it had abandoned the racist principles that had historically driven and legitimised colonial rule. By this time, the British Commonwealth, and the face of European colonialism generally, was changing. John Darwin notes that the period between 1959 and 1965 saw the birth of nearly thirty new independent African states.[[1290]](#footnote-1290) By 1964, the British Empire consisted of little more than ‘a range of small scattered islands, Hong Kong, and Southern Rhodesia’.[[1291]](#footnote-1291) In addition, the Commonwealth’s changing composition changed its political character. With the addition of new Indian and African member-states, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference became a forum for the criticism of British colonial policy and the settler racism of member-states like South Africa.[[1292]](#footnote-1292)

Regarding the Commonwealth as burdensome and opposed to ‘white’ British interests, during the late 1950s and 1960s, the British Radical Right were busy concocting proposals for a replacement. Each group had their own different rendering of what this alliance might look like. Whether dubbed ‘European’, in the case of the UM, or simply ‘white’, as in the case of the other groups, these alliances had much in common. They were attempts to preserve what their activists believed were the ‘best’ features of the former British Empire – namely, authoritarian, white rule.

For the UM, the Commonwealth represented not the continuation but the end of the Empire. The British Empire, they argued, ‘had been degraded into a Commonwealth’.[[1293]](#footnote-1293) What particularly appalled them, as decolonisation picked up pace, was its racial composition. They worried that the Commonwealth would soon become majority ‘coloured’ consisting of more citizens of newly independent African and Asian nations than ‘white’ ones.[[1294]](#footnote-1294) For the white supremacists of the UM, the ‘newly-emerging Afro-Asian powers’ had ‘nothing in common’ with Britain or the older Dominions; they shunned the Commonwealth as ‘an inglorious hotch-potch’.[[1295]](#footnote-1295) They also blamed the Commonwealth for providing a backdoor for the ‘Coloured Invasion’. According to UM activists, ‘coloured’ immigration, facilitated by the Commonwealth tie, was turning Britain into a ‘Black Cesspool’.[[1296]](#footnote-1296)

Mosley and his followers had previously been highly enthusiastic about their international links to non-white imperial subjects when this had meant authoritarian rule by white colonisers. They were distinctly less keen now that it meant membership of a ‘multi-racial’, liberal-democratic Commonwealth. As Mosley saw it, Britain faced a ‘momentous choice’, either unite with ‘the white Dominions’ and the ‘Nation of Europe’ to build ‘white Europe-Africa’ or remain ‘bound to the remnants of a black Empire which is now nothing but a burden to us’.[[1297]](#footnote-1297) This new alliance of Britain, Europe, and the ‘white Dominions’ would ‘replace the useless Commonwealth.[[1298]](#footnote-1298) As one 1958 article put it: ‘They wanted independence from us: now we want independence from them.’[[1299]](#footnote-1299)

For all their repeated assertions that the Empire was lost or that the Britain should simply cut its losses elsewhere and retreat to Africa, the UM were thinking in resolutely neo-colonial terms.[[1300]](#footnote-1300) All the talk of the death of the ‘old colonialism’ was but the preamble to their plans to revive it through the union of Europe.[[1301]](#footnote-1301) Jeffrey Hamm advised British patriots ‘not to dream of past glories, but to… build a new [European] Empire, far transcending anything our forefathers created – and the political parties destroyed.’[[1302]](#footnote-1302) Europe was a means of salvaging, holding onto and developing ‘the remains of Empire’.[[1303]](#footnote-1303) Mosley saw Europe as the means by which Britain could ‘assert again the true values of white civilisation’ as they once had through Empire.[[1304]](#footnote-1304) He envisioned a united Europe under British leadership; through Europe, Mosley promised his followers, Britain would ‘Lead the World Again’.[[1305]](#footnote-1305) Though Mosley’s vision of Europe markedly differed from the existing EEC, he and his members ambitiously advocated that Britain join and ‘press from within the European community’ for the creation of a new European Empire.[[1306]](#footnote-1306) The assumption that Britain would take a leading role in a united Europe was as arrogant as it was unrealistic but, nevertheless, underscores the persistent imperialist streak in Mosley’s thinking.

The BNP had very similar plans for a new global configuration organised along racial lines and even acknowledged these similarities, though they considered the UM to be not ‘genuinely racialist’.[[1307]](#footnote-1307) Even before it merged with the WDL to become the BNP, the NLP was forthright in its belief that the ‘old British Empire’ was dead and must be replaced with ‘a Union of white dominions, with whom we have common ties of blood’.[[1308]](#footnote-1308) Later on, after the NLP and WDL merged, among the BNP’s founding principles were plans for a ‘close confederation’ of Britain and ‘the White Dominions’.[[1309]](#footnote-1309) The posthumous influence of Leese can again be felt in the BNP’s plans to include their fellow ‘Aryans’ in northern Europe in such an alliance. Like the UM, they also blamed the Commonwealth for ‘coloured immigration’. As Colin Jordan wrote in late 1960: ‘*The Commonwealth’s greatest contribution to Britain today is the Coloured invasion.*’[[1310]](#footnote-1310)

Chesterton held onto the fanciful dream of a British ‘return’ to lost colonies into the 1960s.[[1311]](#footnote-1311) His romantic attachment to imperial tradition meant that even though he and his fellow activists in the LEL regarded the Commonwealth as little more than ‘a camouflage for unconditional surrender’, they were still eager to keep it together.[[1312]](#footnote-1312) His inflexible patriotism even served to temper his support for South Africa. When LEL activists demonstrated in favour of South African National Party politicians like Malan or Strydom, they usually also called on them ‘to abandon [their] Republican policies’.[[1313]](#footnote-1313)

However, Chesterton’s stubborn support for the maintenance of imperial integrity lessened after South Africa became a republic in 1961 following a referendum in the previous year. Following their exit, Chesterton wrote that the LEL ‘categorically reject[s], as another institution of the enemy, the internationalist agency once known as the British Commonwealth’.[[1314]](#footnote-1314) He blamed politicians like India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah for pushing forcing South Africa ‘into the wilderness’ with their constant criticism of apartheid. In response to this outrage, Chesterton called on Britain to either withdraw from or liquidate the Commonwealth. As an alternative arrangement, he proposed that Britain unite with ‘the White Dominions’ with whom they shared ‘a heritage’. United, he claimed, this body would be strong enough to preserve national sovereignty and resist ‘the despotic power of Wall Street’.

A new Radical Right group emerged in 1964 advancing a similar line. The Greater Britain Movement (GBM) had splintered from a splinter group. Formed by John Tyndall and a group of others, it had broken away from Colin Jordan’s National Socialist Movement (NSM). The NSM, in turn, was formed after Jordan left the BNP in 1962 after clashing with its National Council over his irrepressible enthusiasm for Nazi Germany.[[1315]](#footnote-1315) Tyndall had then fallen out with Jordan in a romantic rivalry for the hand of French fascist and heiress, Françoise Dior. Despite first being engaged to Tyndall, Dior went on to marry Jordan in a ‘National Socialist wedding ceremony’ in 1963.[[1316]](#footnote-1316) Tyndall also claimed that with the GBM he wanted to carve out a uniquely ‘British’ version of National Socialism, distancing himself from Jordan’s Teutonophilia.[[1317]](#footnote-1317) Reportedly taking the majority of the old NSM membership with him, the rump of the NSM soldiered on. Unlike the GBM, to the virtual exclusion of imperial affairs, the NSM was obsessed with inter-war Nazism and maintaining transnational links with neo-Nazis throughout the world, notably with American Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell and through the World Union of National Socialists.[[1318]](#footnote-1318)

In its ideas and rhetoric, the GBM was very similar to the LEL. Like Bean and Jordan, Tyndall had been a prominent LEL activist and, even after leaving, continued to consult Chesterton for political advice throughout the 1960s.[[1319]](#footnote-1319) The first article of the first issue of its *Spearhead* journal proclaimed the imminence of a ‘Global Race War’ and warned that ‘the rule of the jungle’ was enveloping Africa and spreading to Britain and America. They portrayed African nationalism as racial contagion, inspiring American ‘Negroes’ to struggle for civil rights and resulting in the inundation of Britain with their ‘sub-human brothers… bringing with them the same crime, disease, and filth by which their society is stamped in Africa.’[[1320]](#footnote-1320)

A fan of Mosley’s earlier work from the 1930s, Tyndall called for ‘British Union’ to arrest the spread of the ‘jungle’. By this, he meant a new British power-bloc, which he referred to as ‘Greater Britain’, composed of ‘the whole British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, White Rhodesia, and Anglo-Saxon Canada’ in alliance, he hoped, with South Africa.[[1321]](#footnote-1321) Further reheating Mosleyite leftovers, Tyndall envisioned the new ‘Greater Britain’ as ‘a self-contained economy’.[[1322]](#footnote-1322) Such was the GBM’s racially-charged opposition to the Commonwealth that one of their activists, Martin Webster, another former LEL activist, was imprisoned for two months for assaulting Kenyan Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta during a visit to London in July 1964.[[1323]](#footnote-1323) Webster justified his attack on the grounds that he saw Kenyatta as a malevolent, almost demonic, political presence describing him as a debased, ‘half-savage’ barbarian and the alleged leader of the dreaded Mau Mau.[[1324]](#footnote-1324)

# **Southern African connections**

As well as imagining themselves as white settlers and dreaming up alternatives to the Commonwealth, the Radical Right expressed solidarity with the struggles of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. They opposed the anti-apartheid boycotts in 1959 and continued to urge Britons to buy South African goods throughout the 1960s. As well as moral support, the UM and the LEL attempted to forge political links with South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Mosley in particular, found a receptive audience for his pro-South Africa message and his white supremacist ideas.

In late 1957, the UM founded ‘The Friends of South Africa’ (later converted into the ‘Europe-Africa Association’) dedicated to bringing together Britons and South Africans ‘to keep alight the flame of white civilisation on the African continent’.[[1325]](#footnote-1325) As well as distributing UM publications, this group provided its members with National Party literature and English translations of political articles from the Afrikaner nationalist press. The UM’s support for South Africa did not go unnoticed and they reported that Eric Louw, South Africa’s Minister for External Affairs, had extended his ‘good wishes to the newly-formed Friends of South Africa’ in early 1958.[[1326]](#footnote-1326) In 1957 and 1959 respectively, the UM’s newspaper launched two columns to keep its members abreast of the situation in southern Africa. The first, the ‘South African Report’ was written by Derek Alexander, a Johannesburg-based schoolteacher and Mosley’s ‘South African lieutenant’, and the second, ‘Report from Rhodesia’, by ‘a journalist with one of the biggest newspapers in Central Africa’ named Martin Preston.[[1327]](#footnote-1327)

Alongside their satellite groups and news coverage, Mosley made a several visits to South Africa between 1959 and 1967, guided by Alexander.[[1328]](#footnote-1328) The exploits of Mosley and his agents often made front-page news in South Africa’s *Rand Daily Mail*. His comings and goings and meetings with government ministers, including Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, were the subject of some controversy.[[1329]](#footnote-1329) Indignant questions about Mosley’s trips and his meetings with National Party figures were even asked by United Party MPs in the House of Assembly.[[1330]](#footnote-1330) The *Rand Daily Mail* covered all of his visits in detail, often featuring Mosley’s exploits on its front page. While the *Rand Daily Mail*’s commentary was fairly critical, National Party-supporting newspapers apparently published Mosley’s ‘favourable forecasts of [South Africa’s] economic and political future’ with ‘a gratified air’.[[1331]](#footnote-1331)

The *Rand Daily Mail* was immensely suspicious of Mosley and his associates. Their reporters doggedly investigated their repeated visits to South Africa. In July 1962, they revealed that Mosley had despatched William Webster to South Africa in order to find potential donors to the UM’s 1964 general election campaign fund.[[1332]](#footnote-1332) In September 1962, they uncovered more details and believed they had found evidence of collusion between the National Party establishment and the UM’s ambassadors. They alleged that J. W. F. Haak, Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs, had aided Webster in his search for donors.[[1333]](#footnote-1333) Haak denied these claims.[[1334]](#footnote-1334) If he did assist Webster at all, there is little evidence that it yielded any results. Despite Webster telling the *Rand Daily Mail* that his trip had been ‘worthwhile’ and that he had attracted a ‘good response’, no South African organisation would admit to having given him any money.[[1335]](#footnote-1335)

South Africa provided Mosley with a platform and a receptive, if not necessarily entirely sympathetic, audience. For instance, in June 1962, he took part in a radio programme for the state-owned South African Broadcasting Company (SABC). Given that he had been banned from the BBC since 1934 and was desperate for publicity, this was highly significant.[[1336]](#footnote-1336) The programme was entitled ‘Africa, the West and the Republic’ and also featured anti-colonial Labour MP and chair of the MCF, Fenner Brockway, as well as two political figures from Belgium.[[1337]](#footnote-1337) The announcer introduced Mosley as a ‘leading statesman’ and Mosley’s contribution took the form of a speech in defence of apartheid.

The South African government, quickly becoming a pariah state by the early 1960s, no doubt appreciated Mosley’s pro-South African stance. What is perplexing, though, is why they chose to engage with and, to some degree, embrace Mosley at all. As one South African critic put it, he was ‘a man of no official or diplomatic standing’ and little political influence. [[1338]](#footnote-1338) Since Mosley was not a particularly useful friend of the apartheid regime, this suggests the existence of sincere ideological sympathy on their part. This is unsurprising given some of the obvious similarities between the National Party’s ideology and Mosley’s ideas, something which Mosley strove to emphasise.[[1339]](#footnote-1339) However, the similarities go even further. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Afrikaner nationalism possessed a marked strain of antisemitism, stretching back to the 1930s. While the National Party ‘consciously moderated’ its antisemitism and fascist sympathies by the 1950s, during the inter-war period this went as far as direct and sympathetic contact between National Party representatives and Nazi Germany.[[1340]](#footnote-1340) There is a certain irony, then, in the UM’s defensive assertions that the National Party’s stance on the Jews ‘approximates to that of the Union Movement.’[[1341]](#footnote-1341)

In any case, Mosley was looking to financially exploit his South African connections, despatching Webster in hopes that South African businessmen might reward the UM’s loyal support. Indeed, two years before Webster’s South African sojourn, the UM led efforts to frustrate Britain’s first anti-apartheid boycott.[[1342]](#footnote-1342) Reports of their presence and involvement in violent clashes at the first anti-apartheid boycott rally in Trafalgar Square on 28 February 1960 dominated the news coverage of the event.[[1343]](#footnote-1343) The UM also mounted a month long anti-boycott campaign which saw its activists, joined by members of the BNP, picket shops to encourage them to continue selling South African goods.[[1344]](#footnote-1344) The UM revived their anti-boycott activities again in May 1960 with a ‘Beat the Boycott’ and ‘Buy from South Africa’ campaign.[[1345]](#footnote-1345) They kept this up this throughout the next few years, with UM publicationsurging their readers to ‘Buy South African fruit, tinned goods and wines’.[[1346]](#footnote-1346)

Despite Chesterton’s reservations about the republicanism of Afrikaner nationalism – reservations that Mosley did not share – his writings and conspiracy theorising were an inspiration in National Party circles. *The South African Observer*,a journal founded in 1955 by English-speaking South African antisemite and Holocaust denier, S. E. D. Brown, regularly featured reproductions of articles and extracts from *Candour* as well as allusions to Chesterton’s other writings.[[1347]](#footnote-1347) Whereas in Britain, *Candour* was only influential within fringe Radical Right circles, Brown’s *South African Observer* enjoyed ‘top-level National Party support’.[[1348]](#footnote-1348) However, this ended in 1967, after the journal overstepped the mark in its criticism of the government and was denounced by South African Prime Minister John Vorster.[[1349]](#footnote-1349)

Chesterton was not the only Radical Right figure with connections to the *South African Observer*. While Brown maintained that he was in no way linked to Oswald Mosley or his organisation, advertisements for the *South African Observer* began appearing in *Action* from October 1961.[[1350]](#footnote-1350) Elsewhere, *Action* commended the *South African Observer* for its ‘clear-sighted’ analysis of the ‘hidden’ forces supposedly behind British policy in Africa.[[1351]](#footnote-1351) The BNP’s *Combat* also contained advertisements for Brown’s journal and copies were for sale directly from the GBM’s ‘Viking Books’ bookshop.[[1352]](#footnote-1352)Beyond the Radical Right, the *South African Observer* featured contributions from other racist commentators. One issued contained an article by Harold Soref, a later leading member of the Conservative Monday Club, founded in 1961 to organise frustrated imperialists within the Conservative Party.[[1353]](#footnote-1353) A number of issues also reproduced the racist tirades of anti-immigrant British politicians such as the Conservative MP Cyril Osborne.[[1354]](#footnote-1354)

Like Mosley, Chesterton was very well-connected in South Africa and was reportedly on Hendrik Verwoerd’s Christmas card list.[[1355]](#footnote-1355) Graham Macklin has documented Chesterton’s relationship with Hendrik van den Burgh, a leading operative in South Africa’s Republican Intelligence and later head of ‘the formidable South African secret police force’ BOSS (the South Africa Bureau of State Security).[[1356]](#footnote-1356) A few decades earlier, Van den Burgh was a prominent member of the South African fascist group the *Ossewabrandwag* (OB, Oxwagon Sentinel) formed in 1938. The OB counted a number of later leading Afrikaner nationalist politicians among its ranks.[[1357]](#footnote-1357) Van den Burgh’s pro-Nazi sympathies and role in paramilitary organising saw him interned (along with future South African Prime Minister, John Vorster) in 1942.[[1358]](#footnote-1358) By the mid-1960s, Van den Burgh was a subscriber to *Candour* and was familiar with Chesterton’s books.[[1359]](#footnote-1359) The two had met during one of Chesterton’s regular visits to South Africa, which he made every winter under medical advice from the mid-1960s, and they became firm friends.[[1360]](#footnote-1360) Macklin argues that Chesterton’s imperialist, white supremacist conspiracy theories ‘refined the personal intellectual framework of van den Bergh himself and his definition of who and what was behind “sabotage” and “subversion” in South Africa’.[[1361]](#footnote-1361) They exchanged not only ideas but also surveillance information concerning the activities of anti-apartheid activists in Britain and South Africa.

Along with South Africa, the Radical Right also worshipped Southern Rhodesia as a white supremacist utopia. This intensified after Southern Rhodesia declared itself independent ‘Rhodesia’ on 11 November 1965, seceding from the Commonwealth while proclaiming its loyalty to British institutions like the monarchy. This was prompted by increasing British government pressure on Southern Rhodesia to broaden its electoral franchise beyond white Europeans following the disillusion of the Central African Federation in 1963 and the subsequent granting of independence to the formerly incorporated territories of Nyasaland (as Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (as Zambia). For the Radical Right, and particularly for the LEL, BNP and GBM, Rhodesia’s conspicuously *British* stand against British colonial policy was heroic.

The LEL pledged their support for Smith during Southern Rhodesia’s negotiations with the British government back in 1964. On one occasion, LEL activists met Smith at the airport during one of his visits to Britain. They hailed him as ‘a champion of civilisation in Africa’ and followed him on the journey to his hotel with a ‘cavalcade’ of cars bearing LEL slogans. More activists met him at his hotel in order to emphasise ‘the League’s support for its Rhdoesian kinsmen’.[[1362]](#footnote-1362) Despite the LEL’s support for Smith and the Rhodesian cause, Chesterton had initially cautioned the Southern Rhodesians against withdrawing from the Commonwealth.[[1363]](#footnote-1363) After the event, however, he praised the Rhodesian Front government for daring ‘to stand fast, declare unswerving allegiance to the Crown and defy, not only a British Government but the entire finance-regimented world’.[[1364]](#footnote-1364)

Cartoons of Smith appeared in *Candour* comparing his martial figure with that of a caricature of a portly Harold Wilson.[[1365]](#footnote-1365) While Chesterton displayed his regular cautionary distrust of mainstream politicians, he later admitted that Smith was ‘a man’s man – a word that is fast dying out’.[[1366]](#footnote-1366) He portrayed Rhodesia itself as a land where imperial masculinity lived on, a nation possessed of ‘the spiritual muscle and… sense of purpose which almost everywhere else – except in South Africa – have disappeared in the miasma of catastrophic post-war decadence’.[[1367]](#footnote-1367) In what he called ‘Right, Royal, Heroic Rhodesia’, he saw reflected the best of British characteristics and in Rhodesians themselves ‘the leaders of the British resurgence at home and overseas’.[[1368]](#footnote-1368)

As with South Africa, there is evidence that Chesterton exerted an indirect ideological influence on the Southern Rhodesian state through former *Rand Daily Mail* journalist and adviser to the Rhodesian Front regime, Ivor Benson.[[1369]](#footnote-1369) Benson was a ‘prominent member’ of the Candour League, one of a series of groups affiliated to Chesterton and his LEL.[[1370]](#footnote-1370) He also worked for the Rhodesian government for a short period between 1964 and 1965, tasked with turning the state broadcaster into a government propaganda arm.[[1371]](#footnote-1371) Benson subscribed to Chesterton’s theories about ‘International Finance’, theories which, as a result of his ‘considerable’ influence, filtered into the heart of the Rhodesian state.[[1372]](#footnote-1372)

As with Benson, the worldview of the Rhodesian Front regime was predicated on the ‘belief that the sudden end of British colonial rule and the rapid emergence of African nationalism could… only be attributed to the pernicious influence of external forces’.[[1373]](#footnote-1373) Benson’s favourite ‘innuendos and… smear techniques’ even made their way into the rhetoric of the Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith.[[1374]](#footnote-1374) Chesterton later befriended Benson, staying with him and his wife on one of his holidays to South Africa.[[1375]](#footnote-1375) In addition, Benson’s Dolphin Press was responsible for the distribution of one of Chesterton’s books, *The New Unhappy Lords*, in South Africa and Rhodesia.[[1376]](#footnote-1376)

Just like Chesterton, the BNP and GBM also valorised Rhodesia. As early as 1963, *Combat* urged Southern Rhodesia to withdraw from the Commonwealth.[[1377]](#footnote-1377) When they eventually did, John Bean rhapsodised in the pages of *Combat* that Ian Smith was the man who could halt ‘the self-inflicted decline of Western power’.[[1378]](#footnote-1378) The GBM lauded Rhodesians and South Africans in equally effusive terms in their *Spearhead* journal. They also favourably alluded to Ian Smith’s military service during the Second World War in the Royal Air Force, comparing it with Harold Wilson’s political careerism.[[1379]](#footnote-1379) While condemning Britain for its degeneration from the land of men like ‘Wellington, Nelson, and Clive’ to ‘Half-Men’ like The Beatles, GBM activists praised South Africa and Southern Rhodesia as places where ‘firm White leadership’ survived, ‘the only sparks of sanity… in the whole world’.[[1380]](#footnote-1380)

Their support went beyond mere words. BNP members attended the meetings of the similarly pro-white settler Monday Club and *Combat* urged its readers to join the Anglo-Rhodesian Society.[[1381]](#footnote-1381) *Combat* reported that BNP activists were demonstrating in support of Rhodesia in Sheffield, Birmingham, Coventry and Manchester, ‘among other cities’.[[1382]](#footnote-1382) The GBM also gave their critical support to the Anglo-Rhodesian Society and carried out meetings and demonstrations in favour of Rhodesia.[[1383]](#footnote-1383) This included using a loudspeaker van to broadcast pro-Rhodesia slogans in ‘busy weekend-shopping areas’ throughout London and beyond.[[1384]](#footnote-1384)

# **‘Darkest Britain’**

In their fantasies of new white alliances, and their moral and material support for the cause of white minority rule in southern Africa, the British Radical Right went as far as comparing Britain’s world position with that of South Africa and Rhodesia. This extended to portraying Britain itself, in the face of Commonwealth immigration and the changing international political situation, as a besieged white settler colony. Of course, in the mid-1960s, the British situation bore little similarly to the South African or Rhodesian situation. Britain was a former Empire searching for a role and keen to join the EEC; it was not a white settler colony. However, through the warped looking-glass of antisemitic conspiracy, the activists of the UM, LEL, BNP and GBM perceived Britain just as they perceived South Africa and Rhodesia: as a white nation whose national sovereignty and racial integrity was menaced by international (Jewish) interference.

The UM stuck to the old BUF ‘line’ on the Jews, namely that they did not hate *all* Jews but objected to the sinister conduct of *some* Jews. While Mosley avoided the obsessive antisemitism of Leese and those for whom *The Protocols* was gospel, just as much as in the days of the BUF, he saw politics as a struggle against ‘international finance’.[[1385]](#footnote-1385) UM publications were peppered with accusations that ‘international Jewish finance’ – also referred to as the ‘Money Power’, ‘money-lords’, and ‘Shylocks’ – was directing the course of post-war politics.[[1386]](#footnote-1386) Beyond a desire to distance themselves from the term ‘fascism’, Jeffrey Hamm claimed that with the UM, Mosley had merely revised his ideas and ‘withdraws not one word of his pre-war policy’.[[1387]](#footnote-1387) Thus UM activists continued to blame Jews for aiding the Empire’s enemies adding to older accusations that ‘men with curious names’ were paying for the passage of ‘coloured invaders’.[[1388]](#footnote-1388)

The effect of this was to paint a picture of Britain cowed and transformed into ‘a little off-shore negro island’, ‘over-run with blacks’, ‘tied down to black states’ via the Commonwealth, and ‘dormant and supine except when black interests are involved’.[[1389]](#footnote-1389) Referring to Harold Macmillan, British Prime Minister and prophet of the ‘wind of change’, as well as to events in Kenya, they dubbed Britain ‘Mac Mau Mau Island’.[[1390]](#footnote-1390) By imagining the ‘hidden hand’ of Jewry behind the ‘coloured invasion’, UM activists depicted the ‘White Man’ in Britain as an endangered species, just as vulnerable and imperilled as they argued he was in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The danger, as set out on the front cover of the UM’s *National European* journal, launched in 1964, was of ‘[a] black majority in Africa’ and ‘[a] black majority in Britain’.[[1391]](#footnote-1391) The boundary between (former) colony and metropole became ever more blurred in another UM pamphlet which urged those concerned to ‘Stand by the White Man… In South Africa… in Rhodesia’ and finally ‘in Britain itself!’[[1392]](#footnote-1392)

Chesterton similarly tried to reconfigure the metropole as a colony in his 1965 book, entitled *The New Unhappy Lords*. The bookwas an updated elaboration on Chesterton’s long-running obsession with the machinations of Wall Street-based financiers. *The New Unhappy Lords* proved highly influential in Radical Right circles. It received positive reviews in the BNP’s *Combat* and Hendrik van den Burgh was among its international fans.[[1393]](#footnote-1393) Macklin has dubbed it ‘one of the most important far right treatises in the post-war period’.[[1394]](#footnote-1394)

In *The New Unhappy Lords*, Chesterton argued that the leaders of ‘World Jewry’ based in New York were now conducting a deliberate campaign against the ‘remaining bastions of White civilization’ such as South Africa and Rhodesia.[[1395]](#footnote-1395) According to Chesterton, the agents of this campaign included liberal university professors, humanitarian clergymen, the press, the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Health Organisation.[[1396]](#footnote-1396) Alongside attacks on South Africa and Rhodesia, Chesterton wrote, went a campaign to create a ‘colour problem’ in Britain.[[1397]](#footnote-1397) The Jewish-backed ‘coloured invasion’ of Britain, argued Chesterton, was part of a global ‘conspiratorial plan’ for ‘the mongrelzation of mankind’.[[1398]](#footnote-1398)

Chesterton recast Britain as the underdog. In his conspiracist rendering, the nation no longer appeared as the head of an Empire whose time had come, but as a beleaguered white settler colony bossed about by the United Nations and the Commonwealth, organisations dominated by anti-British ‘coloured’ politicians and secretly controlled by an omnipotent Jewish enclave. This distorted account of international politics was partially a reflection of and reaction to changing world conditions. By 1961, as a result of the achievement of independence by a number of former colonies, African and Asian countries were in the majority on the UN General Assembly.[[1399]](#footnote-1399) The leaders of these new nations prioritised ‘furthering the process of decolonisation’, scrutinising and criticising the racist policies of South Africa and Australia, and promoting anti-racism. Chesterton and his circle interpreted this as a sign that Britain, like South Africa and Rhodesia, now faced ostracism or destruction.

Radical Right activists in Britain were by no means alone in their attempts to explain decolonisation and immigration with conspiracy theory. The Monday Club put out pamphlets, such as Harold Soref and Ian Grieg’s *The Puppeteers* – subtitled ‘An examination of those organizations and bodies concerned with the elimination of the white man in Africa’ – that were similarly conspiracy-minded.[[1400]](#footnote-1400) In 1970, Enoch Powell added a conspiratorial edge to his own reactionary racism, devoting one election campaign speech to the subject of the ‘disguised’ and ‘invisible’ enemy within Britain, operating through the universities, the press and activist groups.[[1401]](#footnote-1401)

However, the Radical Right remained a political failure. Attempts by the UM, LEL and BNP to exploit opposition to immigration at the ballot box came to nothing, while GBM did not contest elections at all. Mosley failed to win North Kensington in 1959 and ran again for Shoreditch in 1966, losing his deposit.[[1402]](#footnote-1402) Other UM candidates fared no better and averaged 3.78 per cent of the votes in all the seats they contested in 1966.[[1403]](#footnote-1403) The LEL ran several candidates in elections in 1957 and 1964; not one of whom won more than five per cent of the vote.[[1404]](#footnote-1404) Election efforts in seats where tensions over immigration were controversial and publicised in the national press were no more successful; John Bean won a mere nine per cent of the vote when he stood in Southall in 1964.[[1405]](#footnote-1405) Alongside running their own candidates, the BNP and the GBM sent activists to campaign against Labour’s Patrick Gordon Walker during the infamous 1964 Smethwick by-election and again in Leyton in 1965.[[1406]](#footnote-1406)

Coupled with their political failure went the small memberships of these groups. The Board of Jewish Deputies’ Defence Committee, which was still monitoring the Radical Right in 1966, estimated that the UM had around 500 to 1,000 members.[[1407]](#footnote-1407) The Defence Committee estimated that the BNP’s membership lay somewhere ‘in the region of 200’ but with a larger number of supporters around election time.[[1408]](#footnote-1408) Martin Walker put the LEL’s membership at around 300 by 1961, down from a height of 3,000 back in their days as the scourge of Conservative Party Central Office in 1958.[[1409]](#footnote-1409) He also estimated that the GBM never possessed more than 138 members.[[1410]](#footnote-1410)

After his defeat in Shoreditch, Mosley retired from active politics in order to devote his full time to posing as ‘an elder statesman of European politics’.[[1411]](#footnote-1411) By this time, he had been living mostly in France since the early fifties and moved in a social circle that included the Duke and Duchess of Windsor as well as a bevy of European neo-fascists.[[1412]](#footnote-1412) Without him, the UM limped on and was renamed the Action Party in 1973.[[1413]](#footnote-1413) Dissatisfied with the idea of becoming a moribund Mosley fan club, some of its remaining members founded the League of St. George in 1974.[[1414]](#footnote-1414) Representing a fusion of the Mosleyite and National Socialist traditions, the League was pro-European but also sought to cultivate relationships with neo-Nazis throughout the world. During the 1980s, a group of Mosley’s old disciples founded ‘The Friends of Oswald Mosley’, a Mosley memorial society, which remains active at time of writing.[[1415]](#footnote-1415)

Given their small memberships, their largely similar ideas, and the competition they faced from more ‘respectable’ Conservative organisations like the Monday Club, a number of Radical Right activists in Chesterton’s circle united in 1967 to form the National Front (NF). Previous efforts at unity had been unsuccessful, with a series of false starts over the course of 1965 and 1966. By November 1966, a merger was agreed between the LEL, the BNP, and another anti-immigration group named the Racial Preservation Society (RPS).[[1416]](#footnote-1416) In February the following year, they officially launched the National Front.[[1417]](#footnote-1417) The NF initially excluded the GBM on the grounds that their tactics were too militant and their neo-Nazism too overt, but Tyndall and his followers were later admitted in September 1967.[[1418]](#footnote-1418)

The agreed objectives of the new NF reflected the ideas of its constituent organisations. The NF pledged that they would terminate all ‘non-white immigration’ and set in motion the ‘humane and orderly repatriation of all non-white immigrants (and their dependents) who have entered since the passing of the British Nationality Act, 1948’.[[1419]](#footnote-1419) Added to this were plans for the Commonwealth to be replaced ‘by a modern British world system’ composed of several cooperating but sovereign nations including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Rhodesia. Such an alliance would also be open to the Republic of South Africa and Ireland. Rather audaciously, the NF also proposed to let ‘Afro-Asian countries’ join this new alliance providing that they were prepared to do so on subordinate terms.

# **Conclusion**

Powell’s anti-immigrant intervention, with which this chapter began, occurred a year into the life of the new National Front. In its wake, the NF claimed to be attracting members of all classes, ages and geographical locations throughout Britain. Despite this, they failed to capitalise further on the furore around Powell. Infighting raged within the NF from its inception. In the general election two years later, the ten NF candidates hoping to take advantage of Powell’s promotion of racial prejudice all lost their deposits.[[1420]](#footnote-1420)

In the ensuing recriminations, nine members of the NF Directorate, organised as the ‘Action Committee’, circulated a letter demanding Chesterton’s resignation as chairman.[[1421]](#footnote-1421) Among the criticisms of Chesterton in their letter, they indicted his bizarre and unhelpful attitude towards Powell. While sharing Powell’s stance on immigration, Chesterton was instantly mistrustful of Powell, criticising him for failing to ‘really attack the international financial system’.[[1422]](#footnote-1422) In the end, he decided that Powell was part of the Bilderberg Group conspiracy.[[1423]](#footnote-1423) The Action Committee worried that all this was alienating the NF from potential supporters.[[1424]](#footnote-1424) Tellingly, the Action Committee’s letter also attacked Chesterton’s ‘preoccupation with activities on behalf of South Africa at the expense of the more obvious domestic issues’. Chesterton angrily resigned in response. Though continually wracked by internal divisions, the NF became one of the largest Radical Right organisations in British political history by the 1970s. Despite occasionally attracting a worrying number of voters, electoral breakthrough proved elusive. Added to this, during the 1980s, NF activists found themselves outmanoeuvred on the issue of immigration by an increasingly hard-line Conservative Party.[[1425]](#footnote-1425)

The UM also failed to take advantage of Powellism, despite the fact that one of their activists, Dan Harmston, was actually at the centre of the pro-Powell protests by the Smithfield Market porters.[[1426]](#footnote-1426) Powell’s speech reportedly brought the UM new members and increased sales of their newspaper.[[1427]](#footnote-1427) However, the UM was undone by its activists’ persistent loyalty to their politically irrelevant ‘Leader’. Harmston argued that Powell’s speech merely validated and vindicated Mosley, proving that he, and not Powell, was the one man who could lead Britain.[[1428]](#footnote-1428) Harmston’s righteous optimism was misplaced. By this time, the UM was effectively moribund, its meetings having devolved into small, private gatherings where members met to discuss Mosley’s writings and listen to recordings of his speeches.[[1429]](#footnote-1429) Not to mention that their leader was across the Channel, busy writing his memoirs and working to ‘make [himself] a European’.[[1430]](#footnote-1430) Mosley had no plans to return but humbly declared that he was ‘always ready if my country needs me’. In 1968, Mosley also released his autobiography, *My Life*, and to coincide with its release, was the subject of an edition of *Panorama*; this marked the end of Mosley’s thirty-four year ban from the BBC.[[1431]](#footnote-1431)He spent his twilight years cultivating a reputation ‘as a benign elder statesman’ while privately ‘obsessively collecting newspaper cuttings about Enoch Powell’.[[1432]](#footnote-1432)

The feelings of the activists and ideologues of the British Radical Right towards the British Empire at its end were complex. That they found themselves enthusiastically in agreement with Enoch Powell in 1968 testifies to more than the existence of a shared set of racial prejudices towards Commonwealth immigrants. The Radical Right had been on a very similar ideological journey to Powell. They felt the Commonwealth had left Britain, to quote Mosley, with ‘all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of the old Empire’.[[1433]](#footnote-1433) Even though they felt burdened by the historical vestiges and former subjects of the British Empire, Radical Right activists still believed in imperial solutions to Britain’s problems. In June 1967, Jeffrey Hamm could still write of the bright future ahead of Britain in ‘the new Empire of Europe overseas’.[[1434]](#footnote-1434) In late 1968, *Candour*, now a NF-supporting journal, reprinted an address given by Ivor Benson to the Candour League of Southern Rhodesia. He spoke for a broad section of Radical Right opinion when he proclaimed that he still harboured hopes that the vital, imperial, masculinising energies of ‘[t]he White Man in his outposts on the periphery of the Western world’ would soon be communicated ‘back to Europe’.[[1435]](#footnote-1435) ‘[I]ndeed,’ he added optimistically, ‘I believe it is already happening.’

# Conclusion:

Empire, Europe and After

In the last few years of his life, A. K. Chesterton began work on another book, an assessment of the ‘British world’ after empire. By this time a new generation of activists less interested in southern Africa and more interested in Powellism had spurned Chesterton, leaving him an isolated yet influential ideologue on the Radical Right. Completed after his death in 1973 by his remaining devoted followers using material from his manuscripts, Chesterton’s gloomily titled *Facing the Abyss* emerged in 1976. In the book, Chesterton lamented the decline of the British Empire and the ‘colonisation’ of the British Isles through immigration. ‘[T]o pass through large areas of the Midlands’, he wrote ‘now suggests driving through Karachi or Bombay, while entire streets and suburbs in London, on both sides of the river, recalls the sights and sounds of the Caribbean.’[[1436]](#footnote-1436) The Empire had come home, but not quite in the way that he wanted.

Undeterred, Chesterton continued to call for a return to imperial values at home and abroad. Against the figure of ‘[t]he smug hippy types’, the student revolutionaries of the ‘New Left’, and the sinister ‘One-Worlders’, Chesterton invoked the figure of ‘Tommy Atkins’ keeping ‘watch and word’ over British colonies ‘to prevent… murder, rape and robbery by potential assailants’.[[1437]](#footnote-1437) He continued to salute ‘[t]he British pioneers who discovered new lands and their successors who followed to establish administration’.[[1438]](#footnote-1438) These ‘men of strength’, Chesterton added, ‘bore no trace of the present liberal malaise’ and worked to sustain little oases ‘free from corruption’ throughout the world.[[1439]](#footnote-1439) He called for a return to ‘the robust attitudes which made our people great’, and ‘unhesitatingly affirm[ed] the necessity for the eventual reconquest of those territories which, like the Union of South Africa, are the creations of European genius and therefore the moral possession of their creators.’[[1440]](#footnote-1440)

Few were as audacious as to claim that Britain should take back its lost colonial possessions. Even without Chesterton and with a renewed focus on domestic issues, the National Front continued to proclaim their belief ‘that Britain’s destiny’ lay ‘with the British Commonwealth’.[[1441]](#footnote-1441) Much as when they were first founded, their policies included plans to reform the Commonwealth ‘into a partnership of White countries with its main nucleus being the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand’. ‘Every effort’, they added, ‘should be made to persuade South Africa and Rhodesia to rejoin the Commonwealth, and to this end full support should be given to the maintenance of White leadership in those countries.’ Behind these plans, lay ambitions of ‘future super-power’ status.

Mosley’s remaining followers busied themselves campaigning for a ‘Yes’ vote in the belated 1975 referendum on Britain’s membership to the EEC. They argued that ‘[a] Britain “going it alone” would not stand an earthly chance’ in the world of the 1970s.[[1442]](#footnote-1442) Still harbouring delusions that Britain would play a leading role in any European union, UM members described the vote on EEC membership in imperial terms as:

… a challenge to the British people to stand on their feet and act like the Britons of other days. They did not tamely accept the harsh facts of an unkind world. They did not cower within their sea-girt shores in any timid spirit of Little England. They went out, and won a great Empire, and for three hundred years this country led the world.[[1443]](#footnote-1443)

In place of that now discarded Empire, *Action* called for Britain to vote ‘“Yes” to Europe’. They added, ‘let it ring through Europe on referendum day. Let it be a shout that shall even be heard in that far-off other world where the shades of great Englishmen rest today. Let Drake heart it, and Chatham, and Harry of Agincourt.’[[1444]](#footnote-1444) When it came to Britain’s place in the world, whether alongside the post-imperial Commonwealth or in a newly unified Europe, those on the Radical Right were still thinking imperially.

This thesis constitutes one of the first full-length studies of the British Radical Right’s relationship with imperialism.[[1445]](#footnote-1445) It has demonstrated that the British Radical Right, throughout the period between 1918 and 1968, developed in dialogue with trends in British politics and in British colonial policy in particular. The dominant vision expressed in British colonial policy during this time was one of Britain democratising its colonies, ushering them towards eventual dominion status and self-government. The actions of the British government frequently fell far short of these good intentions. Moreover, behind a lot of this rhetoric of liberation lay the desire to outflank anti-colonial nationalists and prolong the life of the British Empire. To this end, the concessions they offered stopped short of any guarantees of immediate or imminent independence.

Those on the Radical Right sought not to democratise Britain’s colonies but instead to imperialise the nation; that is, to transform the nation by imbuing the metropole with what they understood to be the violent, authoritarian, racist ethos of Britain’s colonial administrators, its imperial heroes, and white settlers. In doing so, they drew on the vast ideological and experiential reservoir of British imperialism. The stereotypes and ‘theories’ of British imperial discourses of race and masculinity, as well as its adherents’ first-hand experiences of colonial life, shaped the British Radical Right. By emulating the imperial ‘spirit’ still alive in the ‘uncorrupted’ British communities of the colonies and Dominions, Radical Right activists hoped to revive Britain and to repel the various threats menacing the Empire. They also hoped to repel an imagined Jewish conspiracy to destroy civilisation and establish world government. In their view, Jewish plotters were operating behind the scenes of British and imperial politics, pulling the strings of anti-colonial nationalists and instigating a policy of imperial and racial surrender. Even with the end of the British Empire, they continued to look for inspiration to their steadfast white supremacist ‘kith and kin’ in places like South Africa and Rhodesia.

My aim, in pursuing this line of argument, has been to highlight the British Radical Right’s connection to a broader British tradition. This ‘*discontinuous*’ tradition has been described by Schwarz as ‘ethnic populism’.[[1446]](#footnote-1446) He argues that throughout its history ‘recurrent’ manifestations of ‘ethnic populism’ have taken many forms, including the mobilisation of British supporters of Irish Unionism between 1912 and 1914, and, later, Powellism and elements of Thatcherism.[[1447]](#footnote-1447) ‘Ethnic populism’, as defined by Schwarz, consists of a movement of ‘the people’ against perceived ‘elite’ elements, usually located within the nation itself, as ‘ethnic traitors’ among the governing class. Such a movement aims to defend Britishness (racially defined) from the ‘enemies of the people’ within the British state. In the context of struggles over colonial rule in Ireland during the early twentieth century and in southern Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, ‘ethnic populist’ movements grew up in support of those out in the Empire, regarded as the authentically ‘British’ or ‘white’ people, against the decadent and duplicitous politicians in the metropole. Throughout this study, I have argued that the Radical Right represented a thwarted and overlooked manifestation of ‘ethnic populism’. From the 1920s to the 1960s, in their struggle against ‘enemies within’ residing in the British state and society, Radical Right activists looked to an ethos associated with the imperial frontier. Their rogue’s gallery consisted of weak and effete politicians, anti-colonial nationalists, and non-white immigrants. Above all, they sought to ‘save the “nation” from its rulers’, rulers they imagined in the shape of the ‘Elders of Zion’.

Inevitably, in dealing with political ideologies centred on a clash between ‘the people’ and a treacherous metropolitan ‘elite’, the political present was never far from my mind. I began the research for this project only a few months after the holding of the referendum on the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union in 2016. As I read of the plans of Mosley and others to revive ‘Greater Britain’, in contemporary politics, government plans for a post-Brexit British revival hinged on a return to Commonwealth trade; a scheme referred to by its detractors as ‘Empire 2.0’.[[1448]](#footnote-1448) The relationship between Brexit and imperial nostalgia has also been the subject of much journalistic criticism and scholarly speculation.[[1449]](#footnote-1449) To bring up Brexit here is not to suggest that Britain’s decision to leave the EU represents the posthumous triumph of the ideas of Mosley, Chesterton or Leese, or that such ideas in any way represented the intentions of the majority of those who voted to leave the EU. The resurfacing of this rhetoric is nevertheless striking. In addition, expressions of imperial nostalgia in the rhetoric and post-Brexit plans of leading politicians have coincided with other more unsettling phenomena. The three years following the referendum have seen an alarming rise in reported hate crimes and the rising popularity of antisemitic conspiracy theories on the Brexiteer right and on the Corbynite left.[[1450]](#footnote-1450) The danger, in Britain at least, lays not so much in possible political victories for divided and disorganised extreme right-wing groups in the near future but, rather, in the possibility that sinister ideas very close to those discussed in the preceding chapters have already made their way into the mainstream.

As Dan Stone wrote, ‘In history, the continuity of ideas is important.’[[1451]](#footnote-1451) It is only through further enquiry that we can establish how the ideas discussed above were ‘mainstreamed’.[[1452]](#footnote-1452) The British Radical Right did not cease to exist after 1968. As the quotes at the beginning of this conclusion indicate, the Empire and imperial ways of thinking continued to form a major part of the politics of the National Front and the rump of Mosley’s UM into the 1970s. While the latter fizzled out during the 1970s, the NF went on to disfigure the British political scene with its violent racism into the 1980s. This decade also represents an important period in the history of the anti-apartheid movement in Britain. The question of how the Radical Right’s relationship with the legacy of Empire continued to develop in the decade when Nelson Mandela became a household name is one historians have yet to answer. Elsewhere on the Radical Right, after resigning from the NF in 1980, John Tyndall founded his new British National Party in 1982.[[1453]](#footnote-1453) The BNP went on to become a significant and worrying force in British politics in the following decades, later winning two seats in the European Parliament in 2009. Scholars have yet to ascertain whether its activists continued to burn a candle for the British Empire in the era of the rise of ‘multiculturalism’ and as Britain relinquished its last crown colony in 1997.

Beyond the BNP, the relationship between the legacy of Empire and the forces of British ‘Euroscepticism’ constitutes a rich field of potential scholarly enquiry. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2018, Gary Younge observed:

Douglas Carswell, the sole UKIP MP during the referendum, was raised in Uganda; Arron Banks, who bankrolled UKIP and the xenophobic Leave.EU campaign, spent his childhood in South Africa, where his father ran sugar estates, as well as in Kenya, Ghana and Somalia; Henry Bolton, the current head of UKIP, was born and raised partly in Kenya; Robert Oxley, head of media for Vote Leave, has strong family ties to Zimbabwe. One can only speculate about how much impact these formative years had on their political outlook… but it would be odd to conclude they didn’t have any.[[1454]](#footnote-1454)

Younge’s speculations aside, a number of UKIP figures have had connections and associations over the years with the Springbok Club, an organisation that calls for ‘a return of “civilised rule” to South Africa’ and ‘flies the apartheid-era flag’.[[1455]](#footnote-1455)

Thomas Mair, the man who murdered the Labour MP Jo Cox several days before the EU referendum was held in June 2016, was allegedly among the Springbok Club’s ‘earliest subscribers and supporters’.[[1456]](#footnote-1456) A number of right-wing extremists in Britain and America (including the current President) have also adopted and amplified the conspiracy theories of South African extremists about a ‘genocide’ of white South African farmers.[[1457]](#footnote-1457) Images, symbols and flags associated with Rhodesia and apartheid-era South Africa have turned up on the apparel of right-wing extremist activists and terrorists on both sides of Atlantic.[[1458]](#footnote-1458) These various associations between the legacy of British imperialism, particularly in terms of colonial racism, and political extremism in the present urgently require further research.

Turning from politics in wider society to the politics of the academy, this project has much to offer in light of the Royal Historical Society’s (RHS) *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* report. The report’s findings suggested important linkages between a lack of university staff and students from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and ‘*overly narrow*’ curriculums lacking ‘diverse’, ‘difficult’ and ‘challenging’ histories.[[1459]](#footnote-1459) In my own personal experience, I have come across students frustrated with the narrowness of the history of British fascism, a history that, where it touches on ethnic minority groups goes no further than the Jewish opponents and victims of fascism in Britain and Europe. As such, with this project, I have endeavoured to ‘globalise’ the history of the British Radical Right, highlighting how this history is interconnected with that of India, Pakistan, the Caribbean, the USA, and a range of African nations. Like Catherine Hall, ‘I have become a historian of Britain who is convinced that, in order to understand the specificity of the national formation, we have to look outside it.’[[1460]](#footnote-1460) My hope is that this study will offer a foundation on which students hungry for a broader and more diverse curriculum can build.

In my efforts not only to ‘globalise’ but also to ‘decolonise’ the history of the British Radical Right, insisting on its broader connections to national and international history has been essential.[[1461]](#footnote-1461) This approach has also illuminated several opportunities for further research. Thinking back to the RHS’s report, I have also met students, the children and grandchildren of post-war Commonwealth migrants, interested in studying the racism that their relatives experienced from Radical Right groups and how they resisted it. The current historiography on British anti-fascism, which focuses largely on the Jewish community’s resistance to Mosley’s BUF and UM, has relatively little to offer these students.[[1462]](#footnote-1462) Black Britons organised and took action against the racist anti-immigration campaigns mounted by Radical Right groups in the 1950s and 1960s.[[1463]](#footnote-1463) Looking back further, there were active anti-fascists among the black anti-colonial activists of the 1920s and 1930s briefly discussed in Chapter 1.[[1464]](#footnote-1464) When it comes to their stories, illuminated in the course of this project, there is still much work to be done.

Throughout this project, I have sought to highlight and emphasise the British Radical Right’s connections to an imperial and transnational British history. In doing so, this study has demonstrated how the metropolitan reverberations of Empire shaped the Radical Right. Considering the British Radical Right in this way calls attention to the present political situation and the urgent need to increase our understanding of the lives and afterlives of poisonous ideas. In light of the experiences of black and ethnic minority students documented in the RHS’s *Race, Ethnicity & Equality* report, this study also set out to show that only by focusing on the interconnected nature of the past can we hope to write relevant, engaging and inclusive histories. The failure to do so in the past has resulted in histories that have presented the British Radical Right as an exotic species, a politically extreme curio, divorced from the wider history of race, Empire and decolonisation in Britain. In reality, as the previous chapters have shown, the Radical Right was all too British and imbricated with Empire.

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