

**THE LEFT-WING ROAD TO FASCISM**

**An Investigation of the Influence of 'Socialist' Ideas Upon the Political Ideology of  
the British Union of Fascists**

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## ABSTRACT

The primary conclusion drawn by the thesis is that the political ideology of the BUF clearly exhibited a left-wing strand which is described as the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'. This strand (whilst a travestic and heretical form of socialism) considered the BUF to be more radical and virile than the Labour movement and, alone amongst political movements, capable of bringing about a national revolution which would contain a socio-economic reorientation of the country along classic socialist lines - an end to poverty, the building of houses and job creation - with Trade Unions taking a central role, within the framework of the Corporate State, in the industrial decision making process.

It is not suggested that this strand was a self-contained concept within the BUF. The thesis has simply taken the heuristic step of grouping together these ideas in order to highlight the presence of an identifiable strand within the BUF's political ideology.

The thesis supports the school of academic thought which believes that fascism must be taken seriously as a genuine political ideology if it is to be understood. Fascism is viewed as an eclectic political ideology containing a clear potential (although one not necessarily realised) to exhibit a strand of thought which was at base a fascistic revision of socialism.

In regards to the methodology adopted by the thesis, the generic theories of fascism devised by Griffin, Sternhell, Eatwell and Payne, it was concluded that in the context of this thesis all proved capable of predicting the potential inherent in fascist ideology to grow from left-wing roots and exhibit a brand of fascist 'socialism'. In terms of the theories' use as research tools it is Griffin's which stands out, due to its combination of profundity and lucidity, which gives his theory an operational simplicity, flexibility and heuristic quality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, in particular my Mother and late Father.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns itself with a particular aspect of the history of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and its infamous leader Sir Oswald Mosley. In a recent study of the BUF in east London, the author highlighted the diverse and contradictory nature of Mosley fascism<sup>1</sup> suggesting that the 'classical' view of fascist movements being ideologically a vacuous product solely of the right and sociologically a movement of the *petit-bourgeois* was inaccurate and of little use if applied to the BUF. The Mosleyite movement was in actual fact made up of a number of different strands both ideologically and sociologically. This thesis is primarily concerned with one of those ideological strands: the socialist one.

This introduction falls neatly into three sections, which if taken as a whole form the methodological and contextual 'foundations' upon which the historical 'building' of this thesis's argument is built. These three sections are the central argument of the thesis, the methodological framework upon which it is built and the historical context to which it relates. The role of the introduction is envisaged as being to act, within the context of the thesis, as a constant reference point for the argument that will be developed in the main body of the thesis, thus ensuring that the academic premises and context upon which the thesis is based and its historical context are a constant backdrop to the development of the thesis's central argument.

### The Thesis's Central Argument

The subject of this dissertation, the left-wing roots of the BUF, is a complex and academically controversial one. The concept held of the ideological dimension within the BUF is of fundamental importance to any conception we hold of the BUF, and in consequence fascism in general.

The dissertation is essentially concerned with two points: firstly, the need to take fascist ideology seriously if the complex and contradictory phenomenon of fascism, in general, and any fascist movement, in particular, is to be fully understood; and secondly, the need to take the often overlooked left-wing roots of fascism (both ideologically and sociologically) seriously, both in terms of the strength of its presence in fascist ideology and sociology, and in terms of the fanaticism with which many left-wing fascists believed in their 'conception' of 'national' Socialism. The BUF and Mosleyite fascism it exhibited are an excellent case study for the examination of these two points due to the clear presence of a socialist strand within it.

The central historical phenomenon this thesis examines is the road which exists between socialism and fascism, two apparent political polar opposites. It deals with the

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<sup>1</sup>Linehan, T., *East London for Mosley* (London, 1996). The terms Mosley fascism and BUF will be used interchangeably in the thesis. The BUF will refer to the organisation, whilst Mosley fascism to the particular brand of fascism exhibited by the BUF.

question of how and why self-professed socialists became fascists in the context of the 1930s British fascist movement, the BUF. It seeks to establish the existence of a brand of fascist 'socialism' within the political ideology of the BUF and the subsequent mapping out of its salient features and the placement of it within the specific context of the BUF's political ideology and the general context of fascist ideology.

The thesis in no way attempts to suggest that fascism, as a whole, is a heretical brother of socialism (only one particular strand within certain forms of fascism), but that it is in fact a highly eclectic political ideology, there being many roads which lead to fascism, both on an ideological and on a personal level. One of these roads, as this thesis will demonstrate, is from the left. This thesis intends to demonstrate that, under the right circumstances, no one is immune from the virus of fascism, including its political polar opposite, a point proven by the case of the left-wing roots of the BUF.

What this thesis intends to highlight is that the apparent contradiction within fascist ideology, which is often referred to by the critics of the school of historical and social scientific thought which treats fascism as a genuine political ideology, is not caused by fascism's lack of ideological validity but the fact that at the level of ideas fascism is an attempted ideological and philosophical synthesis of socialism and nationalism, what Mosley described as the BUF's attempt to forge 'a creed of patriotism and revolution.'<sup>2</sup> This core synthesis means that it is possible to 'arrive' at fascism from both the right and the left of the political spectrum. This means that any particular fascist's vision of their individual 'version' of fascism will be imbued with either the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit from the right who dreams of the mythical rebirth of the nation, culturally (and racially) cleansed and united with a shared sense of destiny or the 'rational-radical' ethos of the left-wing recruit to fascism determined to create order out of *laissez faire* economic chaos, armed with an all-powerful central state and a national plan, within the pragmatically viable national arena, rather than within an unrealistic and utopian pan-national arena which mainstream socialism dreamed of. It must of course be understood that in just the same way that the two strands of thought are simultaneously present in fascist ideology, the two strands may well be simultaneously present in the 'worldview' of any one individual fascist (in, of course, varying degrees of sophistication and nuance). However, one or other of the two strands will inevitably be the more dominant, exerting the greater influence over the individual or movement. As a result, two fascists may well present differing views upon the same subject, thus creating a contradiction due not to an inherent ideological weakness within fascism, but to an inherent ideological complexity within fascism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Mosley, O., *Ten Points of Fascism* (London, 1934) p.2.

<sup>3</sup>See for example the differing attitudes to the question of feminism in Mosley fascism highlighted by Martin Durham. Durham makes the important point that 'the diversity within its ranks [the BUF] meant that what was basically an ambiguous appeal to women (and to men) could be interpreted in different ways' a diversity caused by 'the political background of some activists in the Conservative Party or the socialist movement'. 'Gender and the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27

It is important to note that this thesis is examining the question of the BUF's left-wing roots from an **ideological perspective not a sociological one**. In one way the thesis is almost dealing with a non-question because if looked at sociologically, the BUF membership prior to joining was predominantly right-wing or non-political. The BUF's failure to appeal to and attract the support of the British working-class, especially that of the unemployed, is quite ironic and reveals a contradiction at the heart of Mosley fascism. This is because whilst its ideological mythic core reveals Mosley fascism to be an essentially left-wing brand of fascism and the BUF a political movement whose principal *raison d'être* was to solve the problem of mass unemployment, one of the chief reasons for the failure of Mosley fascism's attempt to become a revolutionary mass-movement was its inability to attract support from the unemployed and working-class. Consequently it was the failure of its appeal to the British working-class which ensured the BUF's abject failure as a political or indeed any other kind of force.

The relationship between the socialist strand within Mosley fascism and three other salient features of the movement will also be discussed, namely: the right-wing ideological strand within Mosley fascism; the sociology of the BUF; and the movement's failure. This will thus ensure that having initially been identified and examined the socialist strand within Mosley fascism will be placed within the context of its immediate historical reality.

The principle analytical tool which will be used to achieve this aim will be generic theories of fascism, in particular those conceived by Roger Griffin and Zeev Sternhell (although the theories of Roger Eatwell and Stanley Payne will also be noted for comparative purposes). This thesis will, as a consequence of this, be of further academic significance as it will act as a case study of a particular form of fascism to highlight the accuracy of these generic theories and ascertain their heuristic usefulness as academic tools (in at least the case of Mosley fascism).

### **The Methodological Framework**

A key feature of the thesis's analysis is the methodological framework upon which it is based, the intellectual bedrock of the thesis, namely the definitions of ideology, socialism and most importantly fascism, employed in its writing.

#### **Ideology**

A precise definition of ideology could quite easily occupy an entire thesis by itself. In this particular case what is aimed for is a heuristically useful one. A strong school of historical thought considers it misleading to imbue fascism with the kind of intellectual coherence implicit in accepting fascism as a genuine political ideology. This

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(1992) p.527. See also Durham's chapter 'Women and the British Union of Fascists' in Kushner, T., & Lunn, K., (eds) *The Politics of Marginality* (London, 1990) pp.3-18.

school prefers to deny fascism any kind of generic ideological coherency, simply dismissing its political tracts as cynical propaganda.

It is a basic contention of this thesis that this view is wrong. This school of thought has been misled into dismissing fascist political writing as cynical propaganda due to the fact that ideology and propaganda are closely interlinked and distinguishing between the two of them is difficult.

For fascism in general, and in the case of Mosley fascism in particular, although it is important to remember that fascist political writings were always at least partially propagandistic in intent, fascist propaganda was often characterised by a very high ideological content. The distinction between propaganda and ideology in the case of fascism has been too much belaboured and as a consequence has often obscured rather than illuminated the nature of fascist political thought. Barbara Lane's comment concerning Nazism illustrates the point for fascism in general:

"Even the most "elevated" or philosophical tract was intended as "propagandistic". On the other hand, even the most crude and emotion-laden broadside, directed to a small interest group or to an ephemeral issue, usually promised at the same time large-scale political and cultural change. This latter kind of promise has traditionally been regarded by historians as the function of ideology".<sup>4</sup>

Consequently if one is to avoid the mistake of viewing fascist ideology in general, and Mosley fascism specifically, as nothing more than cynical propaganda and thus reducing the source of fascism's appeal to would be fascists 'into something like an epidemic of aberrant behaviour caused by an unknown virus',<sup>5</sup> how is a contentious term such as ideology to be defined?

The approach to ideology adopted in this thesis owes its inspiration to the generic theory of fascism devised by Roger Griffin, a theory discussed in greater detail later in the introduction. For an academic exercise such as this a true definition of the term ideology is not actually required, what is needed is one that is heuristically useful. Thus for the purposes of this thesis ideology is viewed as a political creed's underlying mythic core of values, beliefs and goals, (which are not necessarily an intellectually cogent set of ideas), considered 'in terms of their implications for the maintenance or improvement of the socio-political status quo, or for its overthrow and replacement by an alternative state system'.<sup>6</sup> This mythic core or political myth refers not to something fictitious or imaginary, but to the irrational mainspring of an ideology, the vision of the ideal society, which acts as the inspirational power which inspires and mobilises an

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<sup>4</sup>Lane, B. and Rupp, L., *Nazi Ideology before 1933* (Manchester, 1978) *ibid.*, p.xxv.

<sup>5</sup>Griffin, R., 'Was Nazism Fascist?', *Modern History Review*, (September 1993) p.17.

<sup>6</sup>Griffin, R., 'Integration and Identification: Conflicting Aspects of the Human Need for Self-Transcendence Within Ideological Communities', *History of European Ideas*, 18 (1994) p.11. See also Matthew Coupland's very interesting article, 'The Blackshirted Utopians', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.255-72, which treats the BUF's political ideology as a form of political utopianism.



ideology's activists and supporters in the desire for, and drive towards, what they conceive as the ideal society.

Thus by examining ideology this way, fascism can be defined not in terms of its style of politics (that is its external features as a movement (i.e. the use of violence, paramilitary formations or the ritualistic style of its supporters behaviour) or as a regime (i.e. totalitarianism or charismatic leadership)), but in terms of its core themes and ideas as an ideology. In this way fascism can be seen in common with other political ideologies such as liberalism, communism and conservatism, to be driven by a certain vision or myth of the ideal society which each ideology seeks to create.

This reflects both a 'simple' dictionary definition of ideology as the 'scheme of ideas at basis of some political or economic theory'<sup>7</sup> and a proposed definition of the concept of ideology in a recently established journal, dedicated 'to an understanding of the nature of political thought',<sup>8</sup> as being 'empirically ascertainable sets of political beliefs, opinions and attitudes, consciously-held and articulated at accessible levels of coherence.'<sup>9</sup>

An approach taken such as this consequently ensures that theory remains subordinate to the primary task of understanding and explaining a 'real' phenomenon, such as Mosley fascism, the purpose for which it is devised.

When taking an approach such as this towards ideology, and then applying it to a creed such as fascism, there is the danger of over-intellectualising and over-rationalising a political phenomenon which was/is a particularly irrational form of political expression and radicalism (though quite 'rational' for a fascist). The approach taken in this thesis does not simply take fascist propaganda at face value or ignore the irrational, brutal nature of the violence perpetuated in its name. A key aim of the thesis is to give due importance to the role ideology played within the fascism phenomenon, as a key argument in this thesis is that at least certain forms of fascism contained a strong ideological facet. The thesis will highlight the need to take this ideological facet seriously if the fascist phenomenon is to be fully understood, whilst simultaneously locating the role played by ideology, within fascism, in such a way as to avoid overstating its importance.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Coulson, J., (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary* (Oxford, 1981) p.418.

<sup>8</sup>Freeden, M., 'Editorial', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1 (1996) p.5.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p.7.

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting at this point that the considerable differences between fascism's promises as a creed and the realities of the two fascist regimes that have existed (and as a consequence the arguable differences between Mosley fascism's promises and the would-be realities of a 'Greater Britain') does not weaken the case for viewing fascism as a legitimate political ideology. They are simply the reflection of the 'mythic' nature of its, and any ideology's, core set of ideals and the consequential potential failing it shares with all political movements.

## Socialism

As regards to the concept of socialism, a precise definition is equally elusive. As one leading commentator points out, 'there is disagreement amongst both academic commentators and political supporters and opponents over the identity or existence of [the] 'essential' elements'<sup>11</sup> which make up socialism and over the relative importance of each. Quite simply there are many different interpretations of what socialism actually is.<sup>12</sup>

However if once again we seek a heuristically useful definition for this term, to help serve the enlightening purposes of this thesis, we may turn to a typical dictionary definition of socialism to throw some initial light upon the subject. One such definition is that socialism is a 'political and economic principle [which believes] that community as a whole should have ownership and control of all means of productions and distribution (opp.[osite of] capitalism and individualism)'.<sup>13</sup> This desire to create a community which believes in common ownership, instead of private ownership, with the resources at its disposal being used for the benefit of all, is at the basis of socialism. Such a definition is perhaps more simplistically and lucidly expressed as 'the conscious control of and direction of human resources for human needs'.<sup>14</sup> This definition of socialism is taken from Oswald Mosley's autobiography. Thus for the purposes of this thesis any political writing which exhibits such beliefs will be considered at least socialistic in its inspiration and intention.

There is one specific theoretical problem concerned with defining socialism which perhaps does need to be addressed by any work concerned with such a topic as the fascist 'socialism' espoused within a particular fascist political ideology. This is the question of the distinction between 'socialism' and other forms of anti-capitalist, but not actually socialist, ideological outpourings and rhetoric.

The question of the distinction between socialist ideas and mere anti-capitalist sentiment is of some relevance to this thesis because of the fact that in most 'classical' interpretations of fascism and its various manifestations, what little attention that has been given to this phenomenon has tended to be of a kind which dismisses fascist 'socialism' as mere hollow anti-capitalist rhetoric with no true connection with socialism at all. This thesis sets out an argument which clearly disputes this, suggesting that the political ideology of the BUF clearly exhibited a left-wing strand which is described as the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'. This strand (whilst a travestic and heretical form of socialism) considered the BUF to be more radical and virile than the Labour

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<sup>11</sup>Barker, R., 'Socialism' in Miller, D., (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford, 1987) p.485.

<sup>12</sup>A newspaper article by the current Labour Party leader, Tony Blair, on this issue illustrates the vagueness with which socialism can be defined. See 'The Flavour of Success' *The Guardian* (6/7/95) p.19.

<sup>13</sup>Coulson, *The Oxford*, p.805.

<sup>14</sup>Mosley, O., *My Life* (London, 1968) p.172.

movement and, alone amongst political movements, capable of bringing about a national revolution which would contain a socio-economic reorientation of the country along classic socialist lines - an end to poverty, the building of houses and job creation - with Trade Unions taking a central role, within the framework of the Corporate State, in the industrial decision making process. This argument is then used to support the school of academic thought which believes that fascism is best viewed as an eclectic political ideology containing a clear potential (although one not necessarily realised) to exhibit a strand of thought which was at base a fascistic revision of socialism.

It is argued that this fascistic revision differs from mere anti-capitalist rhetoric and sentiment in the following ways. Firstly, a key way in which socialism differs from anti-capitalism is that socialism is an ideology which seeks to build a new society based upon a new construction of the socio-economic order, whether this eventual new society is achieved by revolutionary or evolutionary methods. Anti-capitalism is simply concerned with railing against the changes caused by the emergence of capitalism in an attempt to preserve aspects of an older pre-capitalist ordering of society and its economy. Socialism is concerned with building the new, but mere anti-capitalism is concerned with simply preserving the old. Fascist 'socialism' is clearly more than just mere anti-capitalist rhetoric because it is concerned with the creation of a new order within the nation and not simply preserving or returning to a previous socio-economic ordering of the nation.

This fascistic revision of socialism differs from mere anti-capitalist rhetoric and sentiment in a further way. Socialism is a genuine ideology with a clear, concrete and coherent programme of change and aims. It has a clear vision of the ideal society it is seeking to build. Mere anti-capitalist rhetoric on the other hand lacks this ideological dimension, being characterised by a tendency to produce unclear and incoherent ideas and thoughts. This anti-capitalist rhetoric is tentative, 'woolly' and often informed by romanticised reminiscences of a bygone age. As this thesis will demonstrate the brand of fascist 'socialism' espoused by the BUF's political ideology is characterised by a high degree of programmatic coherence and sets of clear and considered concrete aims. Therefore it is quite distinct in its own characteristics from a primary characteristic of mere anti-capitalist rhetoric - lack of clarity.

This fascistic revision of socialism differs from mere anti-capitalist rhetoric and sentiment in one further key way. A primary concern of genuine socialism is the working class and its socio-economic grievances. A strong characteristic of non-socialist anti-capitalism is that it tends to be the expression of what might be termed petty-bourgeois panic in the face of the perceived twin threat of large-scale capitalism (such as large department stores) from above and organised labour (the unionised industrial working-class) from below. It is this perceived threat which triggers a response of anti-capitalist rhetoric and sentiment. Fascist 'socialism' whilst not being an expression of specifically working-class radicalism, due to the organic brand of

nationalism it adheres to, is equally not a mere expression of lower middle-class resentment either for two reasons. Firstly, again because of the organic view of the nation fascism adheres to, its vision of a reborn nation includes all national community members regardless of class. Secondly, because in the specific case of the BUF these left-wing fascists are not distressed petty bourgeoisie but working-class disillusioned socialists. Consequently, the primary social groups non-socialist anti-capitalist rhetoric is concerned with are small businessmen, artisans and small farmers, whereas for socialism the main social group it is concerned with is the working class. Fascism as an ideology is concerned with all social groups as it attempts to forge a new social ordering of the nation. Within this overall concern for all social groups within the nation fascist 'socialism' is particularly concerned to produce a programme which directly addresses the socio-economic needs and worries of the working-class. Therefore, once again the socialist influence over the ideas espoused within the BUF's political ideology can clearly be seen as a genuine one and not simply the ill-defined influence of mere anti-capitalist ideological sentiment which has little in common with socialism other than an ill-defined anti-capitalist rhetoric and yearning.

Therefore, at base anti-capitalist (but non-socialist) rhetoric is concerned merely with defending a past old order from the change brought by the rise of capitalism in all social and economic relations. Socialism is, however, concerned with building a new society based upon new ideas concerning the nature of social and economic relations. It is this crucial difference which reveals the accuracy of viewing the brand of fascist 'socialism' espoused by the political ideology of the BUF as a fascistic revision of socialism rather than a mere variant of non-socialist anti-capitalist rhetoric, as it has tended to be in classical interpretations of Mosley's movement.

This revision of socialism is concerned with the role of the nation in the assault upon capitalism and how the concepts of equality, liberty and freedom are to be reconceived within a organic conception of nation and society. However, the genuine desire to sweep away the capitalist system and replace it with a new socio-economic reordering of society is still very much a central part of the fascist 'socialist' vision of a new nation.

The view that fascism contained a brand of socialism was widespread in fascist ideology. The French fascist Georges Valois, for example, defined fascism by using the equation 'nationalism + socialism = fascism.'<sup>15</sup> Many fascist ideologues, despite a professed hostility to Marxism, still claimed that fascism was a form of socialism - a 'national' socialism. The consideration and investigation of such claims have often been overlooked in much of the literature on fascism, instead its socialistic aspects have been conveniently ignored, an oversight this thesis seeks to redress.

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<sup>15</sup>Sternhell, Z., 'Fascist Ideology' in Lacqueur, W., (ed.) *Fascism: A Readers Guide* (Harmondsworth, 1979) p.333.

It must of course be noted that this socialist strand is only one strand of several within fascist 'thought' and is by no means the most dominant. The 'socialist' strand in Mosley fascism's political ideology this thesis seeks to explore is not socialist in a 'conventional' sense of the term. It is a quasi form of socialism, a potential travesty of the original concept of socialism. What this thesis examines is the conception of socialism which the BUF (or at least a large section of it) adhered to and which led them to consider themselves to be the advocates of the 'true' socialism, that is 'national' socialism. The chief ideological development which distinguishes the fascist heretic from its humanistic brother is the fact that fascist 'socialism' replaces the working-class with the concept of the nation as the focus of, and vehicle for, its revolutionary assault upon capitalism. An assault carried out not in the name of one class but of one, united nation as capitalism was opposed by fascism because its inherent economic philosophy, practice and internationalism threatened the unity and identity of the nation. From a liberal or socialist perspective such 'ideological ball juggling' may seem like arrant nonsense, but it should be remembered that as one commentator suggests: 'the history of ideas tolerates no general law suggesting that either influence or conscious sophistication stands directly proportionate to worth...prevalent error may be not infrequently more accurately representative of an age than ultimately more profitable ideas.'<sup>16</sup> Thus the potential for even 'sophisticated' minds from the left to be swayed by the idea of a synthesis of nationalism and socialism which would lead to 'true' socialism clearly exists.

The fascist conception of socialism, as portrayed in both fascist ideology and propaganda, represents a prominent theme in fascist thought, as well as being of central importance when examining the fascist courtship of the working-class, a theme examined in this thesis.

### **Fascism**

A clear definition of what is meant by fascism in the context of this thesis is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, as there is probably no more debased or contentious word in the political dictionary than fascism, a situation which has left it severely compromised in its value as an analytical tool for political scientists and historians, any scholarly work concerned with an area within the scope of fascist studies should start with a clear elucidation of the particular methodological approach to fascism it intends to take. Secondly, as part of this thesis's remit is to act as a case study of Mosley fascism to highlight the accuracy of these generic theories and ascertain their heuristic usefulness as academic tools, it would seem appropriate to outline the respective generic theories of fascism in the introduction to the main body of the thesis.

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<sup>16</sup>Biddiss, M., *The Age of the Masses* (Harmondsworth, 1977) p.20.

The work of the generic theorists of fascism to be used in the thesis, Griffin, Sternhell, Eatwell and Payne, belong to the same 'school' of historical thought when considering their views on fascist ideology. Historical opinion on fascist ideology can roughly be divided into three main schools of thought: firstly, the one to which Griffin, Sternhell, Eatwell and Payne belong,<sup>17</sup> which takes fascism seriously as a political ideology treating it as a specific type of political creed on a par with liberalism or socialism (although it must be borne in mind that within this 'school' of thought there is much divergence of opinion); secondly, the Marxist school of thought which views fascism as a product of capitalism in the death throes of its own terminal decline; thirdly, a particularly strong school of historical thought which has tended to dismiss fascism as a genuine political ideology.

The latter two schools share the common belief that fascism lacked, and indeed still lacks, any clear ideological basis other than nihilistic violence and cynical political opportunism and that to concentrate on fascism's ideology, when fascism is without any major theorists like Locke or Marx, is to artificially impose an intellectual coherence upon 'an ill-sorted hodge-podge of ideas'<sup>18</sup> which comprise the ideological fallacy which is, for them, fascism. The imbuing of fascism with an artificial intellectual coherency is considered particularly perverse, for these schools of thought, as fascism denounced party-political programmes, celebrated violence, irrational values and the superiority of action over thought. Thus to take fascist ideology seriously is deemed to risk neglecting the enormous human suffering caused by the translation of turgid fascist ideas into action and political reality. In short social scientists and historians who take fascist ideology seriously 'have constructed a unitary ideology of 'fascism' which at best is a retrospective creation and at worst no more than an arbitrary construct.'<sup>19</sup>

However for the school of thought to which Griffin *et al* belonged fascism represents a genuine ideological attempt to find an alternative to communism, conservatism, liberalism and capitalism. It is for them a 'new' ideology aimed at co-ordinating 'all the energies of the nation, including conservative and capitalist ones, in a radically new type of society, characterised by new political, economic and cultural structures and a new ethos'.<sup>20</sup> Griffin defends taking fascism seriously at the level of ideological intent by suggesting that:

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<sup>17</sup>In his latest work Griffin identifies this particular 'school' of historical thought as the source of what he claims to be an emerging new consensus on the nature of fascism within fascist studies. A belief not necessarily shared by all academics working in this particular field. See Griffin, R., *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London, 1998).

<sup>18</sup>Trevor-Roper, H., 'The Phenomenon of Fascism' in Woolf, S., (ed.) *European Fascism* (London, 1970) p.19.

<sup>19</sup>Conway, M., 'The Extreme Right in Inter-War Francophone Belgium: Explanations of a Failure', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26 (1996) p.268.

<sup>20</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.48.

"No matter how gratuitously destructive its goals and methods appear...and how many of its recruits are motivated by cynical or base motives, the commitment of a significant percentage of fascist activists is intensely idealistic, rooted as it is in a profound urge to transcend the existing state of society and find a radical cure to the alleged evils which afflict it. One of the cultural preconditions for fascism may be a diffuse sense of cultural pessimism or 'despair', but only in the sense that it encourages fascists to believe their movement is a panacea to the ills of the age, tackling the underlying causes of the decay of healthy values through the creation of radically new type of national order led by a heroic elite. Fascism thus embodies a manic charge of cultural optimism."<sup>21</sup>

If it is thus accepted that there are various levels of commitment to an ideology, then the closer to a movement's activist core one is, the greater the intellectual lucidity with which the core ideas of that ideology will be expressed, while the closer one is to its less committed 'edges', the more simplistic and propagandistic its message becomes. So in the case of fascism, as in all ideologies, its ideas will be expressed in varying degrees of sophistication or simplification. Thus by concentrating on an ideology's core ideas, although an accurate picture may be created of that ideology's 'true' aims, the picture can appear over-sophisticated when compared to many of the activities carried out in that ideology's name.

### Roger Griffin

Arguably the premier theorist of generic fascism, at the cutting edge of the 'assault' upon the classical 'vast system of bestial, nordic, nonsense'<sup>22</sup> view of fascist ideology and in the case of this thesis the producer of the most useful methodological tool, is Roger Griffin. For these reasons it is to Griffin's theory I will turn first.

The basis for Griffin's definition of fascism is the desire for regeneration. Laying at the core of fascist ideology, for Griffin, is a desire to create 'a new national community through the radical overhaul of existing political, economic, ideological and social structures'.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective fascism differs from other political manifestations of the right in that it seeks the total transformation of the status quo and is thus not just anti-parliamentarian or anti-Marxist, but also anti-conservative. Fascism is thus always keen to present itself as a third way between capitalism and Marxism. Griffin succinctly defines fascism as:

'A genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.'<sup>24</sup>

For Griffin fascism, in common with other political ideologies, is driven by a certain vision or myth of the ideal society which each ideology seeks to create. This vision acts as the inspirational force which mobilises an ideology's activists in the desire

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<sup>21</sup>ibid., p.47.

<sup>22</sup>Trevor-Roper, H.R., *The Last Days of Hitler* (London, 1968) p.55.

<sup>23</sup>Griffin, *The Nature*, p.117.

<sup>24</sup>ibid., p.44.

for, and drive towards their ideal society. The mythic vision or core of fascism, in Griffin's definition, is the desire for regeneration, or palingenesis.

As a political myth palingenesis (literally rebirth or renewal) refers to the vision of a radically new beginning which follows a period of destruction or perceived dissolution. From a fascist viewpoint it refers to the conviction that a process of national rebirth or regeneration has become essential if a prolonged period of national decline, caused by a period of social and cultural decadence which has undermined national unity and national culture, is to be arrested and the nation is to be reborn anew: healthier, stronger and united as an organic whole.

In this context what is meant by decadence and conceived by fascism as decadent are, for fascists, the degenerate and bankrupt ideas of conservatism, liberalism and socialism which play host to the decadent forces of individualism, materialism, class-conflict, military weakness, the loss of racial vitality, moral anarchy, internationalism, the parasitism of the traditional elites and cosmopolitanism. All of which undermine the health and unity of the nation and the national community. The perceived national community, which fascism believes it belongs to and serves, is deemed in need of a strong state to protect it from the 'anarchic' forces of decadence, if the nation's distinctive culture and unity is to be preserved and a sense of uniqueness and common destiny amongst all the ethnic members of that particular nation is to be generated and thus the nation, reunited and healthy, will once again be able to fulfil its historical destiny. This means that fascism is inevitably chauvinistic, xenophobic and racist.

It is worth noting at this point that the virulence or object of fascist racism will vary from country to country depending on the prior existence of a tradition of xenophobic obsessions and racial persecution within a particular national culture. The racism exhibited by a fascist movement will reflect the cultural environment in which it develops, incorporating as an integral part of its palingenetic vision, and as an instrument of mass-mobilisation, existing prejudices. An example of this would be the difference between Nazism and Italian fascism regarding anti-Semitism. Whereas Nazism contained a extremely virulent strand of anti-Semitism, fascism in Italy until 1938 totally lacked such a strand and in fact appealed to the Jewish population in Italy to such an extent that the percentage of Jews in the Fascist movement, both at the moment of Mussolini's seizure of power and during much of its period as a regime, exceeded the percentage of Jews in the Italian population at large.

Returning once more to Griffin's palingenetic fascist ideal type, or definitional minimum, nationalism is an ideology whose effective driving force is the sense of belonging to and serving a perceived national community, the nationalism espoused by fascism is an extreme form of this - ultra-nationalism. Within ultra-nationalism the intensity of the feeling of belonging to one's homeland and people expresses itself in a desire to generate a sense of uniqueness and common destiny amongst all the ethnic



members of the particular nation. This particular strand of nationalism is linked to the populism referred to in the definition. Populism here refers to the belief in the need for and desire to embrace all members of the national/ethnic community as, for fascists, the nation is viewed as an organic whole. That is the nation is seen as the highest racial, historical, spiritual and organic entity within humanity, membership of the national community being the only true bond between one man and another. Thus if a nation fails to integrate all its members within itself and within a common sense of purpose, the nation is no longer an organic whole and thus incapable of fulfilling its historic destiny and potential. Thus all fascist movements aim to mobilise the entire nation.

As Griffin's generic theory of fascism is based upon (as it should be being by definition an ideal type construct) fascism's core vehicular vision and accompanying beliefs, the theory not only allows for but predicts the considerable heterogeneity and complexity that fascism exhibits in its various manifestations from nation to nation at the level of specific content and surface rationale. This variety in surface content from one fascist manifestation to the next has caused much of the confusion surrounding the attempts to create a fascist definitional minimum. This characteristic surface heterogeneity is due to fascism being essentially a nationalistic creed and thus each individual fascist growth reflects the national culture in which it germinates, grows, flourishes or dies. Thus in the way that each nation is unique, each fascism is unique in terms of the immediate problems it perceives and national myths of historical mission it champions and feeds off.

This surface heterogeneity is also the 'product' of the eclectic nature of fascist ideology, whose mythic core of palingenetic ultra-nationalism lent itself to many different interpretations and visions of how national renewal was to be achieved. Hence Griffin's comment upon Italian Fascism that:

"Given this pluralism, so strikingly at odds with the monolithic uniformity of what is generally imagined to constitute totalitarianism, it is not surprising if the legion attempts by enthusiastic Fascist intellectuals to formulate Fascist doctrines on a vast range of political, social, cultural, economic, and philosophical issues produced a welter of conflicting ideas...Fascism is best approached ideologically as a loose alliance of schemes for national renewal."<sup>25</sup>

This comment applies to all fascist phenomena and has clear resonances for this thesis and its subject of a single thread within the tapestry of Mosley fascism.

The theory Griffin has produced is an extremely compelling one. Indeed it is the principal one this thesis, in many ways, adopts for its purposes of investigating the left-wing roots of the political ideology of the BUF. So, particularly in the light of this fact it is important to perhaps briefly consider at this point some of the potential

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<sup>25</sup>Griffin, R., *Fascism* (Oxford, 1995) p.18.

weaknesses of Griffin's theory, both generally and in specific relation to its application to Mosley fascism.

There are four areas of possible weakness in Griffin's work. Firstly, the central focus upon 'palingenesis' is not without potential pitfalls. Secondly, Griffin's use of the term 'populism' in relation to fascism is problematic. Thirdly, the complete absence of any reference to the economic dimension within fascist ideological thinking and writing weakens the theory's universal applicability to all fascist manifestations. Fourthly, the emphasis upon myths is a further potential problem.

Griffin's focus upon 'palingenesis' as the central tenet of his definitional minimum is in some respects a quite ingenuous intellectual development. However, the problems it creates for his generic theory are potentially threefold. Firstly, the idea of rebirth, a recurrent theme in many cultures, particularly western culture, is a philosophically banal concept. This banality does seem slightly out of place at the centre of a generic theory which places considerable importance upon the serious nature of fascist ideology. Secondly, the idea of 'rebirth' is clearly present in many right-wing individuals, movements and regimes which were not truly fascist (especially if judged by Griffin's 'fascist minimum'). Thirdly, the focus upon 'palingenesis' does risk confusing the division within fascism between ideology and propaganda. The use of palingenetic imagery by fascists was often for the purposes of creating the impression of legitimacy and familiarity with a particular target audience. Further to this, the idea of 'rebirth' allowed fascist propaganda to confuse the issue of whether fascism truly sought the establishment of a revolutionary new socio-economic ordering of society or simply wished for the restoration of a previously lost old order.

Griffin's use of the term 'populism' in relation to fascism is equally with its potential problems. 'Populism' is a potentially elusive term to define. If it is taken to mean the celebration of a particular 'way of life' epitomised by one particular group in society - such as the 'working man' - then there is a potential problem with its application to fascism. This is because fascism, particular as Griffin defines it, was intent upon creating a new society, a 'new' man and a new form of civic and social culture and therefore its 'championing' of an aspect of a culture it hoped to 'sweep' away in its 'phoenix-like' rebirth of the nation is potentially an uneasy 'companion' of such an aspiration. If 'populism' is taken to mean the use of ideas which have a certain popularity with the masses in order to gain their support then there is a further potential problem with its application to fascism. This is because fascism has tended to seek to lead the masses rather than follow them (many fascists indeed have quite openly despised the masses) in an attempt to simply use them for the purposes of building a vehicle (a mass movement) with which to attempt to force their way into power. Furthermore fascism has tended to attempt to 'nationalise the masses' rather than celebrate their virtues and ideas.

The complete absence of any reference to the economic dimension within fascist ideological thinking and writing weakens the universal applicability to all fascist manifestations of Griffin's theory. This is of particular importance and relevance to the topic of this thesis because it is fascists such as Mosley and fascisms such as the BUF who show that fascism clearly can produce coherent and lucid economic programmes for reform, reorganisation and revolutionary change in the nature of economic management. For manifestations of fascism such as Mosley fascism the economy was central to their thinking and their plans for the radical overhaul of the existing socio-economic order. For this thesis's investigation of the influence of socialist ideas over the political ideology of the BUF, the BUF's ideas and considerations over economic matters will form a central tenet of its argument concerning the seriousness of its ideas and the clear existence of socialist influence over them. Therefore this is for this thesis the greatest weakness in Griffin's work.

Although that is not to say that such economic formulations and proposals are universal of all fascist manifestations and consequently an economic dimension is an essential prerequisite of any 'fascist minimum'. It simply means that any 'fascist minimum' should be able to predict this potential for fascisms to produce coherent ideas considering economic issues.

In examining the 'rational-radical' ethos within the BUF, as personified by what the thesis terms the fascist 'socialism' espoused by the BUF's political ideology, this thesis is confronted with one further problem with Griffin's generic theory. This is the emphasis placed upon myths by Griffin in his palingenetic definitional minimum. Such an emphasis upon the mythical, and therefore irrational, side of fascism clearly runs the risk of playing down the rational side of fascism (such as the economic dimension in fascist thought which has just been discussed) which is the primary focus of this thesis. Fascism did have very strong tendencies within it which had very clear concerns centred upon the desire to develop concrete fascist doctrine about socio-economic organization. The BUF's ideas and literature concerning the corporate state represents an excellent example of this tendency. The authors of such fascist ideas, such as Mosley and Alexander Raven Thomson, were also strongly influenced by conservative revolutionary ideas, with strong mythic notions about race and nation, but this does not deny the clear influence upon their thought of a left-wing inspired 'rational-radical' ethos concerned primarily with the economic and political spheres. It should also be remembered that much 'conservative revolutionary' thinking whilst saturated in mythic concepts considered itself deeply scientific (and therefore quite rational). A prime example of this is fascist views and ideas concerning race.

However despite these four areas of weakness in Griffin's work, his theory still works well as an ideal type, that is for the academic purpose of the categorisation and explanation of social, economic and political phenomena, or more simply what is and what is not a particular phenomenon, in this case what is and what is not fascist. This

theory, not surprisingly clearly labels the BUF as fascist, but more importantly reveals the potentiality within fascism to contain a number of different ideological threads, including a socialist one. This palingenetic theory represents an initial illumination upon the road travelled between socialism and fascism by the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'.

### Zeev Sternhell

Whilst Griffin is perhaps the premier theorist of the concept of generic fascism, any serious study of the BUF's political ideology needs to apply Sternhell's generic theory of fascism to the area of study covered. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, because Sternhell himself, through the 'lens' of his theory, views the BUF as an archetypal fascist movement in terms of the brand of fascist ideology it exhibited, and views Oswald Mosley as an archetypal fascist ideologue and leader. In the various articles and books where Sternhell has elaborated his generic theory of fascism,<sup>26</sup> he has consistently used the example of the BUF and Mosley to illustrate certain key points of his theory. This is quite an interesting fact as Sternhell's main work has been upon French fascism rather than specifically generic theories of fascism or Mosley's BUF, and yet Mosley fascism clearly fits Sternhell's theory. Secondly, because Sternhell's work is very much at the 'cutting-edge' of fascist studies,<sup>27</sup> if the BUF is to be placed correctly in its 'generic' context and the key points of its ideological makeup brought into sharper focus, in terms of those aspects which make it a fascist movement and those which make it a 'uniquely' British affair, then the historian of British fascism should at some point examine the BUF through the interpretative framework of Sternhell's seminal theory.

Similarly to Griffin Sternhell identifies at the heart of fascist ideology the 'desire for reaction and regeneration that were simultaneously spiritual and physical, moral, social and political', culminating in an all encompassing 'revolt against decadence.'<sup>28</sup> However Sternhell's fascist definitional minimum is at base a single synthesis, at the heart of fascist ideology, between integral, 'organic nationalism and anti-Marxist socialism'.<sup>29</sup> In his definition of fascism he produced for a political dictionary Sternhell elaborates upon this suggesting that fascism was a revolutionary movement whose ideological base:

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<sup>26</sup>In particular Sternhell's, 'Fascist ideology' in Laqueur, W., (ed.) *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth, 1979) pp.325-406, *Neither Right Nor Left* (Berkeley, 1986), 'Fascism' in Miller, D., (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford, 1987) pp.37/8 and *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton, 1994).

<sup>27</sup>A recent reviewer's comments illustrates Sternhell's importance. 'Sternhell's study [*The Birth of Fascist Ideology*] marked by the intellectual rigour, lucidity and single-mindedness that characterize his work as whole, helps to move us away from the more banal explanations of the fascist appeal. He conclusively demonstrates that there was a fascist ideology which needs to be taken seriously.' Wistrich, R., 'The Birth of Fascism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3/6/94, p.28.

<sup>28</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.356/7.

<sup>29</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascism', p.148.

"Was a rejection of materialism - liberalism, democracy and Marxism being regarded simply as different aspects of the same materialist evil. It was this revolt against materialism which, from the beginning of the century, allowed a convergence of anti-liberal and anti-bourgeois nationalism and a variety of socialism which, while rejecting Marxism, remained revolutionary. This form of socialism was also, by definition, anti-liberal and anti-bourgeois, and its opposition to historical materialism made it the natural ally of radical nationalism. The fascist synthesis symbolised the rejection of a political culture inherited from the eighteenth century and the French Revolution, and it aimed at laying the foundations of a new civilization. Only a new communal and anti-individualistic civilization was deemed capable of assuring the permanence of a human collectivity in which all strata and all classes of society would be perfectly integrated, and the natural framework for such harmonious, organic collectivity was held to be the nation - a nation enjoying a moral unity which liberalism and Marxism, both agents of warfare and disunity, could never provide."<sup>30</sup>

One of the most interesting and controversial aspects of Sternhell's approach is his insistence that the left-wing roots of fascism were essential in the development of fascism as an 'idea'.<sup>31</sup> Sternhell is convinced that without taking seriously the socialist part of the 'equation', 'fascist ideology can hardly be understood'.<sup>32</sup>

The context within which this strand of socialism developed from Marxism to fascism was the immense changes in the capitalist economy of Europe at the turn of the century which caused changes in the structure of bourgeois society and the lives of the working-class. Changes which Marxism had not expected or predicted. These changes were basically two-fold: improvements in the standard of living and the incorporation of the working-class via Trade Unions, political parties, universal suffrage and parliamentarianism into the liberal democracy of bourgeois society. For this strand of socialist thought the working-class had been effectively 'neutered' and was no longer capable of fulfilling the revolutionary role Marxist theory had given it. Consequently the exponents of this strand of socialist thought felt that there was no option but to 'abandon Marxism and to replace the proletariat with the great rising force: the nation'<sup>33</sup> as the vehicle by which to overthrow capitalism. This process was accelerated by the First World War and the disintegration of 'the notion of class' under its impact. Many 'socialists' became 'aware of the immense reservoirs of energy contained in the idea of the nation',<sup>34</sup> an idea that emerged from the trenches and the unity of national efforts to

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<sup>30</sup>ibid., p.148.

<sup>31</sup>Roger Griffin recently criticised the tendency of this aspect of Sternhell's approach:

"To imply that the 'socialist' component of generic fascism grew out of the revision of revolutionary socialism in an anti-Marxist, anti-materialist 'nationalist' direction. This is simply untrue of the genesis of a number of movements widely associated with generic fascism, for example the British Union of Fascists...Though all these movements sought to create an idiosyncratic form of post-liberal 'national socialism', they drew predominantly on rightist brands of ultra-nationalism."

Griffin, R., Review of Sternhell, Z., *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton, 1994), *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25 (1995) p.478/9.

<sup>32</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascism', p.148.

<sup>33</sup>ibid., p.148.

<sup>34</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.353.

secure victory to embody the fundamental values of society - a unity of common purpose based upon common heritage and destiny.

It was through this process that one arrives at the socialism which became fascist and which had developed, in Sternhell's words, 'into a socialism for all, for the whole collectivity - a socialism that opposes capitalism not in the name of a single class but in the name of the entire nation'<sup>35</sup> and which, in Griffin's words, presented 'the rejuvenation of the national community as transcending class conflict, destroying traditional hierarchy, expunging parasitism, rewarding all productive members of the new nation, and harnessing the energies of capitalism and technology in a new order in which they cease to be exploitative and enslaving'.<sup>36</sup>

This development meant that a synthesis between this form of socialism and a particular strand of nationalism became possible. This particular strand was a radical nationalism that 'set itself against the old world of the conservatives, against the aristocrats and bourgeois, and against social injustice', and most importantly had an organic view of the nation believing 'that the nation would be truly whole only when the proletariat became an integral part of it'.<sup>37</sup> This was because the nation was seen as the highest racial, historical, spiritual and organic entity within humanity, membership of the nation being seen as the only true bond between one man and another. Thus if a nation failed to integrate all of its members within itself and within a common sense of purpose, then the nation would no longer be an organic whole and would thus be incapable of fulfilling its potential and historic destiny.

Sternhell suggests that within the context of this synthesis 'nationalism and socialism work to mutual advantage. Nationalism is to some extent fed from the social concern, and the social concern gains considerable impetus from the enhanced value acquired by all citizens in conditions of community euphoria'.<sup>38</sup> Thus this synthesis 'aimed to be the vehicle of unity and unanimity...against the capitalist citadel, against a society fragmented into antagonistic classes, against the national decadence and the disintegration of a whole civilization'.<sup>39</sup> For Sternhell these two converging strands of socialism and nationalism, and consequently fascism, were deadly serious in their anti-capitalism because:

"Preserving the integrity of the nation and solving the social question means destroying the dictatorship of money. Wild capitalism must be replaced by the classic tools of national solidarity: a controlled economy and corporate organization topped by a strong state, a decision-making apparatus that represents the victory of politics over economics. The fascist state, creator of all political and social life and of all spiritual value, would of course be the undisputed master of the economy and of social relations...Setting out as it did

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<sup>35</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.271.

<sup>36</sup>Griffin, *Fascism*, p.6.

<sup>37</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.271.

<sup>38</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.377.

<sup>39</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.272.

to create a new civilization, a new type of human being and a totally new way of life, fascism could not conceive of any sphere of human activity remaining immune from intervention by the state."<sup>40</sup>

The First World War produced the 'final crystallization' of fascist ideology by providing proof 'of the capacity of nationalism to mobilize the masses...[and] the tremendous power of the modern state,'<sup>41</sup> if central economic planning was used to mobilize the national economy and private property in the service of the nation. The war also illustrated the individual's willingness for self-sacrifice in the service of the national community, the superficiality of the idea of internationalism, how 'easily all strata of society could be mobilized in the service of the state'<sup>42</sup> and the ease with which a dictatorship could replace democracy.

Like Griffin's, Sternhell's approach to fascist ideology clearly establishes the potentiality for fascism to have socialistically radical appeal and rhetoric. This should perhaps be of little surprise because Kele's comments concerning Nazism, is as Griffin and Sternhell have illustrated, appropriate for fascism, in general, as well:

"Most Nazis were committed to winning the workers for national socialism. They could do nothing else. If they had spurned the support of the working class and had written it off as lost to "international Marxism" they would have destroyed the hardest kernel of Nazi ideology: that national socialism in power would embrace all classes within the German Volk."<sup>43</sup>

There are faults to be found in Sternhell's theory,<sup>44</sup> not least the minimising of its racist and xenophobic aspects. Sternhell, for example does not, interestingly, consider Nazism fascist, arguing that 'Nazism cannot be treated as a mere variant of fascism: [as] its emphasis on biological determinism rules out all efforts to deal with it as such.'<sup>45</sup> Such a weakness is particularly relevant in the case of the BUF where the ignoring of the ideological and policy aspects of its anti-Semitism would seriously weaken any final analysis of Mosley fascism.

However the potential for Sternhell's theory to act as an interpretative academic 'tool' in any study of the fascist ideology espoused by the BUF remains. It would seem clear that Sternhell's is a theory which provides the historian with an excellent conceptual framework from which to begin any such investigation.

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<sup>40</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascism', p.150.

<sup>41</sup>ibid., p.149.

<sup>42</sup>ibid., p.149.

<sup>43</sup>Kele, M., *Nazis and Workers* (North Carolina, 1972) p.30.

<sup>44</sup>The previously mentioned review by Griffin of Sternhell's *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, (*Journal of Contemporary History*, 25 (1995) see footnote 31), provides an excellent critique of Sternhell's theory. Nevertheless the fact that the BUF, under Mosley's influence, produced some of the most lucid and rationally argued work of any fascist movement fits in well with Sternhell's 'rational' approach.

<sup>45</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.328.

## Roger Eatwell

The generic theories of Stanley Payne and first Roger Eatwell will now be briefly considered for comparison to the approach taken by Griffin and Sternhell.

Eatwell's theory<sup>46</sup> is of interest to the student of Mosley fascism because, like Mosley himself, Eatwell views fascism as an ideological synthesis of right and left, a feature of his theory he obviously shares with Sternhell. However Eatwell differs in his belief that the synthesis is more complex than a single core one, fascist ideology being in fact based upon a series of syntheses - or more precisely fascist ideology is 'spectral-syncretic'. The four key syntheses Eatwell identifies are: firstly, between a conservative view of man constrained by nature and the left-wing belief in the need to, and the possibility of, creating a 'new' man; secondly, between a commitment to science and an anti-rationalist and vitalistic belief in the power of the 'will'; thirdly, between the faith and service of Christianity and the heroism of Classical thought; and fourthly, between a belief in private property, from the right, and a belief in welfarism, from the left.

Whilst undoubtedly an accurate summation, Eatwell has produced in two subsequent pieces of work a slightly less complex definition<sup>47</sup> based upon a similar understanding of the ideological syncretic driving force behind fascism, which allows for easier methodological handling as a tool for historical analysis.

This simplified version is based upon the two fascist ideas concerning community and socio-economic policy. For Eatwell fascism was primarily concerned with saving the nation whether that involved rebuilding it from scattered enclaves of ethnic pockets or sectional division, or reviving it from its decline into torpor and decadence (Eatwell's equivalent of palingenetic myth). The fascist concept of the nation differed from other currents of right-wing thinking in that it sought to overcome all internal national divisions and forge a shared national conscience and sense of purpose. Eatwell terms this view of the nation as holistic (his equivalent of the organic conception of the nation). So not only did fascism seek national revival and reintegration at the historical and political level but in also seeking the integration of all ethnic members into the national community, sought it at the socio-economic level. Consequently fascism sought to launch a social revolution which was neither right nor left, capitalist nor communist but a third way between the two. Eatwell is keen to stress the fact that this third way between right and left does not mean that fascism is a form of centrism or conservatism, but a brand of radical politics.

Consequently Eatwell succinctly views and defines fascism as:

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<sup>46</sup>See Roger Eatwell's 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4 (1992) pp.161-94 and 'Fascism' in Eatwell, R. & Wright, A., (eds) *Contemporary Political Ideologies* (London, 1993) pp.169-91.

<sup>47</sup>See Roger Eatwell's *Fascism: A History* (London, 1996) Chapter 1 and 'On Defining the 'Fascist Minimum': The Centrality of Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1 (1996) p.303-19.



"an ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based upon a *holistic-national radical Third Way*, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichean demonisation of its enemies."<sup>48</sup>

Eatwell's generic theory covers much of the same ground as Griffin's and Sternhell's, reinforcing much of their respective theories. All three clearly view fascism as eclectic, and inspired by a broad range of political beliefs, whilst desiring collectivist style solutions to politico-cultural and socio-economic problems in a national context. This is of obvious value to the approach taken by, and subject area of, this thesis. Even Eatwell's reservations about detailed programmes and the stress upon action over ideology could be argued are reflected in the BUF. This identification of style is a common element shared between Eatwell and Payne.

### Stanley Payne

Stanley Payne's approach to the construction of a generic theory fascism is worthy of comparative note due to his differing approach.<sup>49</sup> Payne adopts a typological style in his definition of fascism. This basically consists of a checklist, against which the features of any particular movement can be 'ticked off', and thus its relationship to generic fascism ascertained. This checklist falls into three parts. The first refers to fascist negations, namely, liberalism, communism and conservatism. The second examines fascism's ideology and goals, namely the creation of a new authoritarian nationalist state which oversees a fully integrated organic nation at both the historical, politico-cultural and socio-economic levels, and which pursues an aggressive foreign policy. The third part considers fascism's style and organization, namely the use of violence and paramilitary formations, the ritualistic style of its supporters' behaviour, the totalitarian and charismatic nature of its leadership and its championing of youth and physical health. Payne reduced this checklist to a one sentence definition of fascism as being: 'a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the *führerprinzip*, positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normalize war and/or the military values.'<sup>50</sup>

The end product is a rather cumbersome analytical tool with one major strength and one major weakness. Its major strength is that it correctly identifies the revolutionary and organic nature of the nationalism espoused by fascism. Its weakness is the fact that Payne falls for the red herring of using fascism's style of politics as a basic denominator in his definitional minimum. This is arguably a mistake for the reasons already outlined in

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<sup>48</sup>Eatwell, 'On Defining', p.313.

<sup>49</sup>Payne, S., *A History of Fascism 1914-45* (London, 1995) p.7.

<sup>50</sup>ibid., p.14.

the section pertaining to ideology. Fascism's style of politics, an obsession with militaristic, grandiose and uniformed displays, is merely a reflection of fascism's core ideological drive and desire for an integral, united, indeed 'uniform', nation. Fascism's quasi-militaristic style of politics was not, as so often mistakenly claimed, a defining element of fascism but a simple reflection of its ideological basis because as Sternhell correctly observes:

"fascism was a vision of a coherent and reunited people, and it was for this reason that it placed such emphasis on march-pasts, parades and uniforms, on a whole communal liturgy where deliberation and discussion were supplanted by songs and torches, by the cult of physical strength, violence and brutality."<sup>51</sup>

So whilst Payne's theory is perhaps the weakest of the four I have considered it still, in common with the theories of Griffin, Sternhell and Eatwell, clearly reveals fascism's diverse ideological roots and its potentiality for containing a clear and coherent socialist strand within any particular fascist ideological manifestation.

The theories also reveal Mosley and the BUF to be archetypal fascist ideologue and movement. This should be of no surprise as the BUF was never anything other than a political movement and never a regime. Consequently its ideological core ideas are not obscured by the realities of any period of power.<sup>52</sup> However it is interesting to note that both Eatwell and Payne have subtly adapted their definitions to include aspects of Griffin's palingenetic mythic core idea.

There are two principal underlying methodological themes I will derive from the above generic theories to examine and determine the nature of the BUF's brand of 'socialism'. These methodological approaches will help 'shape' and 'form' the thesis's assault upon the body of thought reluctant to accept the facts that fascism was both a genuine political ideology and that fascist ideology contained distinct left-wing roots.

These two underlying methodological themes are: firstly, the application of the aspect of Sternhell's generic theory of fascism which may be termed 'socialist disillusionment with socialism' (that is reformist socialism's compromise with parliamentarianism and capitalism) to the British context and the case of the BUF; and secondly, the application of Griffin's palingenetic theory, and its contained 'loss of faith in the present system' aspect, to the British context and the case of the BUF in order to enhance the explanation of why former (travestic) socialists adopted fascism as their political creed and cause, and why this left-wing brand of fascism (fascist 'socialism') is still fascist generically. The two will be combined to help illustrate that the core to any socialist to fascist development is that the all-pervading desire for a new socio-economic ordering of the nation is held simultaneously with the loss of faith in the ability of 'pure'

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<sup>51</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascism', p.150.

<sup>52</sup>See footnote 10.

socialism (which has 'sold-out' to reformist parliamentarianism) to achieve such a goal. This ideological position thus leaves this strand of leftist thought, and the individuals who held such views, susceptible to the lure of 'regenerative ultra-nationalism' as the only means by which to achieve a new social and economic ordering of society. It will be argued that this is the case within the BUF. Further to this the question of why fascism and not communism was chosen by these individuals will also be highlighted in the developing course of the thesis.

Thus in effect the generic theory of fascism adopted in this thesis will be a hybrid version of Griffin's and Sternhell's. This adapted syncretic version using Sternhell to indicate the negative reasons for the turn to fascism (disillusionment) and Griffin to indicate the positive ones, whether left-wing (social, economic and political (action) renewal) or right-wing (cultural, spiritual and political (leadership) renewal).

### **The Historical Context**

Before turning to the main body of the study it is necessary to set the thesis in its historical context. Initially a brief overview of the BUF's history will be outlined, then the importance of a series of key historical phenomena (which helped to shape and create the unique environment of the inter-war period in Britain) to the environment in which the BUF lived and died will be highlighted, before finally the interpretations, of relevance to this thesis, held of Mosley fascism by historians and social scientists will be reviewed.

These key historical phenomena are the impact of the First World War, the 'great depression', the rise of fascism on the continent and the failure of the first two Labour governments to bring about socialism and contemporary racism.

The primary object of doing this is to ensure particular attention will be paid to placing the BUF in its particular historical context, ensuring that the particular social, economic, political and cultural environment in which it was incubated, germinated, grew, withered and died is well illuminated. The movement's fortunes will be related to the 'shifting sands' of the historical landscape which surrounded it. This process will obviously occur in the natural process of the writing of the thesis, but an initial highlighting of the 'historical context' in the introduction will give this process a secure foundation.

This will ensure that the picture of Mosley fascism this thesis will paint will seek to explain the phenomenon with reference first to the values and social norms of the inter-war period rather than a superimposed set of values from the 1990s. The object of this not being to 'justify' but to correctly understand the causes and reasons behind the actions of the individuals who are the subject of this study, by 'painting' their historical backcloth. This is of central importance because historical context is everything, a point illustrated by the fact that such a contemporary, basic, British, 1990s human right as the 'vote' was not extended to women until the 1920s (under a split franchise).

### The History of the BUF

The British Union of Fascists was launched in October 1932 from the ashes of the ill-fated New Party and the minuscule British Fascists grouplet. This launch was accompanied with the publication of Mosley's *The Greater Britain*, the central text of Mosley fascism, circa 1930s, describing the *raison d'être* for, political intent of and political programme of the BUF.

The movement grew steadily over the next year, to a membership of around 10,000 to 15,000, before enjoying a surge of support to reach a peak membership of 50,000 in the summer of 1934. The cause of this surge in support was the decision of the press baron Lord Rothermere to use his newspapers, in particular the *Daily Mail*, to back the BUF in January 1934.

The BUF however suffered a double body blow in June 1934, as a result of which it lost the support of both Lord Rothermere and the 'Rothermere fascists', the consequential decline in its membership being one from which the BUF never recovered. Firstly, there was considerable violence between Blackshirts and anti-fascists at a BUF mass rally held at the Olympia Hall in London on June 7th. Although the blame as to who caused the violence to flare up is debatable, crucially the BUF was tarnished, as a result of the disturbances, in the public eye as a violent, paramilitary movement, a close cousin of the fascist movements on the continent. Mosley had always been keen to stress that the fascism was not an alien phenomenon, but in the form of the BUF was British. However the second body blow to the BUF in June merely reinforced the image of fascism as being lawless, violent, bloodthirsty and un-British. This second blow was the Röhm Purge, or Night of the Long Knives, on June 30th, when the leadership of the SA, and other potential Nazi opponents, were bloodily purged. Rightly or wrongly Mosley was firmly 'tarred with the same brush' as continental fascism.

As a result of the events of June 1934 the Government sent out covert instructions to the mass media asking them to deny the BUF the oxygen of publicity. Lord Rothermere, also under pressure from obviously alarmed Jewish advertisers, was only too happy to oblige announcing his withdrawal of support for the movement.

Lord Rothermere had originally supported the BUF not because he was a fascist but because, holding the classic conservative view of fascism, he had hoped to use it for his own ends as a form of right-wing pressure group to exert influence upon the National Government. The events of June 1934 had undermined this strategy.<sup>53</sup>

As a consequence of this loss of support with its resultant effect upon membership, which plummeted to an eventual low of 5,000 by October 1935, the BUF underwent a reorganisation and began to concentrate its recruitment drive in the East End of London. The BUF's East End campaign was dominated by the issue of

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<sup>53</sup>For a recent consideration of the influence of the Olympia rally upon the BUF see Martin Pugh's 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate', *The Historical Journal*, 41 (1998) pp.529-42. Pugh suggests that it was of less significance than is commonly considered.

anti-semitism, with clashes between Blackshirts and the local Jewish population and left-wing anti-fascists becoming increasingly commonplace. The 'Battle of Cable Street' in 1936 is the best known of these clashes, although it was predominantly a clash between anti-fascists and the police. This event is popularly remembered as a great victory over fascism, but its immediate effect was in fact an increase in BUF recruitment in east London. However the 'Battle of Cable Street' had the adverse effect upon the BUF of spurring the Government into action and the passing of the Public Order Act, which banned political uniforms and gave the police wide ranging powers to ban demonstrations and marches. This was a direct blow against the BUF's methods of political activity and recruitment.

It was also in the East-End that the BUF tested itself out electorally in a small number of elections for the London County Council in 1937. The most successful BUF candidate won 23% of the vote in Bethnal Green, but compared to its rival on the political extremes, the Communist Party who actually had MPs elected locally (albeit as a result of being electorally in league with the Labour Party (LP) in the 1920s and then as a result of the victorious, euphoric and pro-Soviet Union atmosphere in which the 1945 general election was held) it was electorally minuscule.

Also in 1937, with funds from business, the membership and Italy drying up, the BUF suffered a financial crisis which required the movement to undertake a major reorganisation and cost cutting exercise in order to resolve it. The financial crisis, and consequential loss of paid posts, partly led to the resignation from the BUF of two of its leading members and speakers William Joyce and John Beckett. These resignations were yet another blow to the movement and part of a series of resignations from the BUF throughout its existence, Dr Robert Forgan and A.K. Chesterton being two others. These resignations were an indication of the internal divisions and personality clashes within the movement which severely weakened its bid for rapid growth and reflected the autocratic style of leadership the BUF adopted, personified in Mosley, a style which led to much friction. The BUF's weak position was constantly being undermined by the loss of popular (within the movement) and committed activists such as these four.

With the mounting threat of European war in the late 1930s the BUF began to increasingly concentrate upon its peace campaign which sought to ensure Britain would not become involved in continental conflict but instead by putting 'Britain First' would defend British interests only. This campaign aided the BUF's membership recovery, to 25,000 by 1940, but little else, the outbreak of war sealing the BUF's fate. In the summer of 1940, against the background of a growing fear of an imminent German invasion and a consequential fifth column scare, 747 BUF members were arrested, being deemed a security threat to the nation, and interned. This was effectively the end for the BUF, internment being a bitter and ironic pill to swallow for men and women who considered themselves above all British arch-patriots.

The ultimate reasons for the BUF's abject failure as a political movement of any consequence are cultural, political and economic. There was a deep-seated cultural resistance to a political movement deemed alien and un-British, while the political space required by any new political movement to grow and flourish simply did not exist, the British electoral system effectively securing the loyalty of the British electorate for the British state. The kind of severe economic crisis required to crack this politico-cultural system enough to allow the BUF to emerge as a genuine political contender simply never occurred in Britain on a wide enough or deep enough scale.<sup>54</sup>

### Unique Historical Phenomenon:

#### The First World War

The First World War is of importance to a clearer understanding of Mosley fascism for three reasons. Firstly, the massive social, economic, political, cultural and psychological dislocative impact the war had on all its participants helped to shape the following two decades. This held true whether those participants were nations, enduring economic depression and the causes of an 'inevitable' second Great War,<sup>55</sup> or whether they were individuals suffering from the traumatic effects of war which resulted in, according to one commentator, 'many individual examples of conversions to socialism or away from religious and other orthodoxies.'<sup>56</sup> One example of such a conversion was Mosley.

Secondly, the First World War produced the 'final crystallization' of fascist ideology by showing: the capacity of nationalism to mobilize the masses; the tremendous power of the modern state if central economic planning was used to mobilize the national economy and private property and harness it in the service of the nation; the individual's willingness for self-sacrifice in the service of the national community; the superficiality of the idea of internationalism; how easily all sections and factions within society could be mobilized in the service of the state and the nation; and the ease with which a dictatorship could replace democracy. This socio-economic and politico-cultural re-ordering of society became referred to as 'war socialism'.

Thirdly, the war inspired Mosley's move into politics and all his political thinking. For a complete understanding of Mosley it is essential to place at centre stage Mosley's position as a member of the 'war-generation'. It was his desire to see the building of a 'Land Fit for Heroes' which led him into politics. While it was the points of contact between the 'war-generation' and the LP (namely a desire for a new political, social and economic order) which led to Mosley joining it, it was the points of departure between

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<sup>54</sup>For a full analysis of the reasons for the failure of Mosley fascism see chapter 6.

<sup>55</sup>See Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes: A History of the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London, 1995).

<sup>56</sup>Marwick, A., 'The Impact of the First World War on British Society', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3 (1968) p.63.

the two (the LP's sectarianism and its inert, puritanical and unheroic political style) which led to him leaving it and to his attempt to find a political solution in fascism. The reason Mosley joined the LP was because he considered it at the time to be a movement of action, radicalism and change. When he became disillusioned with the LP he sought this movement of action, radicalism and change in fascism. Mosley's war experience also influenced the pacifist aspect of the BUF's anti-war policy and the Peace Campaign of the late 1930s.

### **The Great Depression**

The economic depression helped to shape and create the unique environment of the inter-war period in Britain in two ways. Firstly the depression produced a socio-economic dislocation within all affected nations which cracked the edifice of existing socio-economic and politico-cultural institutions and ties through high unemployment and faltering economies. The result of this dislocation was the creation of the kind of environment in which political extremism can grow. It thus created the political and social space fascism required if it were to break onto the national political stage.

Secondly, the depression revealed capitalism and liberal democracy to be fallible systems, vulnerable to the 'electric shocks' of the global economy and incapable of dealing with the realities of the modern world. Alternatives to capitalism based upon strong centralised states, strong leadership and central planning gained in popularity, particularly in the light of Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia being seemingly immune to the depression. Thus a window of opportunity presented itself for fascism at the level of ideas. Sternhell correctly suggests that:

"It was the Great Depression of 1929 that led socialists like Mosley...to take a public stand in favour of protectionism and national exclusivism. The economic crisis turned the socialists' gaze inwards towards the nation and towards the idea of a strong, powerful state, efficient and authoritarian, which would be capable of ensuring order and reconciling the divergent interests within the community...[what was needed was a government empowered to produce] order, authority, and decision, according to Sir Oswald."<sup>57</sup>

### **The Rise of Fascism**

The rise of fascism on the continent produced a 'living' alternative to both capitalism and 'unpatriotic' communism - a Third Way. It must be remembered that the 1920s and 1930s belong to a pre-Auschwitz era, the full horrors of fascism put into practice had not yet been revealed by history. Thus fascism was admired in many sections of British society, Mosley's conversion to fascism being confirmed by the favourable impression he gained of it on a tour of Italy.

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<sup>57</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.378.

The impact upon Mosley's political ideas of his intellectual roots also paved the way for his eventual conversion to fascism rather than communism, following his ultimate disillusionment with both the political system and the LP. The ideological roots of Mosley's own rebellion against the existing political system was a reflection of the idiosyncratic influences upon his philosophical thinking. Mosley's inspiration came not from within the British empirical or more universal traditions, but from the tradition of 'Heroic Vitalism' and the writers Fredrick Nietzsche, George Bernard Shaw and Oswald Spengler. The 'cult of the superman' and the disparaging of intellect without action coincided with the charismatic Mosley's own self-image of the thought-deed man and the saviour of his nation in its hour of greatest need. Mosley's thirst for action at almost any cost over ideology, made him susceptible to the lure of fascism's claims to be a heroically vitalistic movement, defying national decline and the will of history.

### **The Labour Party**

The failure of the first ever two Labour governments to bring about socialism, in 1924 and 1929-31, resulted in much disillusionment amongst socialists. In some circles the LP was viewed as having sold-out to capitalism and embraced the existing political and economic system. This alleged embourgeoisement of the LP led to a search for radical alternatives to the parliamentary path to socialism by some socialists. The LP's failure also helped to fuel the disillusionment with socialism, which led to some socialists converting to fascism because fascism seemed to offer the radical alternative these people sought. Obviously this search led to many socialists turning to communism, but as Sternhell correctly points out 'it is not by accident that British fascism was born of well-founded reformist impatience among bona fide socialists.'<sup>58</sup> These socialists sought in fascism the strong central state capable of imposing economic planning upon society and through strong leadership orchestrate a social unity which would overcome the problems of the modern world.

### **Racism**

Social attitudes were vastly different sixty years ago, especially in regard to such issues as race. British society was latently racist and the political left was not immune from such attitudes. Winter, in an article highlighting the phenomenon of 'socialist racialism', makes the very important point, in relationship to the fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, that:

"Their views on race amply demonstrate how ineffectively their socialism provided an antidote to the common prejudices of their day. Indeed, their racialism may be seen as the natural outcome both of the paternalism with which they approached the British working

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<sup>58</sup>ibid., p.378.



class as well as 'lower races', and of their failure to make of the concept of equality an integral part of their socialist position."<sup>59</sup>

Winter is also careful to point out that 'the Webbs were not alone in Britain in voicing this racialism of the left'.<sup>60</sup> Paternal racism was a common link between the left and the right, while eugenics was a source of interest, in terms of its potential social benefits, across the political spectrum. This point is further borne out by a recent newspaper article which claimed that the Liberal economist John Maynard Keynes held overtly racist views.<sup>61</sup>

Mosley, and his fellow fascists, were racist in at least the sense that they were a reflection and product of a society which was latently racist. Thus, as Skidelsky correctly points out:

"One point is very important to stress. Although Mosley had no previous history of personal anti-Semitism, like most English people of the time he thought about Jews in a stereotyped way - and the stereotypes were unflattering. Once he found himself in conflict, for the first time, with actual Jews, the stereotypes were activated; as a result, he responded to Jewish acts with surplus hostility. On the one hand, he saw East London Jews as unpleasant foreigners, with no right to interfere in 'British' business. On the other hand, he was predisposed to believe the anti-Semitic myth of a Jewish financial power which held governments in thrall."<sup>62</sup>

It was thus easy for Mosley and other socialists, without any previous history of racism (or more precisely in the case of the BUF anti-Semitism), to develop a form of racism as a result of this social 'context'. Mosley's latent racism was further exacerbated by his chauvinistic belief in Britain's imperial and civilizing mission, which whilst recognizing the racially diverse nature of Britain's imperial destiny 'also came to uphold a narrowly racist and anti-Semitic concept of British citizenship',<sup>63</sup> a belief which Mosley held with vast swathes of the non-fascist British population.

### **The Academic Historical Context of the Thesis: General Interpretations of the BUF**

This is a brief review of the general academic opinion upon the BUF which is of relevance to this thesis.

Robert Skidelsky, Mosley's autobiographer, is of considerable interest because he considered that it was 'Mosley's refusal to choose between left and right in a situation of mounting social crisis' which led to his drift to fascism. Mosley sought a political vehicle through which to unite the nation in a 'mission' of 'regeneration' which would achieve Mosley's dream of building a 'Land Fit for Heroes'.<sup>64</sup> This was a dream which Skidelsky

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<sup>59</sup>Winter, J., 'The Webbs and the non-white world: a case of socialist racialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (1974) p.192.

<sup>60</sup>ibid., p.191.

<sup>61</sup>See *The Guardian* (31/1/97) p.1.

<sup>62</sup>Skidelsky, R., *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), all quotes from the 1990 edition, p.390.

<sup>63</sup>Griffin, *Fascism*, p.172.

<sup>64</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.312.

believes Mosley remained faithful to in his thought and actions throughout his political life because, for Skidelsky, 'Oswald Mosley saw his mission in politics as to create a policy and political framework capable of expressing the ideals of the war generation'<sup>65</sup> which were to make sure 'that war must never happen again, that we must build a better land for our companions who still lived, that we must conceive a nobler world in memory of those who died.'<sup>66</sup> Skidelsky identifies as the socialist aspect of Mosley's dream Mosley's belief 'that an unmanaged capitalist economy was bound to collapse into depression; he rejected the individualist mode of economics for the ideal of social harmony he had found in the First World War, and which he tried to recreate through the reconciling notion of the 'corporate state'.<sup>67</sup>

David Lewis makes three very interesting observations concerning the BUF. Firstly, Lewis views fascism, and thus the BUF, as an extremism of the centre, the BUF being 'conceived as the result of an attempt by Mosley to appeal to the political centre'<sup>68</sup> and the regime Mosley sought to build being 'controlled by the sectional interests of neither right nor left, but based upon a common desire to reconstruct the ailing British economy.'<sup>69</sup> Secondly, Lewis believes that fascism's intrinsic strength was its 'appeal to a national consensus based upon a classless spiritual and patriotic unity,<sup>70</sup> but its consequential 'position at the centre of the political spectrum meant that [although] it had a vast breadth of potential appeal, to both right and left', it led to internal ideological contradictions, the result of 'attempting to synthesise demands, which were in essence incompatible.'<sup>71</sup> Thirdly, Lewis, interestingly, does not consider fascism alien to Britain because although 'both as a movement and as an ideology fascism incorporated aspects of its style from abroad' it nevertheless 'developed from British roots to fulfil British needs.'<sup>72</sup>

For Richard Thurlow Mosley, a man of considerable intellect, was 'woefully misused in British fascism...his self-imposed political isolation mean[ing] that the cause of economic and political radicalism was seriously weakened.'<sup>73</sup> Thurlow highlights Mosley's genuine desire for 'a revolutionary transformation of the political system',<sup>74</sup> a desire mapped out by the 'revolutionary economic and political programme of *The Greater Britain*' which would 'revolutionize the social fabric of the nation.'<sup>75</sup> This conviction Mosley held, that a revolutionary overhaul of Britain was necessary,

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<sup>65</sup>Skidelsky, R., 'Great Britain' in *Fascism in Europe* (London, 1981) p.281.

<sup>66</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.71.

<sup>67</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.4/5.

<sup>68</sup>Lewis, D., *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester, 1987) p.257.

<sup>69</sup>ibid., p.258.

<sup>70</sup>ibid., p.267.

<sup>71</sup>ibid., p.259.

<sup>72</sup>ibid., p.261.

<sup>73</sup>Thurlow, R., *Fascism In Britain* (London, 1987) p.301.

<sup>74</sup>ibid., p.298.

<sup>75</sup>ibid., p.299.

economically, politically, culturally and socially, if the inevitable decline and collapse of Britain was to be averted, inspired all his political actions, the BUF being 'at base an attempt to defy the trend of history, a 'mutiny against destiny.'"76

A recent thesis concerning the BUF in east London, written by Thomas Linehan, is worthy of note as it provides further evidence of the strength and importance of the strand of fascist 'socialism' within the BUF, particularly in terms of ideology and its appeal to working-class fascist recruits. Linehan concluded from his research that the BUF in east London and south-west Essex 'assumed a number of diverse and contradictory ideological and political forms'<sup>77</sup> and:

"With regard to wider theoretical questions concerning the nature of fascism and the ideological complexion of Mosley fascism in particular, the evidence with regard to fascism in east London and south-west Essex has highlighted the diverse, pluralistic and contradictory character of the phenomenon, suggesting that not just national, but local developmental patterns, characteristics and circumstances tended to shape the ideological texture of fascism and fascist movements."<sup>78</sup>

An important strand within this ideological plurality was fascist 'socialism'. Linehan considered the BUF in Stepney to be ideologically a:

"Form of proletarian egalitarian 'revolutionary fascism' [which] represented the most forceful example of that ideological current within local Mosley fascism [and] which viewed itself as the authentic legitimate heir to the "British Socialism" of Keir Hardie and the early socialists. Stepney fascism also embodied a belief, embraced by many young local workers in particular, that Mosley fascism represented a more virile activist form of revolutionary politics than could be found in the local Labour movement."<sup>79</sup>

Linehan believes that there was a 'strong radical or socialist current' within the BUF 'which appealed to many east London workers' as a result of the fact that 'the BUF's championing of the 'virtuous' and organic 'producers state' of the people in a struggle for supremacy with the invisible hand of 'predatory' laissez-faire capital had strong ideological roots within the British proletariat. It was a powerful and recurring theme in the history of proletarian radicalism since the Chartists.'<sup>80</sup>

Linehan's findings clearly reveal the 'BUF's ability to combine a radical programme of social change with aggressive patriotism' and still be perceived by many of its grassroots membership and support as a 'radical socialist' and 'revolutionary socialist' movement.<sup>81</sup> One former BUF member claimed that this socialism was 'what actually got me first interested.'<sup>82</sup> Another former member made the typical statement that 'it would

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<sup>76</sup>ibid., p.150.

<sup>77</sup>Linehan, T., 'The British Union of Fascists' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1992) p.3.

<sup>78</sup>ibid., p.498.

<sup>79</sup>ibid., p.493.

<sup>80</sup>ibid., p.387/8.

<sup>81</sup>ibid., p.419.

<sup>82</sup>ibid., p.419.

have been as easy to have joined the Communist Party...you could have gone one way or the other.'<sup>83</sup>

However it is important to note that Linehan's interpretation of the motivational and ideological characteristics of the local membership is couched in typically 'conservative revolutionary' language:

"It is at this level, the idea of Mosley fascism as a revolt against "impending decay", the members' belief that they were participating in a unique, all embracing, emotional, cultural and aesthetic experience invested with an heroic, spiritual and utopian dimension, that we begin to understand the motivational and ideological characteristics of the local membership."<sup>84</sup>

A thesis by Stephen Cullen also suggested that patriotic and social concerns drew people into the BUF, with the East End Blackshirt in particular 'being representative of a strongly national socialist, or a British socialist, strand.'<sup>85</sup>

Zeev Sternhell often uses the BUF and Mosley to illustrate his generic theory of fascism as he views them as archetypal fascist movement and ideologue/leader (at least in terms of his own definition of fascism). When examining the fascist brand of socialism, a socialism, according to Sternhell, based not upon proletarian hegemony but upon national unity and the championing of productive elements against parasitical elements, he refers to Mosley thus:

"Mosley...assessed the situation in very similar terms: the opposition was no longer between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but between the 'workers of all classes' and 'banking capitalism, or hypercapitalism'. This approach enabled economic parasitism and social exploitation to be eliminated without prejudicing the unity of the nation, which was compromised by the idea of class struggle, and allowed the preservation of the realities of nation, family, and profession, which the artificial concept of class had threatened. Twenty years earlier, it had been the abandonment of the idea of the class struggle, the pillar of his socialist doctrine, which had made Mussolini swing to fascism: with the socialist ministers De Man, Déat, Mosley; with the communist leaders Doriot and Marion; and with the thousands of socialist and communist militants who committed themselves to fascism, we see the same process taking place. Thus this desire to bring socialism up to date and adapt it to the modern world ultimately resulted in fascism."<sup>86</sup>

For Roger Griffin Mosley fascism is engendered and empowered with a palingenetic myth, being consumed with a deep desire to sweep away the old system in order to build upon its ashes a new 'Greater Britain.' The vision of British economic regeneration and renewal in Mosley's political thinking is clearly palingenetic. Mosley's belief that while the immediate problem of Britain's economic crisis was caused by underconsumption, the longer term socio-economic ills that had befallen Britain were the direct result of the bankruptcy of capitalism, the impotence of the British political system

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<sup>83</sup>ibid.. p.424/5.

<sup>84</sup>ibid.. p.490.

<sup>85</sup>Cullen, S.. 'The British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940: Ideology, Membership and Meetings' (MLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1987) p.148.

<sup>86</sup>Sternhell. 'Fascist Ideology', p.375/6.

and a cultural and moral decline which undermined the ability of the nation to act decisively in times of crisis, being for Griffin pregnant with an interpretation of the British condition inspired by the palingenetic mythical conviction Mosley held of a 'chauvinist belief in Britain's imperial and civilizing mission.'<sup>87</sup> However Griffin characterizes the BUF, along with all other permutations of British fascism, as 'a minute, gawky, earthbound ugly duckling destined to scratch around indefinitely without ever coming out as a swan'<sup>88</sup> due 'to the intrinsic weakness of the revolutionary threat they pose as permutations of palingenetic ultra-nationalism.'<sup>89</sup>

The view of the BUF held by Stanley Payne and Roger Eatwell are both also worthy of note. For Payne the BUF's 'thrust was decidedly modernist, paying serious attention to economic theory and concepts of "scientific production"<sup>90</sup> this was a direct result of the fact that the reason for Mosley's turn to fascism was 'his belief that it would provide the most useful means of overcoming what he saw as the economic stagnation and demodernization of Britain.'<sup>91</sup> The BUF was a political attempt to overcome Britain's social, economic and cultural decadence through the disciplined force of nationalism and the dynamism of fascism, in order to ensure Britain fulfilled her imperial civilizing mission and historical destiny on the world stage. Roger Eatwell considers Mosley to be one of the most lucid and intellectually able of all fascist ideologues reflecting the 'rational-constructive rather mythical-populist face'<sup>92</sup> of fascism. While Mosley's political writings, both in the inter-war and post-war periods, represent for Eatwell 'one of the most sophisticated expositions of policy to come from a fascist leader' based upon a quest for 'economic regeneration', 'progress', 'the rebirth of man' and the 'attempt to create a new form of human nature' which would produce 'a man both dynamic and competitive, though ultimately not money-centred and individualistic.'<sup>93</sup>

Having laid out the thesis's framework in the introduction, it is now possible to construct the main body of the thesis. The main body will fall into two parts: an analysis of the relationship between 'Socialism' and the political ideology of the BUF'; and an analysis of the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the other salient features of Mosley fascism, namely the other ideological components of Mosley fascism, the sociology of the BUF and its failure as a movement.

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<sup>87</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature*, p.138.

<sup>88</sup>Griffin, R., 'British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling' in Cronin, M., (ed.) *The Failure of British Fascism* (London, 1996) p.163.

<sup>89</sup>ibid., p.162.

<sup>90</sup>Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p.305.

<sup>91</sup>ibid., p.474.

<sup>92</sup>Eatwell, *Fascism*, p.182.

<sup>93</sup>Eatwell, R., 'Why has the Extreme Right failed in Britain?' in Hainsworth, P., (ed.) *The Extreme Right in Europe and the USA* (London, 1992) p.176.

**SECTION ONE**  
**'SOCIALISM' AND THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF THE BUF**

## Chapter One

### 'Socialism' and the BUF

This section, 'Socialism' and the Political ideology of the BUF, forms the thesis's 'bedrock' aiming to examine and determine the nature of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'. The section will form the thesis's assault upon the body of thought reluctant to accept fascism as a genuine political ideology and socialism as a genuine component of this political ideology. In this section will be examined an aspect of what Kenneth Lunn refers to 'as a native tradition of British fascism...[which] many standard texts...refuse to engage with',<sup>1</sup> the discussion of which will fall within both the realms of the history of ideas and political biography.

Lunn also points out, in his recent essay concerning the direction in which research into British fascism should proceed, that 'it would be foolish to argue that British fascism was conceived and developed in a political vacuum....indeed it would be wrong to argue that any political movement or regime was not part of a wider context and series of influences.'<sup>2</sup> It would be dishonest to suggest that Lunn had the socialist aspects of Mosley fascism in mind when he makes this point. However, its validity and poignancy for this thesis remains the same. Fascism as a political idea developed within the existing culture growing from and feeding off existing ideas, it was the unique way certain ideas, in particular its cross dichotomic central synthesis of socialism and nationalism, were re-conceived which created at the level of political ideas fascism. The desire for a union of nationalism and socialism was not unique to fascism, it had been a recurrent theme in European political thought since the late 19th century, fascist ideology developing from these currents of contemporary intellectual thought. The desire for new ideas was reinforced by the general post-war craving in the 1920s for radical solutions to the 'world's problems', a radical desire particularly strong in the 'war generation' which Mosley increasingly came to see himself as representing. It is the role of socialist ideas in this ideological cross-fertilization in the context of the BUF which represents an obvious and important avenue for doctoral research.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: firstly, outline the chapter structure of the section; secondly, clarify certain points relating to the notion of fascist 'socialism'; and thirdly, examine Mosley fascism's literal left-wing precursor the New Party (NP), in order to place Mosley's intellectual development (which is discussed in the following chapter) in its historical context.

The section will be based upon three chapters, this initial chapter and two subsequent chapters dealing with the following aspects of Mosley fascist 'socialism'.

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<sup>1</sup>Lunn, K., 'British Fascism Revisited: A Failure of Imagination?' in Cronin, M., (ed.) *The Failure of British Fascism* (London, 1996) p.176.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.176.

The second chapter of the section will concentrate upon the development of Mosley's personal political ideology from his 'Conservative' days through his socialism of the 1920s and finally to his fully blown fascist beliefs of the 1930s. The question of why Mosley became a fascist and not a communist will also be examined in the light of Mosley's belief in 'heroic vitalism'. The chapter's primary task will be to highlight the socialist aspects of, and influence upon, his political thinking whilst illustrating these aspects' uniqueness in their adaptation to, and application within, Mosley fascism. This is a core chapter of the thesis because Mosley, being the movement's all-pervading leader, is of fundamental importance to any correct understanding of any aspect of the BUF's internal dynamics.

The third chapter of the section will concentrate upon the other leading converts from the left to Mosley fascism (Beckett, Scanlon, Leaper, Risdon, Kenyon, Wegg-Prosser, Waters and Raven Thomson). Their own personal drift towards fascism and the conception of fascist 'socialism' they held will be examined closely (along with the rank and file membership's perception of the BUF and its claims to belong to the tradition of British socialism). The BUF's literature (newspapers and pamphlets, with the exception of Mosley's contributions which will have been dealt with in the previous chapter) will receive particular attention in this chapter. The chapter will aim to create an accurate picture of the grass-roots membership's own self-perception, the thesis seeking to illustrate that the BUF (or at least significant sections) considered itself to be ideologically a form of socialism. While the thesis does not seek to suggest that it actually was socialist, it sets out to show that sections of the BUF did take this aspect very seriously, and ideologically it did contain much thought which had distinct left-wing origins. The chapter will illustrate the relative depth of the socialist strand within Mosley fascism and the coherent at core, yet diffuse at the surface, nature of this strand of fascist ideology, a characteristic it shares in common with all the various components of fascist political ideology.

The issue of the distinct left-wing origins of much of Mosley fascism's political ideology (if not its sociology) is of central importance to this thesis. A crucial and distinctive aspect of this thesis's approach and stance is the objective view taken of fascist political thought, in general, and specifically the political ideology espoused by Mosley fascism. Of particular importance is the degree of influence accorded by this thesis to the role of socialist ideas in the ideological cross-fertilization which spawned the brand of fascism espoused by the BUF. This contrasts to traditional, subjective views taken of both fascist ideology and the BUF. The traditional view places both phenomena firmly on the right of the political dichotomy, totally overlooking the importance of left-wing intellectual currents of thought in the development of fascist, and Mosley fascist, political ideology.

There are many varieties of fascism, just as there are many varieties of socialism and liberalism. Fascism has a pluralistic ideological tradition. This should be of little



surprise in truth as it is philosophically centrally syncretic, purporting to represent a union of socialism and nationalism, or as Mosley himself claimed was based upon the philosophical tenet of synthesis.

It is this plethora of different varieties of fascism which has led to obscuring of what Sternhell described as 'one of the most important factors in the rise of fascist ideology: the transition from left to right.'<sup>3</sup> The loss from sight of the left-wing aspects also has an ideological cause as identified by Griffin. The eclectic nature of fascist ideology's mythic core of palingenetic ultra-nationalism lent itself to many different interpretations and visions of how national renewal was to be achieved, 'in other words Fascist ideology consisted of numerous permutations of the 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism'.<sup>4</sup>

What this thesis is attempting to highlight at the general level of the history of ideas (but of course specifically applied in time and place to the BUF) is the fact that in the period 1880-1930 left-wing ideology in Europe was basically a soup of bubbling ideas and concepts ranging from the cast iron revolutionary certainty of classical Marxism to the 'drip, drip' gradualism of the socially democratised parliamentary European left. From within this rich brew grew aspects of socialism which found a home in fascism. This development from the fertile soup of socialism to the barren, lightless desert of fascism (as a political reality) was the result of three factors. Firstly, direct transmission via individual converts from socialism to fascism; secondly, as a result of certain strands of nationalism cynically adopting left-wing answers to the socio-economic grievances of the working-class in order to win the masses to the cause of specific, individual, nationalisms; and thirdly, as the result of particular strands of nationalism, which genuinely believed that nationalism and socialism were 'two sides of the same coin', quite 'naturally' drawing upon aspects of left-wing thinking and socialist ethics and ethos. This thesis will examine all three.

It is important to understand that for the fascist, nationalism and socialism, in effect, fed off each other. Within fascist ideology 'national' and 'social' were often viewed as identical concepts. To be a nationalist meant to place your love of your country before all else. To be a socialist meant to work selflessly and solely for the national community rather than being motivated out of self-interest to work for oneself alone. Economic differences between the classes could not be allowed to become struggles that broke the deeper, stronger and eternal ties of nation and community. Nazism provides an interesting example of this fascist viewpoint.

In *Mein Kampf* Adolf Hitler portrayed Nazism as an endeavour to unify nationalism and socialism, in an attempt to 'accomplish the nationalisation of the masses'<sup>5</sup> without whose inclusion 'a national resurgence was not only a practical impossibility but

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<sup>3</sup>Sternhell, Z., *Neither Right Nor Left* (Berkeley, 1986) p.15.

<sup>4</sup>Griffin, R., *Fascism* (London, 1995) p.19.

<sup>5</sup>Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf* (London, 1992) p.305.

was inconceivable.<sup>6</sup> In Hitler's view there could be no resurrection in Germany without the working-class, so in the battle to win the working-class for the national cause 'no social sacrifice [was] too great'<sup>7</sup> as it was the eventual rebirth of Germany (through the establishment of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community)) that was at stake. For Hitler:

"The reservoir from which the young [Nazi] movement must gather its supporters will primarily be the masses of our workers. Its work will be to tear these away from the international delusion, to free them from their social distress, to raise them out of their cultural misery and lead them to the national community as a valuable, united factor, national in feeling and desire."<sup>8</sup>

The concept of a *Volksgemeinschaft* was the Nazi vision of the ideal society. National regeneration could only be achieved through social reconciliation between the classes which would create a system which stood opposed to both the bourgeois dominance within the capitalist system and the proletarian hegemony of communism. The perceived 'schism in the German people and the mission of the national socialist movement as the instrument of reconciliation'<sup>9</sup> was at the core of Nazi ideology and the inspiration for its self-appointed mission of achieving German national rejuvenation. For many of those who had joined or voted for the Nazi movement the basic affinity they had with Nazism was a perceived shared desire to replace a corrupt system which had failed Germany, leaving the Fatherland internally divided and externally weak, with a *Volksgemeinschaft* where everyone who was racially sound could find 'a niche where he could feel secure and respected: in short a true "national community" from which all sources of friction and unease had been removed.'<sup>10</sup> A state which would ensure the realization of the nation's full potential and destiny. This 'national community' would be for the Germans it 'cradled' classless, in Gregor Strasser's words '*Not-Brot- und Schicksalsgemeinschaft*'<sup>11</sup> (a community of shared need, bread and destiny) where as Röhm describes 'old, divisive contradictions of estate, occupation, class and confession have been eliminated'<sup>12</sup> and a form of social egalitarianism based on race would prevail.

The concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* features prominently in the 'socialism' espoused in Nazi ideology. The need to integrate the German working-class into the *Volksgemeinschaft* meant that the 'social question', (the problem of reconciling the socio-economic grievances of the working-class), had to be fully addressed by National Socialism.

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<sup>6</sup>O'Sullivan, N., *Fascism* (London, 1983) p.87.

<sup>7</sup>Hitler, *Mein*, p.305.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., p.309.

<sup>9</sup>Hilliard, R., 'The Genesis of the Economic and Social Program of the National Socialist Movement', (Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa 1957) p.139.

<sup>10</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.105/6.

<sup>11</sup>Stachura, P., *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1983) p.48.

<sup>12</sup>Fischer, C., *Stormtroopers* (London, 1983) p.144.

This aspect of fascism's nature is of equal relevance to Mosley fascism, where the mythical *Volksgemeinschaft* was the BUF's dream of creating a 'Greater Britain.' What we have in the case of BUF ideology is a janus faced creature consisting of either (according to the view of the British Secret Service based upon its surveillance of Mosley fascism) deeply conservative elements and genuinely revolutionary elements or (according to Mosley) the best elements of both right and left, the BUF being, for Mosley, at base an attempt to create a creed based upon both patriotism and revolution. Mosley fascism's heart and soul was Mosley's declaration that:

"We love our country and we love our people, for that reason we stand both for patriotism and for progress in the union of two great principles which the war of the parties has divided. The National Socialist creed of British Union says to our countrymen "if you love our country you are National, and if you love our people you are Socialist." We ask patriots to join with us in building a country worthy of a patriot's love, in which class distinction of the snob and the privilege of the parasite shall exist no more. But in place of class and privilege shall arise the brotherhood of the British to give equal opportunity to all in service and possession of their native land."<sup>13</sup>

This syncretic aspect of the nature of fascism means that it has the potential to attract support from both the right and the left. Thus, depending upon the road taken to fascism, the individual fascist's vision of their individual 'version' of fascism will be imbued with either the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit from the right who dreams of the rebirth into greatness once again of the nation or the 'rational-radical' ethos of the left-wing recruit to fascism determined to replace *laissez faire* economic chaos with the order and authority of the central state and a national plan. These strands of thought may well both be present simultaneously in any given fascist ideology and the 'worldview' of any given single fascist. But inevitably one strand will exert the greater influence over the individual or movement.

An important point results from this aspect of the nature of fascism which must be borne in mind at all times. Whilst this thesis seeks to establish the existence of and genuine nature of Mosley fascism's socialist roots, these roots have to be of course viewed in the specific context of Mosley fascism's overall political ideology. In other words, the eclectic nature of fascist ideology means that Mosley fascism had many different ideological strands of which the left-wing one was by no means the strongest.

Nevertheless, even though the socialist strand within fascism generally was not a dominant one, its weakness does not lessen its value in terms of academic scrutiny, because, as Kenneth Lunn has recently suggested, if the study of British fascism is to be carried forward 'an ability and a willingness not to close down avenues of enquiry'<sup>14</sup> is required. The subject of this thesis is important because:

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<sup>13</sup>Mosley O., *Tomorrow We Live* (London, 1938) p.57.

<sup>14</sup>Lunn, 'British Fascism', p.173.

"As academics, we cannot therefore afford to ignore the complexities of groups and the individuals who comprise those groups, the processes whereby they arrive at particular patterns of thinking and the reasons for their support of ideologies and organizations, however minuscule their impact on national and international politics may be deemed to be. There are significances in such processes which can be analysed and drawn upon and ought not to be neglected. To assume that only major groups and individuals count is a display of liberal arrogance and a dismissal which will only ultimately weaken our ability to understand and explain the phenomenon of fascism."<sup>15</sup>

However it is important to accept that there were clear limits to the socialist ideological permutations into fascism and as a result of this fascism in general, and the BUF in particular, became associated with the extreme right. Why?

This right-wing drift and association was caused by three factors. Firstly, and most importantly due to its effect upon the sociological make-up of the BUF, was the bitter opposition of the traditional left against Mosley. This was caused partly by bitterness at Mosley's abandonment of the Labour Party (LP), and in particular the traditional left-wing critique of fascism as being a force of reaction designed to crush the Labour movement. Consequently Mosley's left-wing aspirations for his new movement were doomed from the start. Further to this Mosley's decision that the NP should contest the Ashton-under-Lyne by-election in 1931 brought him into direct conflict with the LP, who blamed the intervention of the NP for the Conservative victory in the by-election. The bitterness of the LP's opposition to the NP set the tone for its later confrontations with the BUF. Skidelsky's comments upon this episode are poignant:

"We have here a classic illustration of the way in which fascist and pre-fascist parties are forced into a social straitjacket contrary to the expectations of their leaders...Mosley, who seems to have started with hope of winning substantial working-class support, even of linking up with the I.L.P., observed that the main response was coming from the younger Conservative group, clamouring for dramatic action. In such circumstances the chances of the New Party being able to hold the centre of politics as Mosley hoped began to look distinctly unpromising. Both the mounting hostility of organised Labour and the nature of its grass-roots recruitment were combining to drive it to the Right."<sup>16</sup>

This led to unease within the NP's left-wing leadership, John Strachey, Allan Young and Cyril Joad, all of whom left the NP in response to this right-wing drift. This has clear echoes with the process which occurred within the BUF in both terms of its ideological shift from left to right, as a result of the contradiction between a Left-wing ideology and a right-wing sociology, and in terms of the falling out with the movement of its Left-wing leadership (for example the disillusionment with the BUF suffered by Dr Robert Forgan, Charles Wegg-Prosser and John Beckett).

This illuminates one of the more important conclusions drawn by this thesis, the fact that at the heart of Mosley fascism lay a contradiction. Ironically while its ideological mythic core reveals Mosley fascism to be an essentially left-wing brand of fascism,

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<sup>15</sup>ibid., p.178.

<sup>16</sup>Skidelsky, R., *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), all quotes from the 1990 edition. p.253.

'whose chief *raison d'être* was to solve the unemployment problem',<sup>17</sup> Mosley fascism's attempt to become a revolutionary mass-movement ultimately failed because of its inability to attract support from the unemployed and working-class.<sup>18</sup> Instead the right-wing sociological make-up it acquired simply compounded the contradiction creating an interactionist style effect with the movement's ideology causing the right-wing drift. Quite simply Mosley fascism suffered, from the moment of its inception and during its early years, a contradiction between a left-wing ideology and a right-wing sociological make-up.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, the BUF's association with the *Daily Mail* and foreign dictators in the public mind merely continued this slide to the right. A slide which led the movement eventually 'beyond the pale' with its adoption of anti-Semitism as a result of both a predisposed potential for racism (the result of the very nature of fascist ideology) and an interactionist process between the BUF and Jewish and Communist led opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly,

the left-wing roots of Mosley fascism were ultimately too weak to gain any kind of influence and hold upon the BUF. The reasons for this weakness were two-fold. Firstly, the nature of Mosley's left-wing roots were weak. Mosley's background, not in the Labour movement but in the aristocracy and the Conservative Party, his own perception of himself as a man of action destined to lead the country away from impending doom and his constant belief in 'imperial socialism' revealed him to be not simply a man of the left. Mosley was both a fascist 'socialist' and a conservative revolutionary. Much of Mosley's socialism does, arguably, come across as 'ivory tower' concerns about the working-class, with Mosley often seeming to be paternalistic and trite. Mosley was able to 'wax lyrically' about ideas but he lacked the ability to relate on a personal level to the working-class, except in a hierarchical, neo-feudal, 'Lord of the Manor' style.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the ideological phenomenon of the patriotic left was quite weak and ultimately of little significance within the socialist tradition as a whole, and within Great Britain in particular. The one real exception was the 'Merrie England socialism' of Robert Blatchford although there is little evidence of any direct connection between this turn of the century patriotic socialist and the later phenomenon of Mosley fascism.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup>Thurlow, R., 'The Failure of British Fascism 1932-40' in Thorpe, A., (ed.) *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain* (Exeter, 1989) p.69.

<sup>18</sup>The relative success the BUF enjoyed in the East End of London in gaining support from these groups, which was in 'absolute' terms still very limited, will be discussed later in the thesis.

<sup>19</sup>For a fuller explanation as to the causes of Mosley fascism's marginalisation as a political force and the immunity of the British working-class to the fascist virus see chapter 6.

<sup>20</sup>See chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup>The nature of Mosley's socialism and his experience in the Independent Labour Party will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>22</sup>While Bernard Semmel claimed that Mosley was clearly influenced by Blatchford, Niall Nugent, on the basis of correspondence with Mosley himself, suggests any similarity is a mere coincidence and reflection of Mosley's place in British traditions of political syncretic thought. See Bernard Semmel's

socialist tradition within Britain was undoubtedly non-Marxist but this was as much because of the British Labour movement's desire for change not via revolution but via gradualism and parliamentarianism. The movement's rejection of Marxism was as much practical as ideological. Consequently even despair at the failure of Marxist prophecies to come true was hardly likely to cause much left-wing shift towards revolutionary nationalism as the way forward in the battle against capitalism. The Trade Unions, for which the LP was the political wing, wanted improved working conditions and wages for its members, not revolution. The effectiveness of the establishment's embourgeoisement of the Labour movement during the first half of the twentieth century was aided by the Labour movement's own intrinsic 'conservatism'. A 'conservatism' which was, ironically, quite at odds with Mosley fascism's radicalism.

Now that the limitations of the fascist 'socialism' exhibited by Mosley fascism have been outlined the literal left-wing roots of the BUF should perhaps be examined. The analysis in this part of the chapter is concerned with establishing the historical and ideological context of the BUF's immediate political roots, the NP. These political roots are by definition left-wing, due to the 'progressive socialist'<sup>23</sup> nature of the NP. The NP's *raison d'être*, political programme and fate will consequently be discussed.

The failure of the 1929-31 Labour Government to, in particular, implement Mosley's proposals for tackling the problem of unemployment and its general failure to implement the radical programme it was elected upon, caused Mosley to resign from the government and the LP. Mosley 'had become convinced that the LP was incapable of decisive action...in real crisis Labour would always betray both its principles and the people who had trusted it'.<sup>24</sup> Mosley ridiculed this failure and betrayal during a speech in 1931:

"Spokesmen of the late Labour Government saw in the crisis that collapse of capitalism which they had prophesied with religious fervour. The crisis came in a lucky moment for them. Labour was in office, and had every resource of the State at its command. What happened? The great day dawned, and Labour resigned; cleared out just when they had the realisation of their greatest wish. What must we think of a Salvation Army which takes to its heels on the Day of Judgement?"<sup>25</sup>

In the period between October 1930 and March 1931 Mosley attempted to work within the existing political machinery to achieve 'a national consensus to secure action' by appealing:

"To his fellow MPs to place the welfare of their country before allegiance to any political party on the grounds that 'we have to face modern problems with modern minds, we

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*Imperialism and Social Reform* (London, 1960) p.251 and Nugent, N., 'The ideas of the British Union of Fascists' in King, R. & Nugent, N., (eds) *The British Right* (Farnborough, 1977) p.146.

<sup>23</sup>Cook, C., & Stevenson, J., *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History 1714-1995* (London, 1996) p.372.

<sup>24</sup>Mosley, *My Life* (London, 1968) p.262.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*, p.263.

should then be able to lift this great economic problem and national emergency far above the turmoil of party clamour and with national unity could achieve a solution adequate to the problem and worthy of the modern mind.'<sup>26</sup>

However, Mosley's attempt to work out a solution, he deemed suitably radical for the situation, within the system failed. His attempt to produce a realignment at the very centre of government was doomed because of 'the power of the old party machines, the reluctance of many young MPs to risk their political careers, and a degree of personal mistrust of Mosley himself.'<sup>27</sup>

Mosley felt he was left with no choice and so undeterred by this initial failure left the LP in order to build a 'new' party capable of creating the government of national consensus and action he craved. When he broke from the LP he took with him five Labour MPs and was joined in the NP by one Conservative MP and one Liberal MP.<sup>28</sup> Mosley, disillusioned with the Labour Government and the political system, left the LP in search of the contemporary, modern, new 'tool' by which to get the job of creating a 'Land Fit for Heroes' done. Mosley sought this first in a party of his own creation, the NP. Its name is of obvious significance, the 'New Party' being a brand new political party and thus free of the corrupt and bankrupt ways of the 'united mutttons' of the 'old gangs'.

However before leaving the LP Mosley made one last attempt to influence the Labour Government's policy when he published in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Mosley Manifesto*. The *Manifesto*, signed by sixteen Labour MPs and Arthur Cook, General Secretary of the Miners' Federation, was, in typical Mosley fashion, 'an immediate plan to meet an emergency situation'.<sup>29</sup> It called for a protected home market, government investment in industries and public works programmes funded by increasing the national debt. These measures would be implemented by 'an emergency Cabinet of no more than five Ministers'<sup>30</sup> invested with the 'power of government by order'.<sup>31</sup> This was a clear sign of Mosley's development of a proposed 'overhaul' of Parliament in order to give the 'executive' enough power to 'get things done', a clear reaction to his experience of 'the intolerable network of governmental and municipal procedure'<sup>32</sup> which frustrated him whilst he was the Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster. *The Mosley Manifesto* was to provide the basis of the NP's political programme.

The principal document produced by the NP outlining this political programme was *A National Policy* (see Appendix A for the pamphlet's summary) which although not written by Mosley was directly influenced by *The Mosley Manifesto*. The underlying ethos of *A National Policy* was the belief that 'the raising of the standard of life of our

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<sup>26</sup>Lewis, D., *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester, 1987) p.15.

<sup>27</sup>ibid., p.15.

<sup>28</sup>The Liberal was called Dudgeon. See Cook, *The Longman* p.141.

<sup>29</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.237.

<sup>30</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.267.

<sup>31</sup>ibid., p.267.

<sup>32</sup>ibid., p.281.

own people, the consequent increase in their purchasing power, and the organisation of our productive resources & the mobilisation of our idle workers to meet that increase, these are the true remedies<sup>33</sup> to the crisis. The critique of the then current situation and its plan of action in *A National Policy* was based upon 'three essentials' for recovery. Firstly, reduction in wages and attacks upon social services was not the way out of the crisis as this would merely worsen the situation via the effect it would have of reducing purchasing power and thus demand. Secondly, what was needed was a practical programme, 'questions of the ultimate goal of society are excluded by the very urgency of the problem which confronts us.'<sup>34</sup> The pamphlet being 'concerned with not the question of the ultimate form of social organisation, but with an emergency in which the whole structure of Industry is threatened.'<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, what was required was common action and a joint effort between employers and workers in the face of the crisis.

The NP wished to appeal directly to the electorate to give it a mandate to implement a series of measures, unhindered by parliamentary sectional strife, aimed at restoring general prosperity to the British economy. It wished to overcome class, party and sectional divides and create national co-operation and compromise, something which could only be achieved via the 'co-ordination, balance, and guidance which only national planning can affect.'<sup>36</sup>

Its programme was an urgent appeal to industry to abandon the declining export industries and instead concentrate upon building up and expanding 'scientifically' the domestic market. This domestic expansion would be achieved via a combination of insulating the home market from the global market through the mechanism of selective tariffs under the supervision of commodity boards and central planning using the mechanism of a National Investment Board and a National Planning Council. The use of the British Empire to ensure British insulation from the global markets of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the consequential need to 'plan' on an imperial level rather than a global one was defended in *A National Policy* thus: 'hence the only realistic comparison of the policy of regional planning here advocated is not with a Utopian policy of world planning, but with the planless, dangerous, economic dog fight of the real world of today...the orderly economic planning of a section of the globe will only be a stabilising not a disturbing, element.'<sup>37</sup>

The proposals for commodity boards are worthy of further inspection. The commodity boards were to be composed of representatives of industry, trade unions and the consumer. Protection would be given to industries which increased their productivity. Any industry that refused would be exposed to foreign competition and left to sink. The

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<sup>33</sup>Young, A., Strachey, J., Brown, W., & Bevan, A. *A National Policy* (London, 1931) p.15.

<sup>34</sup>ibid., p.6.

<sup>35</sup>ibid., p.7.

<sup>36</sup>ibid., p.17.

<sup>37</sup>ibid., p.30.



commodity boards represented a form of voluntarist Corporate State relying upon co-operation between the differing interests rather than enforcing it via a highly centralised, authoritarian state as became the case with the proposals for a Corporate State made by the BUF.

There was also a selection of other proposals designed to stimulate industry and economic activity, such as a public works programme to create employment and the suggestion 'that the state should take over the slum clearance problem from the municipalities and turn out houses much as munitions were produced in the War',<sup>38</sup> and aid packages for British agriculture. Economic development would be planned by a government department to avoid the development which 'is going on today rapidly, but in the most haphazard & undesirable manner.'<sup>39</sup>

These measures were to be aided in their implementation by reforms of parliament consisting of government being conducted by a cabinet of five or six, unhindered by parliamentary debate and factional strife as parliamentary debate would be confined to general governmental strategy, not specific issues and details. The NP sought to govern via a small and powerful executive. This apparent move towards authoritarianism and eventually dictatorship, was a reflection of Mosley's critique of the political system based upon his personal experience of office in a Labour administration as compared to his experience of Whitehall and 'war socialism' in 1917/8. For Mosley the nation's sense of corporate identity and union had been destroyed by the political system of liberal democracy and its economic philosophy of *laissez-faire*. The nation's unity and sense of identity could only be regained through the ending of the factional in-fighting of the political parties and the parliamentary system and of class conflict in the nation as a whole. This move in an authoritarian direction was defended in *A National Policy* in an interesting way, with the pamphlet claiming that in effect the NP were the true guardians of parliamentary democracy:

"It may be suggested ...that our proposals for Parliamentary reform are undemocratic. To this we reply that systems of government will stand or fall by the test of how far they prove adequate to cope with the situation which they are called upon to face. The real enemies of democracy are not those who suggest that we have reached a stage where the antiquated methods of Parliament must be brought up to date, but those who by endless talk and obstruction paralyse the Parliamentary machine at a time when action is essential and so bring Parliamentary democracy into contempt."<sup>40</sup>

The ethos behind the NP's *raison d'être* is particularly well illustrated by this press release from Mosley during the election:

"The fate of the National Government, of the New Party, and of all parties depends upon the development of the situation. Is it a passing storm which will be weathered without great effort, or is it a storm which can only be weathered by the greatest effort this nation

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<sup>38</sup>ibid., p.51.

<sup>39</sup>ibid., p.39.

<sup>40</sup>ibid., p.61.

has ever known? Upon the answer to that question depends the fate of old parties and new parties, and whether this country in the future must be governed by men like Baldwin and MacDonald or by men like we in the New Party."<sup>41</sup>

The NP proved to be a short lived venture suffering electoral annihilation in 1931. However, by attempting to buck the system and set up his own movement Mosley had set one foot into the political wilderness. The defiance and underlying beliefs that were to push Mosley further into this political wilderness in his efforts to use the NP 'to import a new impetus to British politics; to secure effective action before it is too late',<sup>42</sup> are evident in this quote from a Mosley article in the NP's paper *Action* after the election *débâcle*:

"Better the great adventure, better the great attempt for England's sake, better defeat, disaster, better far the end of that trivial thing called a Political Career than stifling in a uniform of Blue and Gold, strutting and posturing on the stage of little England, amid the scenery of decadence, until history in turning over an heroic page of the human story, writes of us the contemptuous postscript: 'these were the men to whom was entrusted the Empire of Great Britain, and idleness, ignorance and cowardice left it a Spain'. We shall win or at least shall return upon our shields."<sup>43</sup>

The underlying socialist ethos of and influence over the NP ideologically is quite clear. John Strachey indeed, Mosley's close colleague in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and fellow NP founder who subsequently joined the Communist Party, believed that the NP could have developed into a genuinely socialist party of the working-class revolt. However, it was to prove the stepping stone for Mosley into fascism.

Mosley never left the wilderness in which he now found himself following his next attempt to create a 'vehicle' to bear his political programme for radical change. This 'vehicle' was the BUF which Mosley launched in October 1932. The NP was the first step on the road to Mosley's eventual destiny of, not being the nation's saviour in its hour of greatest need, but 'of the neglected prophet crying in the political wilderness.'<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately fascism must be seen as an answer for those socialists who remained revolutionaries but were pragmatic realists, the need for action took precedence over ideology. It is no coincidence that *Action* was the name chosen for both the NP's paper and a BUF paper. It was this thirst for action combined with the belief that socialism needed to be updated and adapted to the modern world, as long as any readaptation remained collectivist in ethos, which ultimately led some socialists towards fascism.

It is the nature of this readaptation, and Mosley's ideological road from socialism to fascism, that will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>41</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.279/80.

<sup>42</sup>*ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>43</sup>Lewis, *Illusions*, p.11.

<sup>44</sup>Thurlow, R., 'The Return of Jeremiah' in Lunn, K. & Thurlow, R., (eds) *British Fascism* (London, 1980) p.111.

## Chapter Two

### From Socialism to Fascism: The Political Odyssey of Sir Oswald Mosley

This chapter, which deals with the ideological road from socialism to fascism taken by Mosley, is of central importance to this section and the thesis. This is because when dealing with any aspect of the BUF, it is Mosley who is the most important 'character' in this particular historical 'play'. There are three reasons for this central importance: firstly, the BUF was very much Mosley's personal 'fiefdom', his influence and control over it being all pervading and thus any study of the BUF must start with Mosley if one is to gain a correct understanding of any aspect of the BUF's internal dynamics; secondly, Mosley was the leading convert from the left to the BUF, so any study of the BUF's socialist roots must initially concentrate upon Mosley; and thirdly, Mosley's *The Greater Britain*, published the same day as the BUF was launched, was the central text describing the *raison d'être* for, political intent of, and political programme of the BUF. Furthermore the precise features of Mosley's personal journey help to outline the broader details of the similar journey taken by Mosley's fellow converts, which will be examined in the next chapter.

The political thought of Mosley formed both the tap-root of the BUF's ideology and the socialist influence upon it, and consequently any study of BUF ideology must place *The Greater Britain* and its author at its centre. The chapter will thus outline the evolution of Mosley's personal political ideology and his intellectual development from 1918 to 1932. This covers the period of his development from his 'Conservative' days to his socialism of the 1920s through to his fully blown fascist beliefs of the 1930s (specifically his conception of socialism, vis-à-vis his Independent Labour Party (ILP) days and this development into his version of fascism and its socialistic contents), the consistencies in the development of which will be highlighted. The question of why Mosley became a fascist and not a communist will also be examined in the light of Mosley's belief in 'heroic vitalism'. The chapter's primary task is to highlight the socialist aspects and influence upon Mosley's political thinking whilst illustrating these aspects' uniqueness in their adaptation to and application within Mosley fascism.

The main works by Mosley considered in tracing the development of Mosley's thought, are *Revolution by Reason*, the principal text of his ILP ideas, and *The Greater Britain*, the principal text of the BUF's political programme. The brief interlude of the New Party (NP) will, having been discussed in the previous chapter, only be alluded to here although Mosley's later development of his fascist thought in his 1938 book *To-morrow We Live* will be considered in more depth. Before examining *Revolution By Reason* however, a brief biographical sweep of Mosley's initial career in politics will help to place Mosley's ideological development in its historical context.

It was his experience of the First World War which led Mosley into politics. Mosley's memory of Armistice day indicates his state of mind at the war's end:

"I passed through the festive streets and entered one of London's largest and most fashionable hotels, interested by the sound of revelry which echoed from it. Smooth, smug people, who had never fought or suffered, seemed to the eyes of youth - at that moment age-old with sadness, weariness and bitterness - to be eating, drinking, laughing on the graves of our companions. I stood aside from the delirious throng; silent and alone, ravaged by memory. Driving purpose had begun; there must be no more war. I dedicated myself to politics, with an instinctive resolution which came later to expression in my speeches: 'Through and beyond the failure of men and parties, we of the war-generation are marching on and we shall march on until our end is achieved and our sacrifice atoned.'"<sup>1</sup>

This end Mosley wished for consisted of three key elements: firstly 'that war must never happen again'; secondly 'that we must build a better land for our companions who still lived'; and thirdly 'that we must conceive a nobler world in memory of those who died.'<sup>2</sup>

Mosley's first steps in politics were as the Conservative candidate for Harrow in the 1918 general election. Mosley's Conservative candidature is of less importance than at first it may appear because it must be remembered that although a Conservative candidate, Mosley was in fact elected as a supporter of the Lloyd George Coalition in the 1918 general election. The coalition government of the war years, the continuation of which Mosley was standing for, had a great influence upon the young Mosley helping to crystallize his belief that a government of national unity was the ideal form which executive political power in Britain should take. This was because in the climate of the time for members of the 'war generation', such as Mosley, the old political parties were irrelevant as they represented the old divisions within the nation. The First World War, for all its horrors, had shown the power a nation united behind a common cause could muster. The immense peacetime task of reconstructing and regenerating the country required the power of such a unity. In the eyes of the 'war generation' all that mattered was that they should be allowed to achieve such a unity of common purpose in order to reconstruct the nation and thus create the 'Land Fit for Heroes' they had fought for. Mosley was 'courted' by both the Liberal and Conservative parties, the Tories pressed hardest and thus he joined them.<sup>3</sup> Mosley claimed he 'knew little of Conservative sentiment, and cared less. I was going into the House of Commons as one of the

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<sup>1</sup>Mosley, O., *My Life* (London, 1968) p.70.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.71.

<sup>3</sup>It is interesting to note Mosley's comments however in his 1968 autobiography where he says that he joined the Conservative Party as it seemed to him at the time to be 'the party of patriotism'. Patriotism being a sentiment he defined as 'not something static...[but] something dynamic and creative, seeking to build a better and more modern nation, constantly adapted to the development of the age and inspiring it. Particularly...when so much needed to be done in providing a fair livelihood and above all good homes for our surviving companions of the war.' ibid., p.90.

representatives of the war generation, for that purpose alone'.<sup>4</sup> Mosley entered Parliament burning with the desire to help create a new Britain, to ensure that millions did not die in vain during the war but that their sacrifice helped to create a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. This desire was to be a recurrent motivation and dream throughout Mosley's life.

Mosley's first election address by expressing the creed of the war-generation and capturing the general mood of 1918 can be seen as one of the key political statements of his life:

*Industry:* High wages must be maintained. This can only be achieved by high production based on increased efficiency and organisation. A high standard of life must be ensured by a minimum wage and reduced hours, which are proved to increase rather than curtail production.

*Transport:* Transportation and electrical resources to be controlled and developed by the State.

*Land:* The State must acquire land where necessary at a fair price [for soldiers' smallholdings].

*Housing:* In many cases the State must carry out the work [of slum clearance] itself to ensure speed.

*Education:* Numerous scholarships for higher and university education must be supplied by the State.

*Fiscal Policy:* Preference on duties already existing and hereafter to be imposed must be granted as a long-solicited act of justice for our colonies. Industries essential to the national well-being must be shielded; unfair competition to British industry...in the form of 'dumping' must be stopped.

*Agriculture:* Must be secured by the continuance of the present Corn Production Act.

*Aliens:* Immediate legislation is necessary to prevent undesirable aliens from landing; and for repatriation of those who are now resident in this country.

*Empire:* Complete unity must be promoted by every means to enable the British Empire to play a leading part in the future League of Nations."<sup>5</sup>

The war had instilled in Mosley and the 'war generation' the dream of creating a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. The 'shape' of this 'Land' was described by this statement and the dream of building it never left Mosley.

The co-ordination of British society and the economy during the war, and his brief Whitehall career in 1917/8, had shown Mosley the potential power of the State. A state of war had 'infused' the nation with a sense of common purpose, imposing national unity over and above sectional interests. It was now necessary to achieve this sense of common purpose in peacetime and combine it with the massive potential for reconstruction and socio-economic progress the wonders of modern technology had made possible, if a 'Land Fit for Heroes' was to be built.

Mosley described his 1918 programme as 'socialistic imperialism',<sup>6</sup> an indication, along with the contents of the programme itself and his 'war generation' dream of building a 'new' Britain, that even at the very genesis of his political career the

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<sup>4</sup>ibid., p.90.

<sup>5</sup>Skidelsky, R., *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), all quotes from the 1990 edition, p.71/2.

<sup>6</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.91.

palingenetic brand of integral nationalism, which was determined to overcome the socio-economic misery of the masses and that was to lead him to fascism in the 1930s, predominates. In regards to Mosley's development of these early ideas nothing fundamental was ever changed. The passionate call for full employment, full production, high wages, decent housing, equal opportunities and a decent environment always remained central to his political testament with the state always given a central role in the implementation of his political and socio-economic proposals. The means by which these ends were to be achieved varied, but to no significant degree. What Mosley did change was the political 'vehicle' by which he hoped to achieve these goals, to which he remained loyal throughout his life. This loyalty to principles but not to political parties is well illustrated by an examination of the reasons behind Mosley's move from the Conservative Party (CP) to the Labour Party (LP).

Mosley left the CP in 1920 ostensibly in protest at the activities of the Black and Tans in Ireland, however there was a deeper cause for this move which eventually led to him joining the LP in 1924. Mosley had become increasingly disillusioned with Parliament, with its return to the old pre-war ways and the failure of it to reconstruct the nation and create a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. Mosley's whole political outlook had been shaped by his experience of the war and his vision of a 'Greater Britain' it inspired.<sup>7</sup> He felt that this vision had been betrayed.

Mosley became convinced of this betrayal during the visits he made to the slum areas of Glasgow, Liverpool and Birmingham in 1924, whose abolition had been promised in 1918 but remained untouched in 1924. For Mosley this:

"gave vivid proof in these execrable housing conditions that all the pledges given to the war generation had been betrayed. This perhaps more than any other single factor was the motive power which took me into the Labour Party. There were many intellectual arguments which I had already myself developed frequently in parliamentary debate, but here was the real impulse of vital feeling."<sup>8</sup>

This sentiment of a feeling of betrayal is strongly conveyed in an article, "From Tory to Labour", Mosley wrote in 1929:

"We came back from the war with a great determination. We were determined that the world should never again suffer what we had suffered; we were determined that as a result of that suffering Britain should be roused from the torpor of a century to build the finest civilization mankind has ever known...We were concerned only to build a new and nobler world on the ashes of the old. We held ourselves as a generation set apart by a great ordeal and consecrated to a mighty task...[in] my election address of 1918...you will find...great schemes of social reform and ruthless Socialist measures, designed to cut through the great vested interests to the reconstruction of Britain. High wages and shorter hours as the bases of a prosperous home market; transport and electricity 'controlled and developed by the State'; housing schemes carried out by the community; the abolition of slums and back-to-back houses; the compulsory acquisition of necessary land; educational

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<sup>7</sup>Indeed it would seem fair to suggest that if it were not for the war Mosley would not have become a politician.

<sup>8</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.173.

facilities from the cradle to the university; drastic schemes for health and child welfare; these were the proposals of my election address...You may be surprised that on a programme, in effect as Socialistic as that which the Labour Party now advances, I was adopted by a Conservative Association and returned by a majority of nearly 11,000 by a Conservative constituency. That was the temper of the times. The young men, the new men, the men of war, were in charge. Not until we got to Westminster and the old games did the old men resume the reins. The first shock was the sight of our colleagues. The young men were in the minority and the 'hard-faced men' were in a great majority. The profiteer outnumbered the fighter...At home no attempt was made to use the great machine of war for the greater purposes of peace...The productive machine so painfully and laboriously erected was scrapped or sold at knock-down prices to the profiteers...Everything for which we fought - peace abroad and reconstruction at home - was thrown to the wolves of the great vested interests...I have occasionally been called an extreme influence in the Labour Party. We were all 'extremists' in the sense that we wished to get things done, until the young grew tired and the old ways and the old men crept back. My fear is not that the Labour Party will do more than a united nation demanded ten years ago. My fear is rather that in face of the united opposition they will encounter, they will not do as much."<sup>9</sup>

Mosley always claimed that his beliefs were consistent throughout his life, the reason that he moved from one party to the next being that he was in search of the right political 'tool' to get the 'job' of regeneration done, rather than in search of the right policies or most convenient career ladder. This search led him into the LP in the 1920s, when it was the 'new' movement of hope and progress. A movement 'thrown up by the mass of the people to right their wrongs'<sup>10</sup> within which the dynamism of the LP, in particular that of its rank and file (a dynamism which particularly attracted Mosley) seemed to be a guarantee of the LP's desire and ability to enact its programme of radical reform, once in power. Following his disillusionment with the LP and the political system in 1931, this same motivation behind Mosley's search for the right political 'tool' would lead him to found the BUF in the 1930s, portraying it as the 'modern movement' of its time and the only political movement capable of decisive action in the face of the impending crisis.

*Revolution by Reason*,<sup>11</sup> written in 1925, was the major treatise Mosley wrote whilst in the LP.<sup>12</sup> It was a grand attempt on the part of Mosley to adapt John Maynard Keynes economic theories concerning the need for direct government investment to stimulate the economy if unemployment was to be tackled and the identification of the true clash of interests being not between capitalists and workers but between producers (workers and manufacturers) and financiers to the cause of building socialism. It was a typically Mosleyesque attempt at synthesis, an attempted synthesis which revealed three

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<sup>9</sup>Drennan, J., (pseudonym for Allen, W.) *The B.U.F., Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London, 1934) p.72-75. Quoted from *The Labour Magazine*, 1 May 1929.

<sup>10</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.172.

<sup>11</sup>*Revolution By Reason* was also known as the 'Birmingham Proposals' reflecting the fact that Birmingham became Mosley's power base during his Labour Party days.

<sup>12</sup>Mosley was actually a member of the Independent Labour Party (one of the Labour Party's affiliated organisations) which stood to the left of the main party, the membership of which gave Mosley a certain ideological independence and room for manoeuvre.

very important premises about Mosley's political thought, whether socialist or fascist, which remained true throughout his life.

Firstly, Mosley, 'born into an age of technology which really believed...that man could control his destiny',<sup>13</sup> placed immense faith in the modern power of science to increase the productive capacity of the economy and herald an 'age of plenty' to replace what was then an 'age of poverty'. Mosley's belief in the power of science to solve man's economic problems was further strengthened shortly after he had written *Revolution by Reason* when in 1926 he visited America. Not surprisingly Mosley was deeply impressed by the vitality of America, the conveyor-belt system of the Ford works in Detroit and the seeming move towards technocracy in the economy at large, a development which had the potential to detach the problems of production from the question of profit. The only thing the 'Fordism' of the America system lacked was central control to ensure the effective implementation of these new ideas throughout the economy. If that missing ingredient could be added then this for Mosley was potentially the system which could equate production with consumption and cure the economic ills of the age.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, Mosley was greatly moved by his experience of inner city slums in the early 1920s. They were for Mosley a metaphor for all that was wrong with the nation, 'an insult to the sacrifice of the war generation'.<sup>15</sup> While the masses suffered miseries which put the nation to shame, the means to clear the slums and re-house them, men and machinery, lay idle due to the depression. For Mosley this was 'damnable. The rehousing of the working classes ought in itself to find work for the whole unemployed for the next ten years.'<sup>16</sup> It was in this notion of dealing simultaneously with poverty and unemployment that Mosley broke with orthodox socialist economic thought. For this school of thought unemployment was an incidental hazard of a self-regulating capitalist economy. If you wished to tackle unemployment you needed to tackle the real problem which confronted the working-class under capitalism, poverty. As poverty was caused by an unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, and consequently unemployment, could only be conquered by a redistribution of wealth in the favour of the working-class. However Mosley argued that 'the workers' position will only be greatly improved by an increase in the net total of wealth production directed to working-class uses'<sup>17</sup> and that poverty was in fact caused by unemployment. Thus it was job creation which should be central to the creation of the high wage, full employment economy not wealth redistribution.

It is interesting to note at this point that Mosley's desire to end poverty by utilising the power of modern science to cure the social ills of capitalism, and his

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<sup>13</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.135.

<sup>14</sup>The influence over Mosley of America rather than the Soviet Union at this stage gives a further indication of his eventual reluctance to accept communism as a credible alternative once his disillusionment with the LP and the political system had become total.

<sup>15</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.136.

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>17</sup>Mosley, O., *Revolution By Reason* (Birmingham, 1925) p.16/7.



highlighting of the need to create employment as part of this process, were the means by which he envisaged an end to the causes of class war. He never envisaged an end to class war through the eventual triumph of the working-class. Mosley ultimately desired social harmony and prosperity by uniting the nation behind a common purpose, not by gaining political and economic hegemony for any one class. This quote from an article in 1929, entitled 'Why I Am A Socialist', a quote which would not be out of place in any book or pamphlet ever written by Mosley, amply illustrates the point: 'In such an age we summon all classes to a united effort of the whole nation in the war against poverty'.<sup>18</sup>

The third premise revealed by *Revolution By Reason* was Mosley's view of himself as a 'thought-deed' man: a man of action. A permanent influence over Mosley's political outlook throughout his life was his belief in the need for pragmatism. *Revolution By Reason* was written above all as a practical solution to the socio-economic misery of the working-class which could be implemented immediately, a blueprint for a programme of action today rather than in the tomorrow of traditional, theoretical socialism:

"We cannot say, in face of the present situation, "After a hundred years of evolutionary Socialism all will be well. The starving worker of to-day need not worry, because his great-grandchildren will live in the millennium!"...We must above all be realists. Labour must go forward to early triumph in the steel machine of ruthless Realism with the motive power of a soaring Idealism. All realists must declare that it is the sacred duty of our party to strive to bring about a fundamental change in the whole structure of society within a comparatively short period of time."<sup>19</sup>

In terms of the consistency in Mosley's thought during his political career it is worth comparing this quote with one from Mosley's 1938 book *Tomorrow We Live*, 'the essence of our economic creed is the realist facing facts and the adoption, even more in practice than in theory, of the quickest means of national reconstruction'.<sup>20</sup> The 'heroic vitalism' which imbues both quotes will be examined later in the chapter.

*Revolution By Reason* was thus primarily concerned with tackling the problem of unemployment. It was generally accepted that this was caused by a lack of 'demand' in the market place. Mosley however argued that this lack of demand was illusory, the working-class having a desperate need for the potential products of their own labour in order to end their poverty:

"The masses have a "real demand" to a desperate extent. They urgently require the boots, clothes and other commodities which men and machines now idle could produce. The trouble is the working-class has no "effective demand". They have not the purchasing power to command the production of the goods which they require and which those unemployed or on half-time could produce."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.175.

<sup>19</sup>Mosley, *Revolution*, p.28.

<sup>20</sup>Mosley, O., *Tomorrow We Live* (London, 1938) p.37.

<sup>21</sup>Mosley, *Revolution*, p.8/9.

In order to overcome this the British State would be given an executive role of planning, directing and co-ordinating the economy, as well as any sphere of life which needed 'directing', in order that pre-determined targets and objectives were achieved. A State, armed with a national plan, in co-ordination with a nationalised banking system, which would 'be conducted in a Socialist manner for the benefit of the community whose credit they exercise',<sup>22</sup> would first:

"Expand credit [given directly to the impoverished] in order to create demand. That new and greater demand must, of course, be met by a new and greater supply of goods, or all the evils of inflation and price rise will result. Here our Socialist planning must enter in. We must see that more goods are forthcoming to meet the new demand. If, by Socialist planning, we can ensure a greater supply of goods corresponding to the greater supply of money, inflation and price rises cannot result. On the other hand, new demand will have mobilised the service of men and machines now idle in the production of urgently wanted commodities."<sup>23</sup>

National planning was of central importance, socialism being defined in *Revolution By Reason* as 'the conscious control and direction of human resources for human needs',<sup>24</sup> and the 'vehicle' for this socialist national planning was to be a national Economic Council. The Economic Council was in effect the forerunner to the Commodity Boards envisaged by the NP and the economically reconciling and socially harmonising institutions of the BUF's Corporate State.

A clue to Mosley's eventual development into a fascist lies within the proposals of *Revolution By Reason*. Mosley thought that the proposals in *Revolution By Reason* provided a way out of the self-defeating dogfight between Capital and Labour. What Mosley sought throughout his life was social justice via national harmony, not via the hegemony of any one class or section. Mosley's drift towards fascism resulted primarily from this desire for harmony rather than class hegemony as it led to his refusal to choose sides between left and right in a situation of mounting socio-economic and political crisis. That is the desire for social conciliation via national unity inherent in Mosley's brand of palingenetic integral nationalism led him inevitably to fascism. This is a point which is further enhanced by John Strachey's<sup>25</sup> description of the NP as 'an entirely Utopian appeal for social compromise'.<sup>26</sup>

The same sense of betrayal which led Mosley to leave the CP caused him to leave the LP and to resign from the government following the failure of the 1929-31 Labour Government to implement Mosley's proposals for tackling unemployment and its general failure to implement the radical programme it was elected upon. Mosley, frustrated in his experiences of the political system during his time as chancellor of the Duchy of

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<sup>22</sup>ibid., p.8.

<sup>23</sup>ibid., p.12.

<sup>24</sup>ibid., p.22.

<sup>25</sup>Strachey was a close colleague of Mosley's in the ILP, who helped devise *Revolution By Reason* and followed Mosley into the New Party.

<sup>26</sup>Skidelsky, R., 'Great Britain' in Woolf, S., (ed.) *European Fascism* (London, 1970) p.246.

Lancaster working upon the unemployment problem, had become convinced that the LP's leadership had neither the will nor the ability to act decisively in the face of the mounting crisis and would always betray its principles and supporters. Before leaving the LP Mosley made one last attempt to influence the Labour Government's policy when he published in *The Daily Telegraph* *The Mosley Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* however had little impact and so completed Mosley's disillusionment with the Labour Government and the political system.

Mosley thus left the LP in search of the contemporary, modern, new 'tool' by which to get the job of creating a 'Land Fit for Heroes' done. Mosley sought this first in a party of his own creation, the NP, which he formed in 1931. Its name is of obvious significance, the 'New Party' being a brand new political party and thus free of the corrupt and bankrupt ways of the 'united mutttons' of the 'old gangs'. The NP proved to be a short lived venture suffering electoral annihilation in 1931. However, by attempting to buck the system and set up his own movement Mosley had entered the political wilderness. It was a wilderness which, following his next attempt to create a 'vehicle' to bear his political programme for radical change, he never left. This 'vehicle' was the BUF which Mosley launched in October 1932.<sup>27</sup>

It can be argued that Mosley's eventual development into a fascist was an inevitable consequence of the ideas he developed concerning the political and socio-economic *status quo* in the 1920s. Mosley became convinced during the 1920s that if what he considered to be the inevitable decline and collapse of Britain and her empire was to be defied then an alternative programme of radical socio-economic and political policies would have to be pursued and implemented. This conviction was to become the mainspring beneath Mosley's political and economic critique and for all of his subsequent political actions. It was the belief that none of the existing parties were capable of being the 'vehicle' through which such radical policies could be implemented which led directly to Mosley's decision to attempt to set up a movement capable of being such a vehicle, firstly in the guise of the NP and then in the shape of the BUF. Mosley's railings, in the 1920s, against the 'hard faced men' and 'old games' of Parliament and the championing of the 'new' men of the 'war generation' have a clear echo in Mosley's definition of fascism as 'the embodied and organized determination of young manhood to rescue great nations from decadence, and march together towards a higher and nobler order of civilization'.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps an important question which needs to be addressed directly is why did Mosley seek his extra-parliamentary alternative in fascism and not communism? The answer to this question will help throw further light upon Mosley's personal political ideology.

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<sup>27</sup>See chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of the New Party.

<sup>28</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.138.

Mosley did not seek this revolutionary solution in communism because at an ideological level Mosley<sup>29</sup> rejected communism for two reasons. Firstly, because of its economic doctrine that all actions, whether socio-economic or individual, are determined by material conditions. Secondly, because of its moral doctrine that demanded an egalitarian society. Mosley refused to accept either that: firstly, man was controlled by irrefutable laws of economics or history, believing that with the heroic exertion of his own will upon his world man could create his utopia; and secondly, that ownership of property could be justified by the imposition of duty upon the owner, Mosley never having sought an egalitarian society but a meritocratic one.

In addition to these two beliefs which Mosley held was the fact that he had left the LP because it lacked the ability or the will to act in a time of crisis. This was not a reflection of the impotence or torpidity of its ideas but of its character. In turn this character defect was a reflection of not just the LP but the political system:

"many a good revolutionary has arrived at Westminster roaring like a lion, only a few months later to be cooing as the tame dove of his opponent. The bar, the smoking room, the lobby, the dinner tables of his constituents enemies, and the 'atmosphere of the best club in the country,' very quickly rob a people's champion of his vitality and fighting power. Revolutionary movements lose their revolutionary ardour as a result long before they ever reach power, and the warrior of the platform becomes the lap-dog of the lobbies."<sup>30</sup>

This character defect was not simply the result of the routine of the system's institutions but was the reflection of a far deeper cultural decay in which modern civilization had become soft and was now doomed to economic disaster because hard, heroic figures of earlier civilizations, the ones that had built the British Empire were no more. In Mosley's critique of inter-war Britain, the warrior, actor and creator had been replaced by the financier, clerk and political windbag. So Mosley viewed the job of renewal as a twofold one. Not only was it necessary to build a new socio-economic and political system, but first in order to build that, one had to build a new movement with the heroic spirit and mentality capable of getting the job done. What separated Mosley fascism from the old parties was:

"not a difference of method or points of policy, but a difference of spirit. And this difference of spirit expresses itself in a different type of man - Blackshirt man. Fascism excluded the possibility of collaboration with any old party because the psychologies of the old parties are irreconcilable with revolutionary Fascism. Fascism can only take members of the old parties and mould them into Blackshirts through the furnace of the struggle for power."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>See chapter 1 for the personal background analysis to Mosley's susceptibility to fascism rather than communism.

<sup>30</sup>Mosley, *Tomorrow*, p.14.

<sup>31</sup>Editor, 'Notes of the Quarter: Fascism and the Old Parties', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) p.258.

This analysis of Mosley fascism is a reflection of the philosophical roots of Mosley's own rebellion against the existing political system. The greatest influences upon Mosley's philosophical thinking (and the inspiration for his political critique and writings) came not from within the British empirical or more universal traditions, but from the idiosyncratic tradition of 'Heroic Vitalism'<sup>32</sup> and the writers Oswald Spengler,<sup>33</sup> Fredrick Nietzsche and George Bernard Shaw.

Mosley was initially influenced by the veteran socialist George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's views concerning dissimulation and the idea that ideas and people are not good or evil, but useful or useless and Shaw's development of the Lamarckian argument that evolution was not dictated by nature exerting its 'laws' over man, but by man exerting his will over nature (nature being only a stimulae to human action not a determinate of it) were of immense influence over Mosley.<sup>34</sup>

Mosley starting from a Spenglerian view of cultural decay moved (as a result of the rejection of Spenglerian pessimism) via the Nietzschean belief in the transition from decadence through the purifying fires of struggle to health, to the idea of the Shavian hero who, armed with new ideas and age-old impulses, battles triumphantly with the inert forces of ideological dogma and entrenched moral and political values to achieve cultural, spiritual, political and socio-economic renewal.

The charismatic Mosley's self-image of the thought-deed man and the saviour of his nation in its hour of greatest need (derived from the maternal adoration he received unchecked by any paternal competition, his wealth, social privilege, prominent good looks and sporting prowess) led him to see himself as the heroic figure of the vitalist tradition capable of averting the imminent crisis, the prospect of which (both crisis and heroic figure) Mosley was obsessed with throughout his life. The 'cult of the superman' and the disparaging of intellect without action further attracted Mosley, who came to view himself as a potential Caesar and benevolent dictator: the hero in his very own Wagnerian opera.

Mosley's thirst for action at almost any cost over ideology made him susceptible to the lure of fascism's claims to be a heroically vitalistic movement defying national decline and the inevitability of history through the imposition of its own will upon the world. As a consequence of this, fascism represented for Mosley a combination of Nietzschean and Christian values. The Nietzschean belief in the will to power, as exhibited by the athletic, iron, discipline of the man who strives to become a Nietzschean

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<sup>32</sup>See Eric Bentley's *The Cult of the Superman* (Gloucester, USA, 1944) for the best discussion of 'Heroic Vitalism'.

<sup>33</sup>It was Alexander Raven Thomson, a former communist and unofficial philosopher of the BUF, who introduced Mosley to Spengler and an, organic and epochal view of history. See the next chapter for a fuller discussion of Thomson's ideas including his interesting heroic vitalist book *Civilization as Divine Superman* (London, 1932). Written under the pseudonym Raven, A.

<sup>34</sup>See Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* (London, 1898), *Man and Superman* (London, 1903), *Back to Methuselah* (London, 1921) and 'The Perfect Wagnerite' in *Major Critical Essays* (London, 1932).

superman, being used for the Christian purpose of serving the national community rather than the individual:

"On the one hand you find in Fascism, taken from Christianity, taken directly from the Christian conception, the immense vision of service, of self-abnegation, of self-sacrifice in the cause of others, in the cause of the world, in the cause of your country; not the elimination of the individual, so much as the fusion of the individual in something far greater than himself; and you have that basic doctrine of Fascism, service, self-surrender to what the Fascist must conceive to be the greatest cause and the greatest impulse in the world. On the other hand you find taken from Nietzschean thought the virility, the challenge to all existing things which impede the march of mankind, the absolute abnegation of the doctrine of surrender; the firm ability to grapple with and to overcome all obstructions. You have, in fact, the creation of a doctrine of men of vigour and of self-help which is the other outstanding characteristic of Fascism...At the moment of a great world crisis, a crisis which in the end will inevitably deepen, a movement emerges from a historic background which makes its emergence inevitable, carrying certain traditional attributes derived from a very glorious past, but facing the facts of today, armed with the instruments which only this age has ever conferred upon mankind. By this new and wonderful coincidence of instrument and of event the problems of the age can be overcome, and the future can be assured in a progressive stability. Possibly this is the last great wave of the immortal, the eternally recurring Caesarian movement; but with the aid of science, and with the inspiration of the modern mind, this wave shall carry humanity to the further shore."<sup>35</sup>

The Blackshirt movement was to be forged into a heroic elite who would lead the rest of the nation to a higher stage of material and spiritual progress, based upon co-operation and national planning.

An important point needs to be noted when discussing Mosley's brand of heroic vitalism. Part of the optimistic charge which ran through it was due to Mosley's belief in the power of modern science which led him to reject the pessimism of Spengler which 'arises from his entire ignorance of modern science and mechanical development...which for the first time places in the hands of man the ability entirely to eliminate the poverty problem.'<sup>36</sup> Mosley's faith in science to overcome society's ills is a recurring theme in his economic, political and philosophical writings.

This utopian revolutionary philosophy,<sup>37</sup> which was Mosley's brand of heroic vitalism, was not just synthesised by Mosley with his economic programme, but also influenced the nature of its implication. Mosley's argument was for a pragmatic plutocracy. In his ILP proposals this was the central role of the 'executive' (the cabinet of five), while in his BUF proposals it was the call for the fully blown 'conservative revolution' of the Corporate State.

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<sup>35</sup>Griffin *Fascism* (London, 1995) p.173/4. Quoted from Mosley, O., 'The Philosophy of Fascism', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935).

<sup>36</sup>Mosley, 'The Philosophy', p.35-46.

<sup>37</sup>See Matthew Coupland's article, 'The Blackshirted Utopians', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.255-72, in which the BUF's political ideology is analysed as a form of political utopianism.

Mosley's economic proposals were based upon a genuine desire to see an end to class war, so that the task of national reconstruction could begin. For many people, Mosley included, fascism above all represented the best chance of achieving this desire. As John Strachey writes in warning, with the experience of a man who narrowly escaped following the road to fascism:

"the path which leads to the fascist terror has a most attractive entrance. Those who have lost their way, and there are many such, in the baffling complexities of modern life, are tempted to discover in fascism an easy solution to their difficulties. They see, as I saw, the beckoning lights of social peace, economic security for all and a gradual reconstruction of society based upon a new compact between capital and labour."<sup>38</sup>

Mosley was determined to find a vehicle capable of carrying out his economic programme of national regeneration and following his disillusionment with the political system he came to the conclusion that only a movement with a heroic vitalist instinct could hope to perform the task. For Mosley this movement could only be fascism because, as Sternhell correctly suggests 'to a world in distress, fascism represents a heroic opportunity to dominate matter once more, and to subdue through an exertion of power not only the forces of nature but also those of society and the economy.'<sup>39</sup> It was this need for a heroic movement capable of a heroic exertion of will in order to overcome the economic and cultural circumstances to which Mosley believed his opponents were prisoner that pushed him towards fascism. This was the essential reason for Mosley turning to fascism and not communism and his decision to establish the BUF.

The BUF, unique amongst fascist movements, was launched at the same time as an intellectually lucid declaration of its *raison d'être* and 'manifesto' was published. This declaration was Mosley's book *The Greater Britain*. This book presented the BUF's case in terms of both sweeping away the old parliamentary system of government and of replacing it with a new fascist conception of government based upon leadership and action. This case was revolutionary in both its critique of the then current situation and in terms of its proposed remedies.

The intellectual premise of *The Greater Britain* was based upon three related arguments. Firstly, an economic argument formed around the dream of creating the 'Land Fit for Heroes' of a high-wage, full-employment autarkic economy by removing the British Empire from the international political and economic system and so 'insulating' it from the 'shocks' of the global system of finance capitalism. Secondly, an argument that the only way these reforms could be implemented was by sweeping away the old parliamentary system of government and replacing it with a new fascist system of government based on leadership and personal responsibility. Thirdly, a belief that these

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<sup>38</sup>Strachey, J., *The Menace of Fascism* (London, 1933) p.165/6.

<sup>39</sup>Sternhell, Z., *Neither Right Nor Left* (Berkeley, 1986) p.303.

changes in political and socio-economic life, which were necessary if the nation wasn't to fall into terminal decay, could only be brought about by the BUF.

The philosophical framework from within which Mosley wrote *The Greater Britain* represented a synthesis of: firstly, Spenglerian cultural pessimism in the face of the perceived decline and decay of western civilization; secondly, Nietzschean and Shavian vitalism and belief in the need for the emergence of a new man to reverse this decline; and thirdly, a neo-Lamarckian belief that man had the ability, through action and conscious striving, to achieve this aim and build a better society. This synthesis was set within the context of Mosley's chauvinistic belief in Britain's imperial and civilizing pre-destined historical mission.

Within the home economy all areas would be 'geared' towards benefiting national interest, rather than sectional interests, through the co-ordinating framework of the Corporate State which would ensure that Britain enjoyed a high-wage, full-employment economy. Mosley believing that 'there is no room for interests which are not the State's interests... wise laws, and wise institutions, are those which harness without restricting: which allow human activity full play, but guide it into channels which serve the nation's ends.'<sup>40</sup> The vision of British economic regeneration and renewal in *The Greater Britain* (derived from a synthesis of socialist and Keynesian economic planning and Douglas's theory of social credit) was a natural growth from *Revolution By Reason*.<sup>41</sup> Mosley identified as the immediate cause of Britain's economic crisis under-consumption. But for Mosley the real cause of the socio-economic ills that had befallen Britain was the bankruptcy of capitalism, the impotence of the British political system and a cultural and moral decline which undermined the ability of the nation to act decisively in times of crisis.

Mosley's economic proposals amounted to a synthesis of economic protectionism and a form of managed capitalism contained within the major development within the proposals - an autarkic British Empire. The Empire and its Imperial market would be insulated from the world market and thus protected from the 'electric shocks' caused by the world's finance capitalism. For Mosley the future fascist Empire would in fact be an economic super-state in which the dominions and colonies would, in return for manufactured goods made in Britain, supply the primary products and raw materials that Britain would require if it were to achieve autarky. This autarky would herald an era of social harmony and national and imperial unity as, within Mosley's analysis, it was the economic war between nations, caused by free trade, that created the conditions for the class war of Marxist theory. Thus by ending the trade war the causes of class war would

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<sup>40</sup>Mosley, O., *The Greater Britain* (London, 1934) p.19.

<sup>41</sup>Once again the influence of Birmingham over Mosley can be detected with the echoes in his *Greater Britain* proposals of Joseph Chamberlain's call for 'imperial preference'. The influence over Mosley's economic ideas of John Maynard Keynes is also clear, in particular Keynes *A Treatise on Money*. Strangely Mosley never read Keynes major work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.



be removed. A country of Britain's size could no longer hope to be self-sufficient, thus in order to 'opt out' of the trade war the protected area had to be larger than Britain. The Empire was the obvious, practical area to develop as an estate for British economic security.

The executive system of government needed to be capable of decisive action and the only way this could be achieved was, in Mosley fascism's view, to free it from any kind of detailed parliamentary control. Thus the present system of democracy would need to be replaced by a new system of popular participation in the political process. This would be the Corporate State within which voting would be reduced to an occupational franchise ( Mosley believed that the average voter did not understand the complexities of national politics and would be better off using his or her vote within his own area of expertise) and a national referendum in which voters could simply accept or reject the ruling set of fascist ministers who would rule in league with technocrats, experts in their own sphere of economic or social activity. This would signal an end to the party system because Mosley believed that 'in such a system there is no place for parties and for politicians. We shall ask the people for a mandate to bring to an end the Party system and the Parties. We invite them to enter a new civilization. Parties and the party game belong to the old civilisation, which has failed'.<sup>42</sup> The result of this would be the inauguration of an economic system that produced full employment and uninterrupted growth and thus removed the causes of class conflict, which in turn would herald an era of national unity and social harmony. The problem of deciding at what level profits, wages and working conditions should be, would become technical questions which would be settled by experts working within the framework of the national interest's priorities, a framework drawn up by consultation between industrial, trade union and consumer representatives.

It was, so Mosley thought, only a fascist movement that could bring about these changes and ensure Britain's renewal and revive her to her historical position of greatness, via the 'device' which would create such a system - the Corporate State. The Corporate State's primary purpose of co-ordinating the nation within a common purpose was essential to the building of a fascist society. The Corporate State would ensure that national interests rather than sectional interests were served by the economy. The economy would be divided into industrial corporations. Employers' and employees' delegates alongside governmental and consumer representatives would set price and wage levels in each 'corporation' and strikes and lock-outs would be abolished. Mosley, at a later date, explained the system thus:

"The trade unions are supposed to maintain wage standards and to unify labour conditions; in practice...the unions have proved quite unable to maintain wages, let alone raise them...As a result, at the very moment when a larger market is essential to industry,

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<sup>42</sup>Mosley, O., *Fascism; 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London, 1936) Question 14.

wages and salaries are crashing down, purchasing power is being reduced, and the market is ever diminishing.

*Fascism meets this problem by the machinery of the Corporate State. It is useless to issue vague appeals to employers to maintain wages. This is not a matter for sentiment, but for organization. The Corporate State of Fascism sets up corporations for the appropriate areas of industry which will be governed by representatives of employers, workers and consumers, operating under a ministry of corporations, presided over by a Fascist minister.*

These corporations will be charged, not only with the task of preventing class war by forbidding either lock-outs or strikes, but the corporations will be charged with the constructive task of raising wages and salaries over the whole area of industry as science, rationalization, etc., increase the power to produce.

Related to the corporations will be the instruments of finance and credit, which will supply fresh credit, not for the purpose of speculation, but for financing increased production and consumption. *Thus for the first time demand will be adjusted to supply.* When more goods can be produced wages and salaries will be raised to provide a purchasing power for the consumer...Instead of the new credit going to speculators who force up prices, the new credit will go to industry for the legitimate purposes of production and consumption."<sup>43</sup>

Despite these developments within his political ideas however, the ultimate aim for Mosley remained the same, 'a humanity released from poverty and from many of the horrors and afflictions of disease to the enjoyment of a world re-born through science.'<sup>44</sup>

In order to highlight the consistency in Mosley's thought during the inter-war period it is worth considering Mosley's 1938 book *Tomorrow We Live* and in particular comparing the conclusion of *Revolution By Reason* to the conclusion of *Tomorrow We Live*. Mosley wrote in the conclusion to *Revolution By Reason*:

"Through the dust and turmoil of the struggle for better things we must be sustained by the radiant vision of the society which we shall bequeath to prosperity, but we must not be so blinded by the wonder of this vision that we fail to see the grim, stark facts of the struggle which now surrounds us...We are faced with a desperate situation. We have reached a supreme crisis in the history of humanity. We stand, indeed, at the cross-roads of destiny. For good or ill we live in an epic age. Once again the lash of great ordeal stings an historic race to action. Once more the soul of man is on the march. A lead is the clamant demand of the hour. Above all, youth turns ardent eyes of anxious expectation to a great rally of the forces of progress. At such a moment a nation cannot afford to fail. We must awaken and mobilise our country to save itself by heroic measures before the sands of time and fate run out. We must recapture the spirit of rapturous sacrifice. That immortal spirit was evoked by war between men of many common interests for purposes still obscure or frustrated. Why cannot a greater spirit be summoned forth by the war of all mankind against poverty and slavery? In our hands is the wakening trumpet of reality. Labour alone holds the magic of sacrifice. Dissolved are all other creeds of baser metal beneath ordeal by fire. In the old parties we behold an age of small minds and small policies, of fear and panic, of doubt and hesitation. Let us now brace ourselves with fierce and unflinching resolution to face undaunted the shock of great events so that, from the final turmoil of a bankrupt and brutal epoch, we may wrest the supreme sceptre of economic power. Let us, then, repose that mighty trust for evermore in the safe hands of the workers of our land, that with it they may save themselves and by their example save the world."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Drennan, *The BUF*, p.255/6.

<sup>44</sup>Cullen, S., 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22 (1987) p.122. Quoted from *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) p.46.

<sup>45</sup>Mosley, *Revolution*, p.28/9.

The similarity with the conclusion of *Tomorrow We Live* is striking:

"We have been divided and we have been conquered because by division of the British alone we can be conquered. Class against class, faction against faction, party against party, interest against interest, man against man, and brother against brother has been the tactic of the warfare by which the British in the modern age for the first time in their history have been subdued...Can we recapture the union of 1914 and that rapturous dedication of the individual to a cause that transcends self and faction, or are we doomed to go down with the Empires of history in the chaos of usury and sectional greed?...So man emerges for the final struggle of the ages the supreme and conscious master of his fate to surmount the destiny that has reduced former civilisations to oblivion even from the annals of time. He advances to the final ordeal armed with weapons of the modern mind that were lacking to the hand of any previous generation in the crisis of a civilisation.

The wonders of our new science afford him...the means with which to conquer material environment...Man for the first time in human history carries to the crisis of his fate weapons with which he may conquer even destiny. But one compelling necessity remains that he shall win within himself the will to struggle and to conquer. Our creed and our Movement instil in man the heroic attitude to life because he needs heroism. Our new Britons require the virility of the Elizabethan combined with the intellect and method of the modern technician. The age demands the radiance of the dawn to infuse the wonder of maturity. We need heroism not just for war, which is mere stupidity, but heroism to sustain us through man's sublime attempt to wrestle with nature and to strive with destiny. To this high purpose we summon from the void of present circumstance the vast spirit of man's heroism. For this shall be the epic generation whose struggle and whose sacrifice shall decide whether man again shall know the dust or whether man at last shall grasp the stars.

We know the answer for we have felt this thing within us. In divine purpose the spirit of man rises above and beyond the welter of chaos and materialism to the conquest of a civilisation that shall be the sum and the glory of the travail of the ages. In that high fate to-morrow [sic] we live."<sup>46</sup>

It is interesting to note the more optimistic tone of the fascist text compared to the socialist one, unusual for a supposed product of cultural despair, and the references to the First World War and the unity of identity, action and purpose it instilled in the nation. Both texts share a synthesis of what may be termed a romantic conservative revolutionary ethos of impending doom and the need to act and a firm belief in the rational power of science to bring about progress. A synthesis which reflects a man who began with a program of 'socialistic imperialism' and formed a movement which was based upon the attempted synthesis of patriotism and revolution. The belief in 'synthesis, eternal synthesis'<sup>47</sup> is also a reflection of a man who placed great value on the need to be 'realistic', who desired radical change, but not for change's sake and wished above all to achieve social justice and harmony through national unity. The desire to synthesize nationalism and socialism, a classic fascist 'dream', is a recurrent theme within both Mosley's personal political ideology and Mosley fascism, the phrase "if you love our country you are National, and if you love our people you are Socialist" being a recurring rallying call throughout the BUF's literature and press.

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<sup>46</sup>Mosley, *Tomorrow*, p.69-72.

<sup>47</sup>Mosley, *My Life*, p.91.

Whilst there is little development between *The Greater Britain* and his next major political and philosophical work *Tomorrow We Live*, unusual for Mosley and primarily caused by his preoccupation in the 1930s with running the BUF, two further quotes from *Tomorrow We Live* are worth noting as they guarantee the classical socialist calls for higher wages, lower hours and educational opportunity for all in this future fascist Britain. A fascist Britain where 'useful employment can be found for the whole population and for all machinery,' the 'solution of the present problem which is miscalled "overproduction" is both to increase wages and to reduce the hours of labour'<sup>48</sup> and 'all children of outstanding ability will have open to them by progressive selection a straight road from cradle to university. The opportunity open to every child shall be the same, and the same path to higher education will be available to all talent.'<sup>49</sup>

Before drawing conclusions upon Mosley's ideological development, it is perhaps worth considering Mosley from the perspective of Griffin's and Sternhell's generic theories.

In the case of Griffin's it is interesting to note Mosley's own fascism is engendered/empowered with a palingenetic myth. A political vision Mosley developed as a result of a constant and genuine belief he held from the 1920s onwards that only radical economic and political policies could halt what he considered to be the otherwise inevitable decline and collapse of Britain and its empire. This belief underlaid all his actions. The belief that none of the existing parties, the 'united mutttons' of the 'old gangs', were capable of being the 'vehicle' through which such radical policies could be implemented, led directly to Mosley's decision to attempt to set up a party capable of being such a vehicle, firstly in the guise of the NP and then in the shape of the BUF, as Mosley believed that 'the rebirth of a nation comes from the people in a clear and ordered sequence. The People, their movement, their Government, their power. To create their Government...the people have first to create their Movement.'<sup>50</sup>

Such comments, and in particular Mosley's obsession at this time with a vision of the youth overthrowing the old, would seem to be indicative of a palingenetic myth at work within Mosley's vision of a 'Greater Britain', achieved through a radical 'rebirth' of the nation.

It is quite clear that the only way proposed by Mosley fascism that Britain could avert its decline and decay which would reduce her 'to the position of a Spain - alive, in a sense, but dead to all sense of greatness and to her mission in the world,'<sup>51</sup> was in Griffin's view by 'revitalizing its [Britain's] colonial and trading empire under a single party state with himself [Mosley] as its charismatic leader.'<sup>52</sup> The way this was to be

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<sup>48</sup>Mosley, *Tomorrow*, p.40.

<sup>49</sup>ibid., p.56.

<sup>50</sup>ibid., p.11.

<sup>51</sup>Mosley, *The Greater*, p.190.

<sup>52</sup>Griffin, *The Nature*, p.138.

done was undoubtedly palingenetic in 'ethos', for as Mosley himself suggests 'in a age of decadence and disillusion when all old values fail, the new flame purifies and inspires to loftier ambitions and mightier ends,'<sup>53</sup> so that 'in our own movement...we seek to create in advance a microcosm of a national manhood reborn.'<sup>54</sup> Mosley fascism considered that 'the making of the Blackshirts and the making of the Fascist Movement is the preparation in embryo of the new Britons and of the new Britain.'<sup>55</sup> Mosley's proposals, philosophical base and desire for national unity would seem to have been based upon an organic view of the nation and a political palingenetic mythic vision of Britain in the 1930s.

In regard to Sternhell's theory, in his first elaboration of his theory<sup>56</sup> he identified as the four key defining elements within the distinctive political ideology, which he claims fascism to be: its desire to create a new civilization; its view of the relationship between the individual and the community; its conception of a 'new' socialism; and the nature of its totalitarianism. Mosley's personal political ideology clearly displayed all four key defining elements.

For Sternhell fascism was an 'ideology of revolt' which 'advocated a revolution of the spirit and the will, of manners and morals. It offered not only new political and social structures but also new types of relationships between man and society, between man and nature.'<sup>57</sup> This fascist revolution 'wished to replace the mercantile civilization of their day with a civilization of monks and warriors, a warlike, virile and heroic civilization in which a sense of sacrifice would replace bourgeois hedonism and egoism. This new world would be created by an elite conscious of its duties.'<sup>58</sup> In the words of Sternhell and Mosley a fascist victory would herald the dawn of a 'new civilization.'<sup>59</sup>

There are numerous examples of such aspirations in the writing of the BUF's leading ideologue, which aim at a regenerative rebirth of Great Britain (and also lend further credence to Griffin's theory) for example this quote from Mosley: 'In fact, we seek to introduce a new civilisation to the land we love. We fight also for the rebirth of the spirit. Fascism is the creed and the morality of British manhood. It is the creed of men who have determined that Britain shall live and again be great'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed his fulminations against the 'old gangs' and 'united mutttons' were a constant theme in Mosley's writings and speeches throughout the inter-war period. A fundamental part of this desire to create a new civilization was the fascist championing of the new and the young against the old and the decayed. The older generation was condemned for letting

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<sup>53</sup>Mosley, *The Greater*, p.12 (preface to the second edition).

<sup>54</sup>ibid., p.53.

<sup>55</sup>Editor, 'Notes of the Quarter', p.258.

<sup>56</sup>Sternhell, Z., 'Fascist ideology' in Laqueur, W., (ed.) *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth, 1979) pp.325-406.

<sup>57</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.303.

<sup>58</sup>Sternhell, Z., 'Fascism' in Miller, D., (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford, 1987) p.149.

<sup>59</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist', p.354.

<sup>60</sup>Mosley, O., *Fascism in Britain* (London, 1934?) p.II.

European civilization fall into decay and thus like their system had to be swept aside if the nation could grow and thrive once more and if civilization was to be saved. For Oswald Mosley 'the real division of the past decade has not been one of parties, but a division of generations',<sup>61</sup> a belief that led him at a meeting of London and provincial trade unionists in 1938 to say 'We [the BUF] want to see young and virile men taking the place of the leadership of their trade unions in place of old men who are living in the past'.<sup>62</sup>

The second of Sternhell's key defining elements is fascism's view of the relationship between the individual and the community. Fascism saw the individual only in terms of the social function he or she fulfilled. This was because man was viewed as 'nothing more than the vehicle of forces generated by the community',<sup>63</sup> Sternhell identifying as the basis of fascism's political philosophy the 'view of man as an integral part of an organic whole',<sup>64</sup> the individual existing 'only insofar as he is sustained and determined by the community'.<sup>65</sup> Consequently fascists believed that once they had gained power:

"Society would no longer be a kind of battlefield where individuals and social groups challenge one another, but a collectivity in which all strata and classes of society would work together in harmony. The natural framework of such a harmonious, organic human collectivity...[being for fascism] the nation - a purified, revitalized nation, in which the individual would count only as a cell in the collective organism, and which would enjoy a moral unity that could never be provided by Marxism and liberalism, both of which were consequences of fragmentation and war."<sup>66</sup>

Mosley presented this aspect of fascist philosophy as endowing fascism 'with a unique power to heal the divisions of modern society'.<sup>67</sup> However fascists denied that such a view meant a denial of 'freedom'. For them the democratic defence of individual rights was a travesty of freedom as 'nations and societies were living organic totalities which were an end in themselves'<sup>68</sup> and thus any individual could not fulfil his or her full potential or destiny outside of the collective whole of their nation. This was because for a fascist, a nation was a living organism made up of millions of individuals, who were in effect the individual cells of this 'super-organism', and thus the individual could only obtain 'true' freedom if the freedom of the nation was obtained first.

For Mosley 'real freedom' was 'economic freedom', defining 'real' freedom, in similar language to the rhetoric of 'popular' Marxism, as meaning 'good wages, short

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<sup>61</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.356.

<sup>62</sup>Rawnsley, S., 'Fascism and fascists in Britain in the 1930's', (PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 1983) p.66.

<sup>63</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.364.

<sup>64</sup>ibid., p.364.

<sup>65</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascism', p.150.

<sup>66</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.270/1.

<sup>67</sup>Griffin, *Fascism*, p.173.

<sup>68</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.366.

hours, security in employment, good houses, opportunity for leisure and recreation with family and friends'.<sup>69</sup> From this it followed that 'economic freedom cannot come until economic chaos ends; and it cannot end until a Government has power to act',<sup>70</sup> in other words when 'interests' of the national community supplant the 'interests' of the individual and consequently individual freedom is suppressed so that the organic entity which was the nation could be free.

This leads us to the third key defining element of Sternhell's theory, fascism's conception of a 'new' socialism, because it was this organic view of the nation that 'led fascists to speak of an identity of interest uniting workers and employers...[and] led naturally towards collectivism and to an emphasis on the most neglected and the most productive sections of the national community. Herein lay the socialism of national-socialism, the inspiration for its anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist orientation.'<sup>71</sup>

The fascist conception of socialism was based not on proletarian hegemony but national unity and the championing of the productive elements of the nation against the parasitical ones. Mosley believed that 'class war' in society was 'no longer between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but between the 'workers of all classes' and 'banking capitalism, or hypercapitalism'.<sup>72</sup> This meant that economic parasitism and social exploitation could be ended without the fratricidal class struggle which would shatter national unity, the artificial concept of class being a permanent barrier to national unity and consequently national harmony.

It was certainly the economic crisis of the late 1920s that made some socialists look inward towards the nation and the idea of an authoritarian and strong state to orchestrate the efficient running of the economy, impose order over the nation, reconcile the divergent interests within the nation and above all act decisively and effectively in the face of the crisis. However in Mosley's case it was his disillusionment with the Labour government in which he served. Mosley became disillusioned because, as Sternhell correctly states in relation to the left throughout Europe, although 'the extreme left was the traditionally revolutionary element, it soon became clear that the supposedly subversive character of socialism was largely theoretical. Each in turn and in its own manner, the various socialist movements [except of course the Bolsheviks] all took the social-democratic path of compromise with the established order'.<sup>73</sup>

The fourth key defining element of Sternhell's theory was the nature of its totalitarianism. The totalitarian nature of fascism was embraced by Mosley. For its followers fascism was a 'total' view of life, which desired to re-order society nationally, politically, economically and socially. Fascism was 'totalitarian precisely because it

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<sup>69</sup>ibid., p.366.

<sup>70</sup>ibid., p.366.

<sup>71</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.382.

<sup>72</sup>ibid., p.376.

<sup>73</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.15.

encompassed the whole range of human activity. It was totalitarian because it represented a way of life, because it would penetrate every sector of social and intellectual activity, because it meant to create at once a new type of society and a new type of man.<sup>74</sup> This meant that fascists desired a strong central political authority 'freed from the trammels of democracy'<sup>75</sup> to carry out this revolution. In other words 'a state that represented the whole of society with all its different classes,' that through 'planism, economic dirigism, and corporatism,' would ensure 'the victory of politics over economics,' and place 'all the key positions in the economy and society in the hands of the state.'<sup>76</sup> Thus the supreme authority of the state was the objective, the primacy of politics over economics. This passage from Mosley clearly elaborates on this sentiment:

"Capitalism is the system by which capital uses the nation for its own purposes. Fascism is the system by which the nation uses capital for its own purposes. Private enterprise is permitted and encouraged so long as it coincides with the national interests. Private enterprise is not permitted when it conflicts with national interests...This implies that every interest, whether right or left, industrial, financial, trade union banking, or banking system is subordinated to the welfare of the community as a whole, and to the overriding authority of the organized State. No state within the State can be admitted. "All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state.""<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, if judged by the criteria of Sternhell's and Griffin's generic fascist 'definitional minimum' the personal political ideology of Mosley during the 1930s would seem to be clearly fascist ('anomalies' such as the retention of the monarchy being simply a reflection of the 'British' character of British fascism). Conversely the example of Mosley would seem to validate the approaches taken by Griffin and Sternhell in constructing a generic fascist theory.<sup>78</sup>

It clearly appears that Mosley's political thought would seem to have remained remarkably faithful to his original dream of the post First World War era: the building of a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. For Mosley the reason why he was involved in politics was to ensure ideals of the 'war generation' were not betrayed and that the millions killed in the First World War did not die in vain. This meant, for Mosley, that a better and nobler Britain should be built as a fitting tribute to both the fallen and those that survived.

The socialist aspect of this dream lay in two areas: firstly in Mosley's beliefs that the state must exert direct influence over political and socio-economic affairs because uncontrolled capitalism was bound to lead to economic collapse and depression; and secondly in his rejection of the individualist philosophy of liberal socio-economic thought in favour of the collectivist ideal of social harmony and national reconciliation he had

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<sup>74</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', p.354/5.

<sup>75</sup>Sternhell, *Neither*, p.27.

<sup>76</sup>*ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>77</sup>Sternhell, 'Fascist ideology', p.381.

<sup>78</sup>Mosley also seems to fit Roger Eatwell's and Stanley Payne's theories extremely well, particularly, appropriately enough, Eatwell's syncretic approach. See chapter 4 and the conclusion.



found in the First World War and which he hoped to construct once again within the framework of the Corporate State. Mosley certainly considered himself during the inter-war period a man of the left, as a letter to *The Times* he wrote in 1968 shows: 'I am not and never have been a man of the right. My position was on the left'.<sup>79</sup> Anyone who would doubt the genuineness of this aristocrat's socialism during his Labour days should consider the esteem with which he was held by the movement while he was a member. John Wheatley, the left-wing ILP MP's, description of Mosley as 'one of the most brilliant and hopeful figures thrown up by the Socialist Movement during the last 30 years'<sup>80</sup> illustrates this very well.

However it is important to always place at centre stage Mosley's position as a member of the 'war-generation'. The points of contact between the 'war-generation' and the LP, a desire for a new political, social and economic order, led to Mosley joining it, but the points of departure, the LP's sectarianism and its unheroic, puritanical and repressed political style, led to him leaving it and to his attempt to find a political solution in fascism. The reason Mosley gave for joining the LP, in a letter he wrote to Ramsay MacDonald, could just as easily have been given by Mosley as the reason why he formed the BUF: 'the battle array of the future is determined. You stand forth as the leader of the forces of progress in their assault upon the powers of reaction. In this grave struggle...I ask leave to range myself beneath your standard.'<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately fascism must be seen as an answer for those socialists, including Mosley, who remained revolutionaries but were pragmatic realists, the need for action taking precedence over ideology. It is no coincidence that *Action* was the name chosen for both the NP's paper and a BUF paper. At root Mosley's personal political ideology was a charismatic synthesis of utopian revolutionary and pragmatic plutocratic ideas. It was this synthesis which led him to fascism.

Within this syncretic realignment there was genuine social and economic radicalism. Mosley genuinely desired revolutionary transformation of not just the political system but also an economic, social and spiritual one. There is considerable irony in this statement because Mosley sought his solution to Britain's problems outside of the political system because he considered the system incapable of action. However his decision resulted in him being in a position where he was powerless to act. If he had stayed within the political system he would have had far more opportunity to implement his radical ideas. In seeking action Mosley found himself permanently divorced from the decision making process. A process whose power to implement change and to act Mosley had critically underestimated.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>*The Times*, 26 April 1968.

<sup>80</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.169.

<sup>81</sup>*ibid.*, P.127.

<sup>82</sup>See chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of this argument.

One of the central premises of this thesis is the belief that a firm understanding of the socialist roots of the BUF, and their subsequent influence upon it, is essential to an understanding of the BUF itself. This is because the ideologies of all classical fascist movements (the BUF being an archetypal example of one) are formed from the fusion of two distinct strands of political thought, one nationalist in origin and one socialist in origin. Consequently, having examined the personal political ideology of its founder and leader, the next two chapters in the thesis will deal with: firstly, the extent of the permeation into the BUF of a brand of fascist 'socialism'; and secondly, the nature of the ideological relationship between the two strands in the BUF's 'creed of patriotism and revolution', the strength of both strands in the BUF being clear from even the most fleeting reading of the BUF's press and other literature.

## Chapter Three

### Other Forms of Fascist 'Socialism' Within the BUF

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: firstly, to illustrate that the influence of socialist ideas over, and role within the political ideology of the BUF cannot be reduced to one man (Mosley) but were in fact far deeper set than normally realised; and secondly, (via example) to define what the BUF's particular brand of fascist 'socialism' was. The question of how significant the socialist roots of the BUF or its brand of fascist 'socialism' were overall within the political ideology of Mosley fascism will be dealt with in the next chapter: the purpose of this section is simply to establish its existence and define the nature of the BUF brand of fascist 'socialism'. In many ways this chapter will act as a mini-anthology of primary sources of Mosleyite fascist texts specifically selected to illustrate, at source rather than abstract level, the nature and depth of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'.

The chapter will concentrate upon the left-wing converts to Mosley fascism John Beckett, John Scanlon, William Leaper, Wilf Risdon, Henry Kenyon, Charles Wegg-Prosser, Thomas Waters and Alexander Raven Thomson, who all figured prominently in both the movement's hierarchy and the espousal of a brand of fascist 'socialism' in the BUF's literary output. The Fascist Union of British Workers (FUBW) although insignificant in terms of membership or influence will also nevertheless be considered as it was the BUF's supposed vehicle for worker recruitment, as will some miscellaneous pamphlets and newspaper articles which illustrate certain aspects of this brand of fascist 'socialism'.

An important point must be borne in mind from the outset of such an exercise as this. This group of individuals, or even (at the level of ideas) the concept of fascist 'socialism', was not a concrete self-contained 'ginger group' or concept within the BUF, nor was it even the BUF's equivalent of Nazism's Strasser/Goebbels *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* grouping of the mid-1920s (the so-called Nazi left). The chapter's, indeed the thesis's grouping together of these individuals is a heuristic step taken to highlight the presence of an identifiable strand of thought in a political ideology which although characterised by eclecticism and synthesis was nevertheless (and indeed must be viewed as) a genuine ideology containing a coherent and whole 'worldview'. It would be incorrect to view fascism as a concoction of incompatible strands because these strands were ideologically fused together. Thus in order to examine one strand one must go through the artificial procedure of academic surgery in order to place the strand, in this case the socialist one, beneath the microscope of academic inquiry. It will require the preceding chapter, this chapter and the following chapter, which examines Mosley fascist ideology as a whole and the place of fascist 'socialism' within it, to complete the examination and detailed portrait of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'.

Having said this the reasons for the drift towards fascism, both personal and ideological, and the conception of fascist 'socialism' exhibited by these individuals, share a number of genuine common factors. All were serious in their belief that the BUF belonged to the political and ideological tradition of 'British' socialism. The chapter will illustrate that (arguably significant) sections of the BUF considered itself to be ideologically a form of socialism. While the chapter, and the thesis, does not seek to suggest that it actually was, it sets out to show that sections of the BUF did take this aspect very seriously and ideologically it did contain much thought which had distinct left-wing origins. The chapter will illustrate the relative depth of the socialist strand within Mosley fascism and the coherence at the core, yet diffuse at the surface nature of this strand of fascist ideology, a characteristic it shares in common within all the various components of fascist political ideology.

Before examining these left-wing fascist converts what is required is the establishment of a definitive framework of what is meant by the phrase fascist 'socialism.'

Socialism and its heretic brother fascist 'socialism' both rejected the individualist and *laissez-faire* philosophy of capitalism and both shared a desire to directly control politico-cultural and socio-economic resources and allocate them in such a way that collective interest would be served over individual interest. The chief ideological development which distinguishes the fascist heretic from its humanistic brother is the fact that fascist 'socialism' replaces the working-class with the concept of the nation as the focus of its revolutionary assault upon capitalism. This new form of socialism claimed to stand for all the members of the chosen national community, opposing capitalism not in the name of the working-class but on behalf of the entire nation. Fascist 'socialism' whilst obviously rejecting the internationalism and materialism of Marxism presented a fascist rejuvenation of the nation as a means: to overthrow the existing political, social and economic elites; to transcend class conflict; and to harness the socio-economic and technological energies of the nation in a new political and socio-economic order, free from exploitation and enslavement, in which all productive members of the new nation would be justly rewarded. Thus fascist 'socialism' does not aim to form any deliberate or concrete expression of working-class radicalism or militancy, as it was consciously opposed to class politics and a civilian society based upon sectional interests. What fascist 'socialism' sought was a nation where national interests were placed at all times above sectional ones, a desire which is reflected in the BUF's slogan 'Britain First'.<sup>1</sup> For left-wing fascists the only way the socio-economic grievances of the working-class could be addressed was not through the utopian tomorrow of international socialism, but through the nation of today and the national rebirth the triumph of fascism would orchestrate. A rebirth which would herald a new age of national unity of purpose, destiny and mission, which would enable the problems of bad housing, poverty and

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<sup>1</sup>Mosley, O.: *The Greater Britain* (2nd edition London, 1934) p.19.

unemployment to be tackled successfully, unhindered by vested sectional and financial interests.

The genesis of the British version of this 'new age' was the dream of the 'war generation' to create a 'Land Fit for Heroes', following the horrors of the First World War and the massive sacrifices the 'war generation' were asked to make during it. The ethos of the 'war generation' - a dream of building a new Britain - harboured the palingenetic brand of integral nationalism which (dominated by the socialist ethos of a strong central state armed with a national plan) was determined to solve the socio-economic grievances of the entire nation (not just the working-class), in particular bad housing, poverty and unemployment, that was to develop, ideologically, into a fully blown version of fascism in the form of Mosley fascism and its vehicle for enactment, the BUF.

It is a very important fact that the overwhelming majority of both left-wing and right-wing recruits to the BUF were disillusioned veterans of the 'Great War'.

This thesis in no way attempts to suggest that fascism, as a whole, is a heretical brother of socialism (only one particular strand within certain forms of fascism), but that it is in fact a highly eclectic political ideology, there being many roads which lead to fascism both on an ideological and on a personal level. One of these roads is from the left. This thesis intends to demonstrate that, under the right circumstances, no one is immune from the virus of fascism, including its political polar opposite, a point proven by the case of the left-wing roots of the BUF.

To simply label former socialist or communist recruits to the BUF as traitors or turncoats does not really help to explain the phenomenon of left-wing conversion to fascism. The ideological dimension, indeed the ideological challenge posed by Mosley fascism to the British Labour movement, must be taken into account.

The BUF's appeal to these individuals was two-fold. Firstly, in its critique of the Labour movement and the present political system as both being ineffective and self serving, more of an obstacle to change than a vehicle for it. Secondly, in its promotion of a Corporate State as a reconciling mechanism which embraced economic planning, public expenditure to reduce unemployment, a strong role for the state in imposing the 'common good' over business interests, a central role for Trade Unions in the industrial and economic decision making process and ample economic and social rewards for the British working-class.

These ideas could clearly appeal to socialists and communists who were disenchanted with Ramsay MacDonald's leadership of the Labour Party (LP), alienated by the Russian control of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and disheartened by the Independent Labour Party's (ILP) lurch into the political wilderness. For these individuals fascism was a quite acceptable answer to the questions the Labour movement had failed to answer, particularly when British fascism was led by such a prominent and previously well thought of former comrade.

This process was a strong factor in the transition to fascism of all the individuals specifically examined in this chapter, and particularly in the case of John Beckett. In regard to Beckett it is of particular interest to note the common train of thought he shared with Mosley which led Beckett from the ILP to the BUF. In a 1934 fascist newspaper article, 'Why I Joined the Blackshirts', Beckett recounts an outline of his political journey:

**"When I joined up on August 4th, 1914, I was a boy of nineteen. At the end of 1917 I was discharged fully convinced that, however important fighting might be, thinking and planning were equally essential to our national well-being.**

**I spent six months reading economics and sociology, another three months listening to political leaders and studying their programmes. The Conservatives were unbelievably stupid, and reeked of guttural finance patriotism. The wishy-washy goodwill without guts of the Liberals was obviously useless.**

**Only in the utterances of the Labour Party did I find constructive thinking. The width and generosity of "Labour after the war" captured me as it did thousands of young men at that time...for the first few years I had great hopes. In 1919 the process of disillusionment started. I was elected to a Borough Council where labour ruled...afraid to put their own policy into force, the London Labour Councils elected immediately after the war provided a forecast of the Labour Governments that were to follow...**

**I was 25, I did not learn my lesson. I thought that hypocritical and self-seeking as the leaders were, this had only to be exposed and the workers would rise and set their house in order. I hoped this with lessening intensity for many years. In 1924 I was elected to the House of Commons...**

**In the Parliamentary Labour Party I discovered a new low level. Some would have been decent had it suited their comfort and economic position; those who mattered would have disgusted Tammany and nauseated a cosmopolitan crook. Some sold themselves openly for a "job". The majority succumbed to a double whisky and a condescending nod from a "real gentleman."**

**Their self-satisfaction and sluggishness were colossal. They cared nothing for the causes or promises they had made from the platform. The Labour Government could steer them to disaster; they were too lazy to think, too cowed to kick. I saw my friends Wheatley martyred, Mosley derided, and Maxton driven out like a pariah.**

**These things sickened me, I cared for England and its people. England needed planning for and working for. The Tories and Socialists drove away every brave man willing to think and fight. There seemed no alternative but to retire from politics and leave the task one had hoped to assist in. Few of the humble members of the Labour Party cared and those who did were powerless to overthrow the machine...**

**[but after the founding of the BUF an alternative emerged because] The British Union of Fascists makes possible a new alignment. People who care for an ordered, planned, scientific system of living may join together to obtain it, unhampered by the pullings of mass demagogues shouting their way to personal comfort...**

**I put on my blackshirt and submit to that discipline which alone can bring salvation, prepared to take my small part in building a land where lethargising myths of committee government and freedom to slack and starve are replaced by the stern and practical realities of Fascism, and manliness, courage, thought and discipline are weapons with which security, peace and comfort can be obtained."<sup>2</sup>**

As this text illustrates Beckett, like Mosley, was both a member of the 'war generation' (the experience of the 'Great War' exercised a considerable influence upon his political thought) and the ILP. Beckett joined the ILP because he thought that the

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<sup>2</sup>Beckett, J., 'Why I Joined the Blackshirts: The Stern and Practical Realities of Fascism', *Fascist Week*, 2-8 March 1934 p.1/2.

Labour movement was the movement which would fight against social injustice and to create the dreamed for 'Land Fit for Heroes'. He was to leave the Labour movement following a similar disillusionment to that of Mosley's with the parliamentary system and the 1929-31 Labour Government. The Labour movement had not been the vehicle for radical change Beckett had initially believed it to be, but at the time of his membership had appeared the only option, a feeling reflected in a comment Beckett made upon the one-time ILP National Secretary John Paton in a review of Paton's biography: 'the author's adhesion to the I.L.P. was purely because it appeared to be the only way out of the morass the workers were involved in.'<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently he joined the BUF in the hope that this would be the movement which would build the 'Land Fit for Heroes'. In the BUF he was Director of Publicity and editor of *Action* and *Blackshirt* between 1936 and 1937, before leaving the BUF in 1937 after falling out with Mosley over his sacking from his salaried posts.

The editorials Beckett wrote act as a basic critique of his view of the LP. Its leadership, at both national and local level, were condemned as the betrayers of the hopes and aspirations of the working-class:

"Labour Government means neither revolution nor evolution. It means spineless government by nonentities without any guiding principles; it means drifting without direction in a welter of glib insincerities; it means inarticulate alarm amid economic insecurity and financial panic increased by nervous and inexperienced ministers."<sup>4</sup>

The LP, following its adoption of the means test as part of its social and welfare policy was branded 'for ever not only as a Party willing to enact the meanest legislation against the very people they claim to represent, but as the biggest gang of political prevaricators the country has ever had the misfortune to harbour.'<sup>5</sup> Beckett warned that, after Poplar's Labour Borough Council had used "blacklegs" to break a strike by municipal electricians and Camberwell's Labour Borough Council had used "blacklegs" to break a strike by municipal painters, 'Labour candidates will climb to office on the backs of the Unions, but will not hesitate to fight them once in power',<sup>6</sup> and commented that it was 'interesting to note how a Labour majority deals with the workers in contrast to their crawling subservience to the powers of finance.'<sup>7</sup> Beckett often highlighted instances of local Labour councils introducing wage cuts, in contrast to Labour's lavish election promises.

The then present state of decline and decay Britain found herself in was not solely the fault of the LP, Beckett also highlighted the faults of both the equally guilty political and capitalist systems:

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<sup>3</sup>Beckett's review of *Proletarian Pilgrimage* by John Paton, *Fascist Quarterly*, 2 (1936) p.145.

<sup>4</sup>Beckett, J., 'Social Democracy in Decay', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) p.83.

<sup>5</sup>Beckett, J., *Shot and Shell* (BUF Publications, 1935) p.2.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p.3.

<sup>7</sup>ibid., p.4.

"This extraordinary method by which the people were given the freedom to exchange one set of failures for another was not such a tragedy in pre-war times because our national problems then were on a minor scale, and the country was in such an outwardly prosperous condition that it practically ran itself...

We, who must face the stern problems of to-day, have no margin to spare for expensive farce and efficiency wasting conceits. For this reason alone a great change would have to be made - but there is another factor at work which makes it not only desirable but vitally necessary...

The old happy methods of division of the spoils are gone never to return. The Labour Party secures office on a series of disconnected and elaborate promises. They have evolved a new technique of cynicism in their dealings with the electorate...

Labour candidates promise huge increases in national expenditure, while responsible leaders assure the City of their loyalty and economy.

A Labour Government arrives in office pledged to carry through the transfer to Socialism, pledged to make huge contributions from the National Exchequer to their supporters, but also pledged neither to organize industry under Capitalism nor to increase Taxation...

We are a small island with no agricultural organization by which we even attempt to feed any appreciable portion of our population. Uncontrolled and unorganized private enterprise insists upon cheap food from abroad while our own fertile land is used for grazing and grass moors...

Our own people go without the necessities of life because we cannot manage our consumptive power in such a way that our unemployed might be manufacturing the goods which their fellow countrymen need.

Pages could be used pointing out the utter chaos and muddle of our present anarchic political and economical life.

This tragic state of affairs is not solely due to accident. There are many great financial and monopolistic interests which thrive on the poverty of the nation. Those who behind the scenes control our destiny have interests in every country in the world.

Communism is not the only international party; present day Conservatism is the catspaw of the banker and the cosmopolitan financier. The inner ring of Tory backers are as varied a crowd of names as any that could be found on a Committee of the Third International.

This ring of greed and cunning cannot be broken by a loose political organization. The Conservatives are hand-in-glove with it, the Labour Party is spineless and afraid.

Unless the modern Briton can contrive a new weapon to save himself there is no future but one of gradual decline, accompanied by the horrors of civil war and Communism as the masses turn from the hypocrisy of the Labour Party to the honest, if suicidal, fanaticism of Maxton and Pollitt...

The vitally necessary organization of this country as an industrial and agricultural unit; the insulation of our people from the competition of low grade labour and the vagaries of international finance are just as much a job for the expert as the diagnosing of a tumour or the planning of a building."<sup>8</sup>

Beckett also attacked the evils of capitalism, haranguing the folly of 'starving in a world of plenty...the most tragic symptom of the world's economic ills is the constant restriction of production and destruction of food, and food producing potentialities, which is constantly necessitated by the refusal to readjust the distributive machine to modern productive possibilities.'<sup>9</sup> Beckett condemned restrictions being placed on the amount of tea produced in India and Ceylon in 1933 despite the government 'knowing

<sup>8</sup>Beckett, J., 'Why Patriotic Britain is Going Blackshirt: End of the Ins and Outs', *Fascist Week*, 20-26 April 1934 p.1.

<sup>9</sup>Beckett, *Shot*, p:30/1.



the unique place of tea in the homes of our workers, knowing the hardship to the unemployed of the shortage of tea owing to its high price, destroying one of the few pitiful little comforts our people enjoy - all for profit to already wealthy firms and shareholders.<sup>10</sup> Beckett held the classic fascist sentiment that behind the evils of capitalism lurked international finance, 'the wire pullers', who were bleeding the country dry, 'the only things the international financiers don't own in the whole country are the sewers and the National Debt. Those belong to the British People [the national debt consisted mostly of war loans and]...more than 80 per cent of the War loans was taken up by the banks and big financial houses.'<sup>11</sup>

Beckett was also the BUF's leading expert on trade unionism, being responsible for tackling the question of the relationship between the BUF and trade unions. This he did in a 1935 pamphlet.<sup>12</sup> Beckett asserted that fascism meant '100% Trade Unionism of the workers for the workers by the workers'<sup>13</sup> and that:

"Far from desiring the abolition of Trade Unions, as is commonly asserted, Fascism intends to reorganize and strengthen existing Trade Unions to enable them to carry out their part in the coming reorganisation of industry...it is through them that the workers will be represented as co-partners in industry, and it is through them that the workers will be able to do their share in building a Greater Britain for the benefit of all."<sup>14</sup>

The mechanism of the Corporate State would ensure the Unions role in this rebuilding of the nation because the Corporate State would divide all areas of socio-economic life into corporations:

"Each Corporation will be composed one-third of employers' representatives through their Federation, one-third representing the employees through their Trade Union, and one-third representing the consumers. Their task is to plan and organise production and distribution in their industry; to settle prices, profits, wages and conditions. They are joint bodies representing every interest, working not with class distinction but as citizens of a great nation...The Corporate State offers equality and joint control...A prosperous Britain needs prosperous industry; prosperous industry requires organisation and efficiency. These can only be obtained by a pooling of brains and interests in the cause of the national good. Fascism will demand sacrifices where they are necessary for the good of the nation. Britain comes first and warring sections must work together for the common weal. The purpose of this article has been to show that the workers are being offered far more under Fascism than under any other system which is before them. Their guarantee of this is that the Corporate-State machine gives them everything and more than they have ever fairly needed and far more than their leaders have ever asked for. In addition they have the knowledge that not only the Fascist conception but the character and record of the British Fascist leader give them every guarantee of a fair deal and full recognition of their rights as citizens in the New Order that the British Blackshirt movement is destined to build."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>ibid., p.39.

<sup>11</sup>ibid., p.40.

<sup>12</sup>Beckett, J., *Fascism and Trade Unionism* (BUF Publications, 1935).

<sup>13</sup>ibid., back cover.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., p.1.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p.8.

Beckett was always keen to highlight the 'positive' role for Trade Unions envisaged under Mosley fascism and the corrupt and corrosive influence upon trade unionism of its present leadership:

"Under the Fascist policy Trade Unions will become an important feature of national life and administration. Every effort will be made to make them one hundred per cent strong. They will be a recognised part of the industrial machine and they will have an equal voice with the employer in the government of their industry and their country. They will not only have the strongest possible machinery for safeguarding wages and conditions of Labour, but will be responsible joint administrators of the price-fixing, producing, and distributing machinery upon which, in the last resort, wages and conditions are dependent.

In other words the Fascist sees the Trade Unions, shorn of class hatred and political intrigue, taking the position that every unbiased and dignified workman desires for them. Responsibilities bring duties: rights carry obligations. The great mass of decent trade unionists to-day would be the first to recognise that.

If the trade unionist is to become a real partner in industry and the national life...

**The leadership of Trade unionism has to be transformed from hysterical bombast and cunning self-interested intrigue to a British spirit of independence and service...**

In the Corporate State the employers and workmen are in a definite partnership controlled by the State for the welfare of nation and industry...The dread of the Blackshirt is fermented by the corrupt and cowardly leadership who, content to tie up the organisation to their own personal ends, fear the enquiry which the Blackshirts will relentlessly pursue into their methods, objects and bank balances...These are the men who denounce "Fascist Dictatorship." Their policy is a mean and cowardly autocracy under the hypocritical guise of democracy. The Blackshirt policy means courageous leadership by consent of those willing to be led...it means honesty, economy and courage in the Trade Union."<sup>16</sup>

Beckett certainly considered the political ideology of the BUF to reflect his own brand of socialism. He wrote in his autobiography that 'my speeches were practically the same as those I had made in the ILP because my change of organisation had no effect upon my socialist convictions and policy. Indeed I found in the BUF far more sincere and earnest socialist conviction than I had seen in the Labour Party for the last ten years'.<sup>17</sup>

This opinion of Beckett's was based upon three beliefs. Firstly that 'the great dividing gulf between the Right and the Left is the difference between the believer in political democracy and the revolutionary. I have always been the latter.'<sup>18</sup> Secondly, and also the reason for his rejection of the Russian controlled CPGB, Beckett believed 'that British problems and psychology need purely British treatment. In that sense I have always been a nationalist.'<sup>19</sup> Thirdly, upon the basis of the development, in the 1930s, within Beckett's personal version of socialism, a vision of 'the conception of national unity in the interests of all classes combined with the abolition of class privilege...seemed

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<sup>16</sup>Beckett, J., 'Fascist Facts for Trade Unionists: Corrupt and Cowardly Leaders Fear the Blackshirts', *Fascist Week*, 3 August 1934 p.4.

<sup>17</sup>Beckett, F., 'The Rebel Who Lost His Cause', *History Today*, 44 (May 1994) p.41, quote from John Beckett's unpublished 1938 autobiography, *After My Fashion (Twenty Post-War Years)* (unpublished, 1938).

<sup>18</sup>Beckett, *After My Fashion*, p.17.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p.18.

to me to provide a basis for the use of the enormous potentialities of the 20th century productive power to organise a life of reasonable comfort for the whole of its [the nation's] citizens.<sup>20</sup>

John Scanlon was a former Clydeside shipyard worker and lifelong activist in the Labour movement up until the MacDonald betrayal of 1931. His writings as a journalist in two books and a regular industrial column in *Action* from 1936 onwards, under the pen-name John Emery, was a critique of the betrayal of the British working-class by the Labour movement's leadership and is representative of the BUF's standard critique of this betrayal.

Written prior to his association with the BUF, *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* nevertheless became a standard BUF referential text for its critique of the LP's betrayal of its ideals and supporters:

"From 1922 onwards there were two schools of thought in the Labour Party. One, led by Maxton and Wheatley, which believed that the party must remain true to the spirit of Hardie and refuse to accept any of the political or social compromises which would inevitably divert it from its path. The second school believed that if Labour was ever to attain to power it could only do so by becoming as like the other two Parties as possible...at no time during the past ten years has there been a fight between the forces of Capitalism and the forces of Socialism. Whatever fight took place in the House of Commons, so far as the Labour Movement was concerned, was that within the Labour Party itself...whatever else the Parliament of 1923 was it was not the Parliament conceived by Hardie and the pioneers. They had conceived of a body of strong, dignified, self-reliant, intelligent working men entering Parliament, proud because they were workers who knew and felt the struggles of the working class, and because they knew and felt the struggle, were alone capable of ending it. They understood the injustice of the capitalist system because they had suffered under it; they understood its futilities because they had studied and believed there was a better system."<sup>21</sup>

The result of this infighting was, for Scanlon, inertia and a regression for the cause of socialism:

"And now, in 1932, Labour has reached the parting of the ways...In pessimistic moods many Socialists believe that its position in 1932 is worse than in 1906. In that year we had our enthusiasm and our hopes; and enthusiasm counted for more than a soulless machine. In 1906 we at least could say to the workers that they had tried Liberals and Tories and both had failed, but now the rising Party of Democracy should be given its chance. We cannot say that to-day.

The machine, it is true, goes lumbering on trying to create enthusiasm for something which it no longer believes in itself. If there were even sufficient courage and honesty amongst the leaders openly to admit that the policy of the past ten years was wrong, there might be some hope. Instead we find every Labour newspaper and every Labour leader deliberately obscuring the whole question of their failure by placing the blame on Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Snowden. The excuse that Labour was a minority does not carry conviction in 1931...the charge that Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Snowden betrayed the Party...may be perfectly true, but it does not justify the betrayals that took place between 1922 and 1931. Leaving aside the social climbers, the office seekers and that mass which was content with its lot in Parliament, the men who believed they had got economic security for themselves, let us take only the political records. who was responsible for

<sup>20</sup>ibid., p.345.

<sup>21</sup>Scanlon, J., *Decline and Fall of the Labour Party* (London, 1932) p.14-42.

the...betrayal...of the very definite pledges?...In the year of grace 1932, the organised Labour Movement is feeling sick and sorry. It is not surprising, at the end of thirty years political effort, during which time there have been two Labour Governments, the condition of millions of the British working class is worse than at any time in history...Fortunately, in August of 1932 there is evidence that large sections of organised workers are beginning to realise the futility of allowing the Labour Party in the next thirty years to be used only as a place where men can make political careers."<sup>22</sup>

This following extract from a fascist newspaper article illuminates Scanlon's, and the BUF's, standard critique of these self-serving politicians of all political hue, interested only in their 'political careers':

"From all this you will probably feel that I have not a very exalted opinion of our politicians. If that is what you think, you are right. I do not like the breed. There is no reason why I should, and no reason why you should. I know that the useful workers of Britain produce all the wealth of Britain, and no politician has yet succeeded in getting us our fair share of that wealth. What is more, they do not believe we should get it.

Their idea of a fair share is contained in the proposals for increasing their salaries. Without thinking that there is anything in the slightest degree incongruous about it, they have decided that a dud Prime Minister [Neville Chamberlain] is worth 100 good miners and 250 agricultural labourers.

Actually, if we were living in an intelligently organised State and living real instead of artificial lives, the miner and the agricultural worker would be the most valued persons in the community. Soon we will change all this. Instead of the handful of gasbag politicians, economists, and journalists telling us how much we should get to live on, we will decide how many of these people we will be able to afford out of our produce. That time is not yet, however. We may condemn Tory politicians because they regard us as an inferior species, doomed to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for a superior class, but our own Labour Party is not a bit better."<sup>23</sup>

It is always though the LP who are held in greatest contempt because of their perceived betrayal of its ideals and promises.

William Leaper was a journalist by trade who had worked as a reporter, descriptive writer, sub-editor and art editor on *The Yorkshire Post* and *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. Critically he served in France between 1916 and 1918. He was a member of the ILP, the LP and was the secretary of the Yorkshire ILP Wool/Textile Commission. He joined the New Party immediately upon its formation, standing unsuccessfully as its candidate for Shipley in the 1931 general election. He joined the BUF and helped to set up its Newcastle branch in September 1932. He resigned from the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* in November 1933 to take a full time journalist position on the *Fascist Week* and *Blackshirt*.<sup>24</sup>

Leaper typically presented himself, and the BUF, as being staunchly working-class and as a consequence a defender of the British worker's interests, in particular the unemployed:

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<sup>22</sup>ibid., p.238-247.

<sup>23</sup>Emery, J., 'A Barefaced Ramp: Cabinet Ministers Get Huge Rise, While Others Free To Starve', *Action*, 3 April 1937 p.5.

<sup>24</sup>See *Fascist Week* 9 March 1934 p.5.

"I am working class and I am proud of it. If Fascism in Britain were antagonistic to the interests of the workers, then I would be a bitter opponent of the Blackshirt movement.

I know the working-class point of view. I am a member of my trade union which is definitely linked up with the whole of the trade union organisation. I am also a member of a co-operative society, a creation of the working class in rebellion against the regime of high prices...

I know, too, what it is to be unemployed. I have trudged the streets, begging for work, watching the cynical expressions of prospective employers, tired of turning away men seeking work...the stark tragedy of the workless, the sorrow of the great army of the under-paid worker to me is a reality.

Is it any wonder I am class-conscious? Is it any wonder that I am a rebel, a revolutionary, bitter, fiery in my resentment against unnecessary suffering that this world permits.

It is because I am class-conscious that I have dedicated my life to obliterate the divisions of mankind.

All men may not be equal, as someone has said, but we all want to eat, we all want comfortable beds, to live in decent surroundings, to wear warm clothing in mid-winter, and to enjoy those little extras of life that make the effort seem worth while.

In that respect, at least, we are all equal, and we have the right and the duty, to demand that the social structure of society in which we live should permit us to enjoy these minimum requirements.

We have the right, too, to declare that any economic society which permits colossal waste and colossal want to exist side by side is unjust, and being unjust, we have the right to remove it.

We workers demand the right to live, the right to economic justice, and we are determined to achieve it.

We demand the abolition of poverty, and we are determined to abolish it."<sup>25</sup>

Leaper goes on to make a very interesting comparison between fascism and trade unionism in which he highlights their ultimate compatibility due to a shared philosophical belief in communal union over individualism. In the process of drawing this comparison Leaper seizes upon the term "blackleg":

"We of the working-classes have to fight our own battles, but we are used to that and we will go on fighting until we have achieved economic justice and victory.

The working classes, as a matter of fact, are at least a hundred years ahead of these massive captains of industry and these smug intellectuals. We learned the lessons of unity in the early days of last century while even to-day they are still grovelling in the realms of ideas.

When mechanical industry was still young, we know that unity is the source of strength and that it was the only way to combat the attack of unscrupulous employers.

"Unity is strength," we preached and we flocked into our unions. We did not believe in suicidal competition, the cutting of wage rates by one workman against another.

#### **The Enemy of His Class**

We despise the "blackleg" as an immoral enemy of his class, as one who, fighting under that shoddy banner of freedom, maintained that he had the right to work at a lower rate of wages than that which prevailed, and under whatever conditions he liked, irrespective of whatever harm it did to his fellow-workmen.

We have fought the blackleg in and out of industry for generations...

The politicians alone have not learned the lesson of unity. They have continued their silly quarrels, damaging the nation; they have allowed a thousand interests to fight on stupidly, one section against another section.

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<sup>25</sup>Leaper, W., 'Fascism, Trade Unions and the Workers: The "Blackleg" is an Enemy to Society', *Fascist Week*, 2-8 February 1934 p.1.

The next logical step is to create still more unity within the nation. The warring sections must cease warring. They must unite, just as in the same way the workers learned how to unite.

#### **The Logical Future of the Unions**

The workers fought each other in the industrial field, they harmed themselves grievously. When sections of industry fight each other they harm themselves grievously too.

The fight between sections must stop. All must enter into one great union for the nation. Cutting rates must stop, conditions must be regulated and the "blackleg" must be recognised for what he is - an enemy of Society.

That is the greatest lesson that the unions have taught the world - and that is Fascism, the union of all the nation - and no "blacklegs."

The British Union of Fascists is the logical outcome of trade union unity. Britons must unite and carry the battle for unity into the camps of the enemy."<sup>26</sup>

Leaper gave a précis of the BUF's plan of action to solve the immediate problem of unemployment thus:

"The British Union of Fascists takes the attitude that the unemployed workers of this country are in no way responsible for the negative attitude of past Governments and that the unemployed should not be called upon to endure a further period of suffering...

The British Union of Fascists has been tireless in indicating to the Government the methods by which it can remove the scourge of unemployment from our country...

Restoration of the 1931 cuts in unemployment benefits.

Prohibition of the importation of all foreign commodities that can be manufactured here.

Revival in agriculture.

Development loan to improve the capital value of the land, and to re-house the people.

The use of currency and credit to increase wages and expand industry.

Reduction in the hours of labour.

If the whole energy of the nation were mobilised to carry through a policy of this character, there would be no problem of unemployment in Britain within a very short time."<sup>27</sup>

Leaper's critique of the political system was not a purely political and economic one. He identified not just the political system as the cause of the socio-economic ills of the day, but the decay in twentieth century civilization, the result of intrinsic spiritual and cultural deficiencies:

"Millions of our people to-day are living under conditions that would shame our barbaric fathers. They dwell in hovels on the banks of the Thames, Ouse, Tyne and Clyde; in the great cities and on the countryside...Thousands of children are born of unhealthy parents. Deformed in mental faculties and bodily fitness, they have no chance of ever reaching complete adulthood...They totter to schools to have pumped into them "elementary education" by teachers who loathe their tasks, who know the hopelessness of attempting to instil into their dwarf minds facts and fiction that have no reality to their half-starved bodies...As they grow older, they read newspapers that pour forth filth and scandal; that misrepresent truth and untruth, that suborn the intellect.

They put their shillings on horses in the vain hope of getting rich quick; they besmirch the name of sport with their ill-gotten coupons.

<sup>26</sup>ibid., pl.

<sup>27</sup>Leaper, W., 'Justice for the Unemployed', *Fascist Week*, 23-29 March 1934 p.1.

If they are lucky they find work and earn enough fodder to maintain themselves, their women and their progeny. They become the slaves of machinery, perhaps filling their lungs with coal dust, or with the fluff of a textile mill, the dust of ledger, or the poisoned air of a chemical works; thus do they kill themselves, slowly and certainly that they might live.

If they are unlucky, they join the ranks of those who trudge the streets seeking work, to find that they are unwanted, that a pint of beer at the local pub is the best form of introduction to the foreman who dispenses the jobs; if they belong to a higher run of Society, that the "old school tie" or an Oxford accent is the open sesame.

The unemployed, victims of our social unconsciousness, live in rooms that they cannot afford to heat. where they attempt to boil kettles of water with fires of discarded newspapers in the hope of stimulating the senses with weak tea; they besiege the dockyards and the new buildings like hungry jackals yelping for food; they are turned out of their dingy holes by harassed landladies who cannot meet their bills until they seek shelter in a palace for destitutes...

**If man were born for all this, then it were better that man had never been born.**

**Behind the fabric of our existence there must be something more noble than degraded animalism, more inspiring than insipid day-to-dayism.**

**This civilisation of undeveloped minds and bodies must end, and it can be ended by the Fascist Axe.**

**Man must go forward to a period greater self-control, in which excesses are abhorrent, where each man realises that he is his brother's keeper, in which the cruelty of man to man is no more.**

**Fascism must satisfy this yearning of the inherent nobility in mankind, or it will be but a shadowy image that will fade away.**

**We of our Movement believe that Fascism is the revolt against all that is rotten in the twentieth century civilisation, and it is because we believe this we have dedicated our lives to the Man of the Future, who will be freed from the chains that bind us to present slaveries."**<sup>28</sup>

Leaper, being a member of the 'war generation', also berated its betrayal by the politicians. It is important to note that Leaper considers this betrayal the inevitable result of a bankrupt and decadent society which was destined to be swept aside by the young and healthy fascist creed:

"The men who stormed the trenches of Ypres, and the men who defended them, fought in a life and death struggle. The issue was obscure. These brave youths were content to do their duty and obey. They obeyed the politicians, who, killed them...The politicians told us that it was to be a "war to end all war," that it was going to make the world safe for democracy, that on our return to Britain we should dwell in a land fit for heroes.

It is these men and their like that we challenge to-day.

**We charge them with every form of crime. We charge them with the wicked betrayal of the dead and the living. We charge them with deception of the grossest character, with lying to the nation, with making promises that they knew they could not keep...**

The heroes who were to dwell in a land fit for heroes now pawn their war medals and wear their ribbons in the gutters of our cities...

They have promised our people work, but have given them the "dole" and the "means test" instead. They have started huge schemes for re-housing our people, but have not produced the houses.

**Where Are The Houses?**

Their Housing Acts have been almost numberless. From Addison to Hilton Young the sorry tale goes on, but there is no reply to the question "where are the houses for the

<sup>28</sup>Leaper, W., 'Man was not Born to Preserve Present Civilisation', *Fascist Week*, 13-19 April 1934 p.1.

heroes?" Their record is strewn with ghastly failure. Tens of thousands of our people are living in conditions unfit for the lowest types of animals.

**Where are these houses that you promised the people, you decrepit democrats? We demand, in anger and in scorn, where are they?**

You, who held out these lying promises to us. We demand an answer, and if you do not reply, then by Heaven above, we will make you answer before the next decade is through.

Must we of the people always suffer from the ills of your misrule and your inertia? You tell us that "only" 2,000,000 of Britain's men and women are unemployed, and you expect us to be satisfied!...

**You sorry cheats. You and your kind have ruled the world. You all worship the same idols; you pay tribute to the gods that you have set up, and in the name of liberty, you stand by while men and women suffer the anguish of physical and spiritual starvation.**

Your creed is an inspiration of the devil. It is anti-Christian and anti-social. It ranks self above the level of mankind. It exalts the pursuit of one's own welfare instead of the welfare of your fellow men...To you, the individual paramount, and in the sacred name of liberty, you permit him to carry on a vicious warfare that he might line his pockets.

**Slowly, but certainly, the world turns against you. The men with their war ribbons, reinforced by the children of the soldiers, are mobilising to drive you from your seats of government and misgovernment.**

Perhaps it is not altogether your conscious fault. The political system that you uphold has made you shiftless and crafty. You use every trick and subterfuge to get your Parliamentary majorities.

Your propaganda is an attempt to hypnotise and deceive the public whom you profess to flatter and woo.

Your failure is in your morality as well as in your economics.

But we will not suffer in silence. We will cast down your idols and replace them by Honour and Truth. We will not stand by while you cajole the people with more lying promises.

Instead of flattering the nation, we will, under our Leader, inspire it. We will rouse it again, as it was roused in 1914, by a call to service, by a call to voluntary discipline, by a dedication of self to the common weal. The selfish, greedy instincts that you caress will be overwhelmed by a devotion and a love for this land of ours...

The issue is clear: have the old gangs who have made all the blunders of the last twenty years to go on until they have brought Britain down to the level of a fifth-rate people, destroying the Empire at its heart and condemning its people to an ever-decreasing standard of living; or will Britain, again glorying in the spirit of service and adventure, march out, not to conquer new worlds, but to conquer herself, to adjust her affairs to changing circumstances, to set up a Corporate State, in which the employing and employed will co-operate to their mutual benefit, in which government will be strong and decisive, going ahead with the task of consolidating the Empire, developing it for the good of mankind, introducing a new social and economic order at home, and rebuilding a land which shall be known as "Greater Britain"?

**With the memories of these past twenty years still seared in our souls, we of the British Union of Fascists are certain of victory.**

*As the old die, the young spring to life.*<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately for Leaper the purpose of fascism was twofold. Firstly its task was to ensure 'the complete banishment of every form of poverty, with all its symptoms of slums, hunger, filth and disease',<sup>30</sup> an essential task before fascism could tackle its second purpose which was the spiritual development of the nation and the insurance 'that the people should have the opportunity to enjoy, if they so desire, fine music, great libraries,

<sup>29</sup>Leaper, W., 'These Twenty Fateful Years', *Fascist Week*, 3 August 1934 p.3.

<sup>30</sup>Leaper, W., *Fascism for the Million* (BUF Publications, 1936) p.8.



all forms of sport, and all the essentials to live a fully adequate life.'<sup>31</sup> Fascism's ability to deliver these promises gave it the moral right to be allowed to build fascism in Britain because 'the system that gives the people what they desire must prevail.'<sup>32</sup> However Leaper was quick to acknowledge that conversely 'if Fascism does not succeed in delivering at least this minimum, then sooner or later it will die a natural death...[because] no system can live, or has the right to live, unless it is a success.'<sup>33</sup>

For Wilf Risdon the BUF was 'the custodian of the ideals of the early Socialist pioneers' and Mosley the twentieth-century equivalent of Robert Owen. However the LP through its acceptance of the capitalist values of materialism and internationalism had betrayed its socialist principles and supporters.<sup>34</sup> Risdon continued this critique by claiming that fascism was a natural development from, and improvement upon socialism:

"Marxism had led me to Fascism before I knew it to be Fascism...Marxism teaches us that civilisation develops in phases; that those phases grow up, become decrepit, and finally pass away...Capitalist Society of to-day...is now reaching the stage of decrepitude...now...I want you take special notice of this fact. Socialism is a theory of an alternative form of society. The Socialist theory emerged during the infancy of Capitalism, developed and grew in direct ratio with the development and growth of capitalism...not only is Capitalism disintegrating, however, but the Socialist movement which grew up within the Capitalist system is also on the downgrade, splitting up into conflicting sections, baffled just as badly as is Capitalism itself by the problems of modern society...one section wants to nationalise only the bankrupt or near-bankrupt undertakings such as mines, railways, land, etc. Another section wants to nationalise banking, transport, and the key industries. One section wants to confiscate. Another section wants to compensate. One section wants to nationalise in a hurry (twenty-five years), and call their policy 'Socialism In Our Time.' Another section insists on the 'inevitability of gradualness,' and are prepared to wait a hundred years or so for their plans to emerge and develop.

All this...is not encouraging. Socialism, as a political force, torn and rent by internal dissension, is weaker to-day than ten years ago. In other words, it is declining, together with the system of Capitalism.

It is not an *alternative* to Capitalism, but merely a negative to Capitalism - the reverse to the same coin, so to speak. It is imperative, therefore, that we seek for the true alternative to the decaying Capitalist state.

We who set out to do this in the New Party in 1931 had to exclude from our minds all prejudices and start from the existing evil to find a remedy for that evil. We gradually built up an economic policy...in that policy we found three vital factors, all of which were essential to success, all of which constituted fundamental differences from Socialism. We found that Nationalism was essential as opposed to Internationalism. We found that class collaboration was essential on a national basis, as opposed to class antagonism on an international basis. We found that the preservation of the rights of private property, carrying with it certain new obligations for the owners of private property, was essential, as opposed to the abolition of private property rights...We also decided that the interests of the State as a whole comprised the interests of every section within the State. That just as in the human body every limb and every organ is attuned to serve the whole of the body, so in society every sectional interest must be subordinated to the general interest of the State as a whole. This is the corporate conception of society, and this was where we arrived definitely at what is called Fascism or National Socialism...Fascist forces

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<sup>31</sup>ibid., p.9.

<sup>32</sup>ibid., p.9.

<sup>33</sup>ibid., p.9.

<sup>34</sup>Risdon, W., 'The Heritage of National Socialism', *British Union Quarterly*, 1 (1937) p.28.

emerging from the joint collapse of Capitalism and Socialism; Fascism, or National Socialism, springing...from the decay of the preceding system...success crowning its efforts where Socialism fails."<sup>35</sup>

Risdon was the architect of the BUF's 'Power Action not Strike Action' slogan aimed at trade unionists. The slogan reflected the BUF's claims that strike action was ineffective under capitalism in an age of mass unemployment and a global economy. However, under fascism although the right to strike would be lost, the position of importance granted to trade unionism in the mechanism of the Corporate State would give Trade Unions greater power than they had ever enjoyed, hence the slogan 'Power Action not Strike Action':

"Trade Unionism will be of vital importance in the New State envisaged by British Union. There will be no place for the "scab" or the "blackleg" in this New State. All will share alike in the benefits derived from the "Power Action" with which trade unions are to be armed and all will be expected - nay compelled - to support the unions which will represent them.

This means that National Socialism will insist on 100 per cent trade unionism. Since that is our ultimate aim, we appeal to all our readers to get into their appropriate unions now. We admit that at present there are certain faults and weaknesses in trade unions...[that] can be remedied only from within...

#### **WEAKNESSES TO BE REMEDIED**

One of the most serious weaknesses of trade unionism is the fact that the unions have no clearly defined status. In some works and factories unions are recognised, and negotiations carried out by their representatives whilst in other cases unions are not recognised.

It is our desire that the unions, as employees organisations, should receive recognition by the State...[however] before granting such status...it will be necessary to cleanse them of taint of party politics. Subsequent to such cleansing all workers in every industry will have to join the appropriate union for their industry, and that union will have a statutory right...in determining the conditions for their industry. Such conditions will be binding on the industry as a whole, and no undercutting will be tolerated.

This will mean in practice that workers through their trade union organisation will possess a power which they now lack, hence the term "Power Action," which we apply to trade union methods in the New State.

#### **STRIKE ACTION OUTMODED**

The only means at present available to workers whereby they may stress their claims is found in the "strike" weapon, which means the refusal to work. Such refusal, however, carries with it the penalty of loss of wages which, in a protracted struggle, means starvation.

By comparison with such outmoded strike action the power action of British Union, which enables workers' representatives to legislate their own conditions of work is such an obvious improvement that nothing other than sheer political prejudice can justify any opposition to the change over.

We do not and cannot ask the workers to forfeit the strike weapon, which is their only executive weapon under the present system. On the contrary, so long as the present system endures our members will at all times give loyal help and support to their union colleagues, where a strike is the only way out. But we do, at the same time, ask for the help of the trade unions through their members to help us to put an end to this system and set up the machinery which will substitute Power Action for Strike Action in a saner society.

#### **GET IN AND STAY IN**

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<sup>35</sup>Risdon, W., 'Can a Marxist Become a Fascist?: Socialism is Torn by Internal Dissension', *Action*, 10 April 1937 p.11.

Is it not obvious, therefore, that, for the attainment of our aims we must work in the unions, with the unions, and through the unions for final victory?

Every reader of this paper who works for wages is eligible for trade union membership. It is his, or her, duty to get into that union now and stay in that union, using every opportunity to bring home to fellow-members the policy which will give more power to the trade unions...and by so doing, bring nearer the day when organised workers will come into their own."<sup>36</sup>

The BUF was very keen to portray itself as the standard bearer of British socialism following the generally perceived betrayal by the LP of its supporters and principles during the second Labour government of 1929-31. A BUF leaflet on the history of trade unionism, 'dedicated to the workers who fight for freedom and to the leader through whom this freedom can be attained',<sup>37</sup> contained a foreword by Mosley which congratulated the author, H. Kenyon, who:

"As a trade unionist, with a lifelong struggle to his credit in the workers' cause...discovers that their struggle [the workers'] to-day can only be carried through to victory in British Union...[because up until then]...their defeats have come from men and methods whom they have trusted but have failed them...We know now that from our own land and our own people alone will come salvation. The Union of the British will realise the dreams of the worker martyrs, and in that day it shall be said they did not die in vain.

Their old enemy, the corrupt power of financial capitalism, is shaken at last on its golden throne. The People's State awaits the building of by the workers."<sup>38</sup>

Kenyon concluded the leaflet with the sentence: 'The time has arrived for the workers of Britain to unite to hasten the day of Authority, Prosperity and Freedom, which can only come through the Corporate system, that is, through British Socialism as advocated by Sir Oswald Mosley and British Union.'<sup>39</sup>

In an article for *East London Blackshirt* Kenyon attempted to counter the claim that the BUF would upon gaining power aim to smash Trade Unionism by suggesting that the aims of the BUF were identical to and thus quite compatible with the principles and aims upon which the Trade Union movement was founded:

"Upon what fundamental principles was Trade Unionism based, what have been the aims and aspirations of the builders of the Workers' movement?

Briefly summarised, they are: **Security of Employment** and a **Higher Standard of Life**, and the history of the last century has been one of struggle, industrially and politically to achieve these objectives...

Workers have hoped to get a voice in the control of industry; through the policy of Nationalisation of industry they hoped to be able to control industry so they would enjoy better conditions...

Does the policy of British Union oppose the desires of the workers, or through its adoption can they without further struggle reach that position where they will control their conditions for themselves as recognised and responsible members of the industrial life of the nation?...

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<sup>36</sup>Risdon, W., 'Trade Unions in the New State: Power Action not Strike Action', *Southern Blackshirt*, January 1939 p.6.

<sup>37</sup>Kenyon, H., *Towards Freedom. Trade Unionism: Its History and Future* (BUF Publications, n.d.) p.1.

<sup>38</sup>ibid., p.2.

<sup>39</sup>ibid., p.22.

[Within the BUF's Corporate State] It will be necessary for everybody to be a member of his or her appropriate trade organisation. This means nothing less than that British Union requires 100 per cent. Trade Union membership, and such membership will be compulsory under the Corporate organisation.

The dream of a century will be achieved, and an increase of over 200 per cent. on existing membership will find Trade Union officials plenty to do looking after those members rather than interesting themselves in the workers of every other land under the sun than Britain.

Workers will freely elect, through their Trade Unions, those who will represent them on the Boards of the Corporations. They will thus be able to determine their conditions of employment and rates of pay for themselves through their control of industry...A living wage and decent conditions of life would be guaranteed. A guaranteed home market would be provided to...industry for its products...

It would be the workers themselves, through their representation on the Boards of their own industries, with wages increasing as production increases, who would bring prosperity back to their lives; it would be because the Trade Union machinery was operating as its founders meant it to operate, that the workers would achieve their prosperity...

The workers of Britain can, through the policy of the Corporate State, by operating the fundamental principles upon which Trade Unionism was founded, bring back prosperity to their nation and to themselves.

Is it likely that Mosley and the British Union would smash Trade Unionism when he offers it everything it has fought and struggled for?

Is It?

Workers of Britain, you alone can decide, the future is yours in and through British Union."<sup>40</sup>

Kenyon's argument concerning the nature of trade unions, as they were and as they would be under fascism, is atypical of the line taken upon trade unionism by the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the BUF in general.

Charles Wegg-Prosser was a former LP member who became the BUF's Shoreditch District Organiser and a BUF candidate at Limehouse in the 1937 London County Council elections. Wegg-Prosser was keen to portray the BUF as more than just pro-working-class:

"Vague but frequent statements that Fascism is "anti-working class" have created in the minds of many honest people a distinct prejudice. Fascism, they are told, is a plot hatched by a small plutocratic clique against the will and the interests of the great mass of the population. So far is this from being true, that Fascism is in principle, in origin, and in personnel a mass movement, built up by humble men in response to inspiring leadership, growing to strength and finally to triumph by the unrecorded heroism and persistence of nameless thousands. Fascism can proudly claim to be a Revolutionary Workers' Movement, seeking to set up the only genuine Workers' State, which is the Corporate State."<sup>41</sup>

Wegg-Prosser criticised the socialism of Marxism and Social Democracy for being unattainable, a fact he contrasted with the practical achievements of Italian Fascism and in particular the social principles of Italian Fascism set out in the Italian Charter of Labour. The charter guaranteed the following rights for workers: freedom of association

<sup>40</sup>Kenyon, H., 'British Union & Trade Unions: Aims Are Identical', *East London Blackshirt*, April 1939 p.3.

<sup>41</sup>Wegg-Prosser, C. 'The Worker and the State', *Fascist Quarterly*, 2 (1936) p.255.

in unions; ethical wage; special rates for night work; weekly day of rest; annual fully paid holiday; health insurance; maternity benefit; and workers education and cultural development programmes.<sup>42</sup> Italian Fascism had also broken down class barriers building 'a new aristocracy of merit.'<sup>43</sup> As for the BUF's programme:

"We propose to solve the problem of poverty within the territories subject to our jurisdiction...We refuse to resign ourselves to poverty in the midst of plenty; we therefore propose to adjust consumption to production by the provision of adequate purchasing power to the people...The high standard of life would have to be protected, and we should allow our people to consume the things which they require, but which a mad financial system sends to the ends of the earth to-day to compete with the products of sweated Oriental industry.

This economic policy conquers poverty...That alone entitles us to the support of those who claim the title of British worker. We shall faithfully deal with the forces of corruption, and we provide in the Corporate system the most perfect form of representation it is possible to devise. Unfair trading and harsh working conditions will be illegal."<sup>44</sup>

The ultimately left-wing nature of the ethos upon which the BUF was ideologically built resulted, according to Wegg-Prosser, from the fact that:

"Fascism in Britain arose from men who had been in the Socialist Movement and refused to be associated with the shameful surrender made by that Movement to money Power...It is a movement of the people...It was not the editors, the generals or the politicians who saved Britain in the War. It was the plain man of British blood from office, factory, field and mine. Those who came back from that ordeal, with the generation that succeeds them, will yet carry through the greatest and most beneficent Revolution in history."<sup>45</sup>.

Wegg-Prosser's resignation from the BUF illustrates just how seriously at least some of the membership of the BUF took the left-wing aspects of BUF policy and the difference (or at least perceived difference in this particular individual fascist's case) between the original left-wing brand of fascism Mosley fascism sought to champion and its later development of anti-Semitism as a central tenet of its political creed. Wegg-Prosser resigned in 1937 and wrote to Mosley to explain the reasons why thus:

"You are side-tracking the whole issue of social betterment by the anti-Semitic campaign. Anti-Jewish propaganda, as you and Hitler use it, is a gigantic side-tracking stunt - a smoke-screen to cloud thought and divert action with regard to our real problems...Hitler attacks the Jews to whip up the lukewarm and critical, you do it to get mass support in East London and other places. I tried to interest these people in real problems, unemployment, wages, housing, and so on. I watched with dismay the mentality which said 'Get rid of the Jews, and you will automatically get rid of unemployment, slums, sweating'...Our people are fair, tolerant and humane. You introduce a movement imitating foreign dictators, you run it as a soulless despotism. You side-track the demand

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<sup>42</sup>ibid., p.260/1.

<sup>43</sup>ibid., p.263.

<sup>44</sup>ibid., p.265.

<sup>45</sup>ibid., p.266.

for social justice by attacking the Jew, you give the people a false answer and unloose lowest mob passion."<sup>46</sup>

The BUF's east London movement as well as being the focus of the BUF's anti-semitic campaign also contained at the ideological level, in the various local forms it took, a strong fascist 'socialism' strand, exhibiting a left-wing, pro-Trade Union and anti-Capitalist theme.

This strand of local east London fascism was personified by Thomas Waters, the ex-communist Political Organiser of the BUF Limehouse Branch and editor of *East London Blackshirt*. In one memorandum Waters sent to BUF H.Q. Waters was clear in his belief for the need to steer the BUF, ideologically, into a more radical and left-wing direction due to his conviction that 'National Socialism will be won by the Worker mentality and not by the Bourgeois mentality.' The practical manifestation of this change of direction would be the adoption by the BUF of a campaigning stance which dealt sympathetically with 'industrial disputes', and 'lead the fight' for 'Trade Union recognition' and 'better conditions' for the working-class.<sup>47</sup>

The following article attacked the Labour movement for its obsession with theoretical socialism which would never be realised whilst claiming that the BUF represented an alternative of real, existing socialism, the LP having concluded:

"That the realisation of Socialism is too far off to be of any help to the unemployed and...that Labour Party Socialism is unrealisable within the lifetime of its younger members...[as a result] So will end for all time the legend that the Labour Party stands for revolutionary changes. all they have to offer is a series of tinkering and trivial measures on the Tory model which they fondly hope will have some ameliorative effect on the cancerous sores that affect the body politic. No longer can the worker be inspired with the hope that the advent of a Labour Government would end the uncertainties of his economic life; that at last a fairer and equitable distribution of life's rewards would be meted out to the most deserving element in our land-the producer of the country's wealth by returning Labour candidates to Parliament. The Labour Party had already killed that hope by their neurotic interest in every country except their own...There is only one revolutionary party left in Britain-The British Union. We are the sole remaining hope of the worker that justice shall be done to him and his family. With Britain and the Empire's vast resources of men, technical skill, wealth and raw materials, welded together with the spirit of sacrifice, strong will and the determination to allow no vested interest to spread obstacles in the path that will lead to a better and fuller life for the ordinary people, there is no limit to the standard of living that can be attained in our country. There is no Movement other than the British Union that can bring crashing down the barriers of class and creed that divide our people, and stifle every appeal for national unity. Defeatism is rampant in the old parties. Unemployment they say, like the poor, must always be with us. There is no cure, they bleat.

They said the same in Germany, a country with a tenth of Britain's resources, before Hitler came to power. He demonstrated its falsity by applying National Socialism, by inspiring his people with a love of country, by crushing subversive internationalist element, by controlling, on behalf of the mass of the people, every factor of Germany's economic life, by making himself the master instead of the servant of finance. There were seven million unemployed when Hitler took over; now they have a shortage of labour.

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<sup>46</sup>Wegg-Prosser, C., *Fascism Exposed* (London, 1938) p.3/4.

<sup>47</sup>Linehan, T., *East London for Mosley* (London, 1996) p.86.

What Germany has done, we can do ten times better. British Union is the BRITISH way to National regeneration and National Salvation."<sup>48</sup>

What is particularly interesting about Waters, an East End fascist, is the absence of virulent anti-Semitism in his writing. Waters believed that the BUF 'should attack international finance as such, and not dwell particularly upon the Jewish issue' as capitalism was a global phenomenon 'which knows neither class, creed, nor colour.'<sup>49</sup>

To this end Waters was a keen supporter of the BUF's attempt, during its early years, to set up its own trade union organisation the 'Fascist Union of British Workers' (FUBW). Although the FUBW was in all practical terms an abject failure, it warrants examination because of its ideological position. Led by former Communists and National Union of Unemployed Workers members the FUBW advertised its *raison d'être* as being:

**"Fascist Union of British Workers**

For Worker and Workless.

To protect the interests of workers, whether in employment or unemployed. To fight against wage cuts and all reductions in the standard in life.

To fight the Means Test and all measures to bully the unemployed."<sup>50</sup>

The FUBW operated a labour exchange and gave tribunal aid for the unemployed, as well as providing food, clothes and cigarettes for the unemployed and poverty stricken. However all activities were limited in scope and financial support. One commentator has described this aspect of the FUBW's activities as being 'more like the Salvation Army than the SS.'<sup>51</sup> However it must also be remembered that there was a strong ideological basis for the setting-up of such welfare provisions for deserving Britons. It was the practical manifestation of the 'national community', a microcosm of the future 'Greater Britain', where all Britons would be 'embraced' and provided for.

The following extract from an article entitled 'What is the F.U.B.W.?' continues the standard BUF critique of the betrayal of the British worker by the Labour movement:

"Trade Unions were originally intended for constructive purposes, that is, their aim and object was to band together all the workers in a certain industry on the assumption that unity is strength, in order to bargain with the employers for better conditions and a standard of living compatible with the economic position of that industry.

They also were created for the purpose of giving legal assistance in cases of dispute under acts such as the Workman's Compensation Act. Promotion of Education, Housing Conditions, and National Health Insurance all came within their scope, and the workers of Britain would be much better off to-day if the controlling bodies of the Trade Unions had kept to these intentions.

Bad leadership and political exploitation...have robbed the Unions of the wealth and power they had gathered under good leadership...Party Politics is the poison which has

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<sup>48</sup>Waters, T., 'Labour Forsakes Marx: British Union is Real Socialism', *East London Blackshirt*, April 1939 p.6.

<sup>49</sup>Linehan, *East London*, p.242.

<sup>50</sup> *The Blackshirt* February 1933, p.4.

<sup>51</sup>Webber, G., 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984) p.592.

eaten into the soul of Trade Unionism, the workers are being forced to support by their vote and cash contributions Political Parties with which they have no sympathy...

**The workers in the Trade Unions are not slow to realise whither the Unions are driving, and in recent years there has been a wholesale secession from their membership. But something must be done immediately to stop the rot in the Trade Unions and the exploitation of the British Worker."**<sup>52</sup>

It is interesting to note the tone of the text which suggests that the BUF would return trade unionism to its true British origins, the BUF being the 20th century standard bearers of this tradition following its betrayal by the then present Labour movement's leadership. The subtle play on the notion of unity, the cornerstone of union strength and of course the cornerstone of fascism's organic view of the nation, is also worthy of highlighting.

Alexander Raven Thomson was the BUF's unofficial 'philosopher.' Thomson is especially interesting because while before joining the BUF Thomson had been a member of the British Communist Party, he had also been educated in Germany where he had become heavily influenced by the work of Oswald Spengler - a classic synthesis of the left and right wing roots of fascism.

As a result of this, Thomson's individual 'version' of fascism was imbued with both the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit from the right who dreams of the mythical rebirth of the nation, culturally (and racially) cleansed and united with a shared sense of destiny and the 'rational-radical' ethos of the left-wing recruit to fascism, determined to create order out of *laissez faire* economic chaos armed with an all-powerful central state and a national plan, within the pragmatically viable national arena, rather than the international arena which mainstream socialism dreamed of.<sup>53</sup>

The nature in which these two strands were inter-woven in Thomson's political thinking was via his organic view of human society, civilization and the communal nature of life. It was due to this organic philosophy of history<sup>54</sup> that Thomson refused to be 'led astray by the claims of those who have turned the great collective terms, "Socialism" and "Communism", to the service of a narrow class-conscious revolt'<sup>55</sup> and was convinced that capitalism, as an economic system, was doomed due to it having 'placed too much emphasis upon the interests of the individual.'<sup>56</sup> While the right exalted the individual, and the left exalted a single social group (the working-class), both at the expense of the community as a whole, fascism searched for a third way, 'the corporate concept of the

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<sup>52</sup>'What is the F.U.B.W.?', *The Fascist Week*, 5-11 January 1934 p.4.

<sup>53</sup>See Introduction - 'The Thesis's Central Argument'. Interestingly in a review of a book by William Leaper Thomson makes the criticism that Leaper is 'a little inclined to stress the purely materialist aspects of Fascism.' Thomson's review of *Fascism for the Million* by William Leaper, *Fascist Quarterly*, 2 (1936) p.446.

<sup>54</sup>See Thomson's book *Civilization as Divine Superman* (London, 1932) written under the pseudonym Alexander Raven.

<sup>55</sup>Thomson, A.R., 'Why Fascism?', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) p.247.

<sup>56</sup>Thomson, A.R., 'Corporate Economics', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) p.23.



nation' which viewed the nation as an 'organism of a higher order, but essentially similar to the human body, with its organs and functions serving a collective purpose', insisting upon the need to treat 'the community as a single organized corporate state, controlled and planned by a central government empowered with sufficient authority over individual and group to protect the general welfare of the whole, and advance the national purpose.'<sup>57</sup>

Thomson considered fascism to be 'a new and revolutionary creed of national and cultural regeneration' which had two tasks to perform, one practical, one spiritual:

"To check the rapid decay and corruption produced by the illusions of democracy, and to restore a deeper purpose to national life. Its method is the "Corporate State", which is a complete recognition of the essentially organic nature of social intercourse. This corporate organization is no mere system of administration, through which dictatorial authority may exercise its will upon the people; it is a means of organic expression of the will of the people themselves working together as a united nation. Great is the destiny of man, but this destiny can only be maintained by mutual co-operation for the realization of a higher purpose; not by an insistence upon individual liberty of petty personal self-expression."<sup>58</sup>

Thomson was the BUF's main theorist of this fascist method, the Corporate State, in particular the nature of the form and shape it would take in practice. This he summed up thus:

"The BUF would 'substitute the new constitutional forms of the Corporate State for those of Financial Democracy. Such a fundamental change will amount to no less than a revolution...Democracy is failing all over the world...the failure is largely to be attributed to the mistaken belief in individual liberty which has negated all effective government. Democracy stands in theory for self-government, but if the people insist upon clinging to their individual rights and liberties, they make their own effective government impossible, and reduce Democratic administration to an absurdity...since the war the British electorate has called for certain social improvements and a solution to the unemployment problem. Again and again political parties have made promises to effect the people's will and when in office have been unable to carry out their pledges. It is easy to blame this failure on individual politicians, but it is the system which is at fault...none of the old parties can hope to improve our economic distress, so long as they uphold the tenets of individual liberty which deny them the power to rule. Fascism introduces the Corporate State as a means of effective economic government...power to control and direct industrial and financial organisation...not only will it be possible to clear slums and cure unemployment, but the productive powers of the nation will be released to raise the standard of life of the entire community...it is designed to end the chaos and disorder of the present economic system, and replace them by an organised and planned economy...

The Corporate State is of a three-fold nature.

- 1) **A PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION** which recognises the nation as an organism of a higher order, transcending the individuals of which it is composed.
- 2) **AN ECONOMIC ORGANISATION** which plans and develops industry along lines of functional service.
- 3) **A SOCIAL ORDER** which maintains individual freedom of self-expression and initiative within the bounds of national well-being.

...which may be expressed by the slogan:

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<sup>57</sup>ibid., p.23.

<sup>58</sup>Thomson, 'Why Fascism?', p.253.

"AUTHORITY, PROSPERITY AND FREEDOM," when AUTHORITY is the means by which the State is maintained as a social entity.

PROSPERITY is attained by the functional organisation of economic and industrial groups.

FREEDOM is realised by the individual once he is released from political corruption and economic oppression to enjoy leisure for cultural self-expression.

...[the] three aspects of the Corporate State [are]...

(1) POLITICAL - Central government welding the nation together by the exercise of authority.

(2) ECONOMIC - The science of organisational planning upon functional lines for the establishment of prosperity.

(3) CULTURAL - The release of individual enterprise for the realisation of cultural advancement."<sup>59</sup>

Thomson's ideas concerning the nature of a fascist society and economy were, like the majority of the ideas and policy of the BUF, a genuine attempt to tackle the modernising needs of the British state and British society. In many ways this need to modernise was the mythic drive behind Mosley fascism's political thought. A driving myth captured by this quote from a BUF pamphlet co-written by Thomson and John Beckett. The quote also exhibits the 'rational-radical' ethos within Thomson's fascist vision:

"Fascism calls for higher standards of life at home...the immediate effect of a Fascist Government will be...[to increase] purchasing power, both by great public works and increased wage-rates...[this will be] a rational solution of the problem of poverty in the midst of plenty...but those who expect a solution in terms of the class war...must look elsewhere. Fascism does not come to destroy, but to rebuild."<sup>60</sup>

The practical manifestation of this 'rational-radical' ethos in terms of the nature of the benefits and rights the British worker would have within the Corporate State are outlined in this quote from *The Coming Corporate State*:

"Fascism must set co-operation, service and patriotism, with the final realisation that no citizen can permanently enrich himself at the expense of the nation...The most difficult problem is the class war between employers and workers fought so bitterly to-day. Fascism will unite worker, small trader, and honest producer in a common onslaught upon the tyranny of high finance in the realisation that the great majority of employers have common interests with the workers in the attainment and maintenance of a higher standard of life. Nevertheless, the workers recognising their relative weakness will be chary of abandoning the strike weapon and entering into any system of co-operation. We may say that an earthly paradise has arrived as the result of the advent of the Age of Plenty, and that economic lions will lie down with the economic lambs. The workers will still retort, "Yes, with us inside?" We must make it clear that we have trimmed the capitalist lion's claws and pulled his financial teeth.

The class war can only be ended by a treaty of peace negotiated and ratified between the opposing forces. Fascism as the great pacific force will act as mediator and draft the terms of agreement. It is impossible to discuss in detail such a far-reaching agreement, which must be the subject of negotiation between the workers and employers of Britain, but we may outline its provisions even now.

<sup>59</sup>Raven Thomson, A., *The Coming Corporate State*, (London, 1935) p.3-5

<sup>60</sup>Beckett, J. & Thomson, A.R. *Private Trader and Co-Operator*, (BUF Publications, 1936) p.10/11.

A. An emphatic statement of the philosophic principle of the united corporate nation, to which everyone, employer and worker alike, owes a duty of service in return for a commensurate reward.

B. Establishment of employers' and workers' organisations with full disciplinary powers to negotiate national wage and hours agreement for each industry. (100 per cent. Trade Unionism.)

C. Creation of judiciary bodies to settle disputes between employers and workers, and the consequent abolition of all strikes and lock-outs. (Judges aided by trade assessors.)

D. Safeguard of workers' interests by insistence upon:

i. Compulsory weekly and yearly holiday (probably fourteen days).  
ii. Compulsory payment of overtime rates, and limitation of standard hours of work (probably not more than 40).

iii. Regulation of piece time rates to enable average man to earn standard wages at least.

iv. Election and recognition of shop stewards in every concern employing more than a limited number of employees (probably twenty).

v. Compensation for worker or employee of long service upon dismissal (or death) prior to superannuation (probably one month's pay for each completed year of service with the firm).

vi. Equal pay for men and women doing similar work and no dismissal upon marriage.

vii. Holiday on full pay for mothers upon birth of a child (probably four months).

viii. Workers' and employees' claims to have preference in the event of bankruptcy.

E. Joint organisation by employers and workers as follows:

i. Special labour exchange for each industry situated in the trade union offices.

ii. Craft training to improve quality, output and efficiency.

iii. Superannuation schemes based upon status reached (similar to present civil service pensions).

iv. Pooling of all after-work recreation schemes and their development by the Corporation.

v. Educational and holiday schemes, especially for the young in unpleasant industrial surroundings.

vi. Housing schemes in relation to employment, especially where new industries are being developed.

F. Unemployment and health insurance to be conducted by the State, subject to the following conditions:

i. Contributions to be proportional to wages earned.

ii. Benefit payments to depend upon status in industry of recipient.

iii. State to possess power of transfer of long standing unemployed to other industrial field, via requisite training centres, on condition of genuine alternative employment.

iv. *No means test.* Only disqualification: refusal of work at trade union rates. *No time limit for benefit.*

v. Special national medical service to study and eradicate industrial disease, with generous compensation for victims meantime.<sup>61</sup>

Thomson's conclusion to *The Coming Corporate State* reveals the spiritual and 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary side of his personal vision of fascism:

"Fascism recognises the nation as an organism with a purpose, a life and means of action transcending those of the individuals of which it is composed. To limit such an organism to a purpose within itself, to the mere service of its constituent parts, would be a denial of the whole philosophic concept of the Corporate State.

No progressive organism can adopt a self-limiting purpose. There is always striving towards an external goal or progress would cease. Man himself, as an organism

<sup>61</sup>Thomson, *The Coming*, p.25-27.

composed of many million cells, does not consider his whole purpose one of self-indulgence, or at least such men are rightly condemned by all moral authority.

The man of worth will sacrifice his immediate welfare to the needs of his career. Similarly, the Corporate State must not be considered solely as a means of good government. It is also the means of self-expression of the nation as a corporate whole in the attainment of its national destiny...it is only through co-operation with others in the organic purpose of the State that the individual can attain his highest potentiality. There is no need for any conflict between individual and the State as neither can exist without the other. An individual exiled from the civilised communion must inevitably relapse into savagery: a State deprived of loyal co-operation from its citizens must inevitably collapse into barbarism. It is only by a true balance between the needs of individual and State that progress can be achieved for both. The Corporate State, with its functional organisation of human effort in a communal purpose, best achieves this essential balance...What then is the purpose of the Corporate organisation of the national life?...to prepare a fitting vehicle for the attainment of that destiny, to give the nation that organic form instinct with life, which will enable it to play its part in the great events of future world history."<sup>62</sup>

In guidelines Thomson wrote to BUF speakers he makes two interesting comments concerning the nature of the BUF's socialism. For Thomson 'our socialism is Imperial. We base our economic system not only on Britain, but upon a empire which contains every raw product required by the modern science of production. For Britain we must have IMPERIAL SOCIALISM.'<sup>63</sup> Complementary to this Thomson suggests that the corporate state is 'a practical, modern form of Socialist Government suited to our needs' and that 'socialism [is] a system of service instead of greed' the BUF not being 'interested in the Marxist conception of the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, as this is merely a mechanism to achieve socialism which, in its highest sense, is the co-operation of all in the common interest.'<sup>64</sup> A pamphlet Thomson wrote concerning the BUF's plans to build a motorway system in Britain,<sup>65</sup> it being a classic example of a central plan for state intervention and direct action in the economy, is a further reflection of this aspect of Thomson's political thought.

Thomson can ultimately be seen as part of this tradition of BUF fascist 'socialism' due to his constant portrayal of Mosley as a genuine socialist and the 'leader of a struggle for British socialism against the plutocratic regime of British capitalism' and the portrayal of fascism as 'a movement of the left, emerging not from the Marxist wing but from the tradition of syndicalist socialism'.<sup>66</sup>

A brief consideration of some miscellaneous BUF pamphlets and articles will complete this anthology.

The following pamphlet illustrates the 'national' orientation of the BUF's critique of the Labour movement, which is accused of being concerned primarily with foreign affairs at the expense of its British working-class supporters:

"The British Union stands for Trade Unionism. It is a lie to say that the British Union is against Trade Unionism. We are against Trade Union funds being used for Russians.

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<sup>62</sup>ibid., p.47/8. In later life Mosley interestingly described Raven Thomson's philosophy as 'ant-heap collectivism' Mosley, O., *My Life* (London, 1968) p.331.

Spaniards, Jews and foreign wars. We are in favour of Trade Unions protecting the interests of British workers and of being given the power to do it which they now lack.

Follow Mosley!

And keep British Money for British Homes!"<sup>67</sup>

This line was the standard one taken in the BUF press, as this quote from *Blackshirt*,<sup>68</sup> in concern of Trade Unions in Nazi Germany, shows: 'the trade unions, taken from the control of the former parasitical, internationalist leaders, will now be reorganised to serve the interests of those by whose work and contribution they have developed.'<sup>69</sup> This BUF critique of Trade Union leadership is well illustrated by the following BUF cartoon.

Source: *Fascist Quarterly*, 1 (1935) between pages 336 & 337.

The pamphlet *British Union and the Transport Workers* (see Appendix B) is representative of the kind of pamphlet produced and aimed at specific groups of workers, such as transport workers, miners, agricultural workers, fishermen and dockers. It neatly sums up the critique of the existing system and the benefits of the Corporate State as exhibited by this brand of fascist 'socialism' as espoused by this section of the BUF. A pamphlet aimed at miners demanded that 'cheap foreign coal must be excluded from our markets', accused 'the international parties of Labour, Conservatives and Liberals' of being 'controlled by their masters International Finance who have interests in foreign coal and oil fields' and thus wanted 'to destroy the British mining industry' and called for all miners to help 'end the International System of Poverty and Build the British Union System of Plenty.'<sup>70</sup>

'Speakers Notes' issued by the BUF's HQ to its speakers in east London suggested that the BUF should be described 'as the 'inevitable successor' to the early British Socialism represented by [George] Lansbury, Keir Hardie and the Guild Socialists, a political tradition which had been betrayed by the LP's 'internationalist ideology'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Thomson, A. R., *BUF Speaker's Notes* (18/3/39) p.4. University of Sheffield Library - Special Collections and Archives.

<sup>64</sup>Thomson, A. R., *BUF Speaker's Notes* (1/3/40) p.1. University of Sheffield Library - Special Collections and Archives.

<sup>65</sup>Thomson, A.R. *Motor Ways For Britain* (London, 1938).

<sup>66</sup>Lewis, D., *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester, 1987) p.75.

<sup>67</sup>Untitled Pamphlet, no date.

<sup>68</sup>*Blackshirt* originally carried the subtitle 'For King and Country' but this changed to 'The Patriotic Workers Paper' with the declaration that it 'was the paper for the masses' before whom it would put 'the hard hitting revolutionary policy of Fascism.' *Blackshirt*, 21 March 1936 p.1.

<sup>69</sup>*Blackshirt*, 1 June 1933 p.4.

<sup>70</sup>No Author, *British Miners* (BUF Publications, no date).

<sup>71</sup>Linchan, *East London*, p.161/2.

To conclude this anthology the aims and objectives of the BUF which were printed on the back of the BUF's membership card are worth noting:

"To win power for Fascism and thereby establish in Great Britain the Corporate State which shall ensure that -

All shall serve the State and none the Faction;

All shall work and thus enrich their country and themselves;

Opportunity shall be open to all but privilege to none;

Great position shall be conceded only to those of great talent;

Reward shall be accorded only to service;

Poverty shall be abolished by the power of modern science released within the organised state;

The barriers of class shall be destroyed and the energies of every citizen devoted to the service of the British Nation which, by the efforts and sacrifices of our fathers, has existed gloriously for centuries before this transient generation, and which by our exertions shall be raised to its higher destiny - the Greater Britain of Fascism."<sup>72</sup>

The anti-faction (and thus anti-class) and meritocratic ethos of the BUF geared towards the goal of improved living standards for all, which the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' clearly believed in, is imbued in this declaration.

The BUF was ideologically highly pluralistic. An important strand within this ideological plurality was fascist 'socialism'. This mini-anthology has illustrated, at source rather than abstract level, the nature and depth of this BUF brand of fascist 'socialism'. This current of thought within the BUF's political ideology considered itself to be the legitimate heir to the 'British Socialism' of Keir Hardie and the early socialist pioneers, following the Labour movement's betrayal of its principles and supporters, and Mosley fascism to be a more radical and virile form of political activism than anything found in the Labour movement, capable of bringing about a national revolution which would contain a socio-economic reorientation of the country along classic socialist lines - an end to poverty, the building of houses and the creation of jobs. The key element of this socio-economic reorientation would be the central role taken by Trade Unions, within the framework of the Corporate State, in the industrial decision making process. A role which would give the Trade Unions 'Power Action not Strike Action'.

Although in a sociological sense this brand of fascist 'socialism' was a failure in attracting recruits to the BUF, it did find some resonance in the movement's rank and file. One former working-class member from Birmingham insisting that for him fascism was:

"Utopian socialism...conditions such as back to back slum houses which existed in parts of Birmingham brought the realisation of urgency and reality. To me it seemed that Mosley was putting forward socialism at national level as opposed to pie in the sky socialism of the International Socialists. Britain needed things doing now and the time seemed right for a new dynamic creed like fascism."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Mosley, N., *Beyond*. p.24.

<sup>73</sup>Brewer, J., 'The British Union of Fascists: Some Tentative Conclusions on its Membership' in Larsen, S., Hagtvet, B., & Myklebust, J., (eds) *Who Were the Fascists* (Oslo, 1980) p.546.

Ultimately fascism must be seen as an answer for those socialists who remained revolutionaries but were pragmatic realists, the need for action took precedence over ideology. Although the sense of betrayal following the LP's failure to inaugurate the dawn of socialism and the appeal of the authoritarian, disciplined and unifying ethos of fascism, which seemed to guarantee action, were also instrumental in the move from socialism to fascism undertaken by these people and in the nature of the resultant brand of fascist 'socialism' exhibited by this section of the BUF.

Having examined the nature of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' it is now necessary to turn to the second section of the thesis and the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the other salient features of Mosley fascism. In particular, the nature of the ideological relationship between the two strands in the BUF's 'creed of patriotism and revolution.'

**SECTION TWO**  
**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BUF'S BRAND OF FASCIST**  
**'SOCIALISM' AND THE OTHER SALIENT FEATURES OF MOSLEY**  
**FASCISM**



## Chapter Four

### The Nature of the Political Ideology of the BUF

This second section will, leading on from the analysis of the preceding section, examine the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the other salient features of Mosley fascism. In particular the role of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' within the political ideology of the BUF and the abject failure of the BUF will be examined. The section's ultimate purpose is to place the analysis of the preceding section in its correct context.

In the previous section the fascist 'socialist' strand within Mosley fascism was examined on its own in order that its presence and essence could be more easily established. In order to do this the heuristic step of grouping together, what I have termed, the BUF's strand of fascist 'socialism' was undertaken so that the strand could undergo the artificial procedure of academic surgery and be removed from the 'body' of the political ideology of the BUF, and then be placed beneath the microscope of academic inquiry in order that its existence and essence could more easily be established.

It is now this section's task to 'replace' the strand back into the 'body' of the political ideology of the BUF and thus the correct context of the strand, the BUF's political ideology, will become the background upon which it is examined, rather than the artificial background of an academic slide. This will ensure that a correct and undistorted picture of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' is created by this thesis. If only viewed out of context any analysis will be artificial. Thus there is a need to illustrate how the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' relates to the rest of Mosley fascism. The thesis aims to ensure that Mosley fascism's 'socialist' aspects are neither exaggerated nor underestimated.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: firstly, to outline the chapter structure of the section; secondly, to clarify certain points relating to the BUF's political essence, in particular to what extent is it legitimate to view the BUF as a radical left rather than a radical right phenomenon?; and thirdly, to briefly compare the BUF to continental fascism - in Italy, France and Germany - in terms of ideology, specifically the left-wing strand, and points of physical contact.

The section will be based upon three chapters, this initial chapter and two subsequent chapters dealing with the following aspects of the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the other salient features of Mosley fascism.

The second chapter in this section will look at the relationship between the strand of fascist 'socialism' in Mosley fascism and the right-wing ideological strand, the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary, with which it cohabited within Mosley fascism, forming the syncretic core of the BUF's political ideology. This relationship is of fundamental importance as a basic argument of the thesis is that at the political and philosophical ideological core of Mosley fascism is a political dichotomy

based upon the synthesis of right and left (as claimed by Mosley fascism itself). The chapter will fall into three parts. The first part will highlight two aspects of this relationship: the way in which the socialist strand adapted nationalist criteria to itself and the way in which the nationalist strand adapted socialist criteria to itself, in order to illustrate how the synthesis of the two, from a fascist standpoint is quite natural and harmonious, whilst from a non-fascist standpoint the synthesis is one of incompatible elements leading to chronic contradictions at the heart of fascist ideology. This point is considered further in the final chapter of this section. The second part of the chapter will then examine the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and Mosley fascism's intrinsic racism, in particular its anti-semitism. The chapter aims to illustrate two points: firstly, the prevalence of racist ideas in society at large, even in 'left-wing' circles, in the pre-war and inter-war periods; and secondly, the way in which racism and anti-semitism were absorbed into a 'version' of socialism via, respectively, 'paternalistic' views of race and the left-wing form of conspiracy theory centred on the financiers of international capitalism, the banks. The third part of the chapter will act almost as a postscript to the thesis's findings as it details the developments in Mosley's post-1945 ideas. Specifically Mosley's post-war development from the narrow nationalism of his *Greater Britain* vision to the pan-nationalism of 'Europe-a-Nation' and his inception of the idea 'European Socialism' will be discussed, in the general context of thesis's line of argument, in order to throw further light upon the questions of the ultimate essence of Mosley's own fascism and the consistency of his political thought.

The final chapter in the section, which will examine the failure of the BUF, will fall into three parts. The first part will review the sociology of the BUF, as the BUF's lack of support was the obvious and most important manifestation of its failure. The second part of the chapter will examine the general reasons for failure of the BUF. Whilst noting the very important socio-economic and politico-cultural factors behind Mosley fascism's abject failure the chapter will approach the question of failure from the ideological perspective: that is the intrinsic weakness of fascism, in general, and the way the syncretic ideological core of Mosley fascism (in particular its socialistic component and pretensions), in reflecting this, plays a significant role in its almost preordained failure. The final part of the chapter will examine the specific reasons for the failure of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and will include an assessment of the reasons for the 'falling by the wayside' of the leading left-wing recruits to the BUF and the failure of the majority of the New Party's former LP MP's to join the BUF. Three specific questions will be addressed: firstly, to what extent (in terms of both absolute numbers and relative to other social groups) did the BUF successfully recruit from the British working-class?; secondly, to what extent was any working-class support for Mosley fascism the result of the successful appeal of the BUF's left-wing brand of fascism to the British worker?; and thirdly, the most important question, why did this particular aspect of the BUF's message

fall so resoundingly on 'deaf ears'? Griffin's methodology will be of central importance to this chapter.

The second chapter in the section will deal with the BUF's political ideology in its entirety. An immediate point thrown up by such an enterprise, in the context of this thesis, is the question of where on the political spectrum the BUF (and in many respects fascism) lies. Classical interpretations clearly place the BUF at the extreme right of the spectrum, this thesis, taking its lead from those generic theorists who indicate fascism's potential for a wider base of political influences, is concerned with the BUF's left-wing roots, while a recent study concluded that Mosley fascism was an extremism of the centre, defining it 'as a form of authoritarian 'centrism'.<sup>1</sup> This study by David Lewis is worthy of further consideration for the light it throws upon the problem of categorising fascism within the traditional linear political spectrum.

In his analysis Lewis argues that Mosley fascism did not derive its theory, policies and support from the right of the political spectrum alone but in fact from a wide range of political sources. This was because, in Lewis's opinion, the BUF was an attempt by Mosley to gain the support of the centre of the political spectrum from which Mosley fascism would develop into an attempt to achieve (an inevitably forced) ideological synthesis of the political spectrum in Mosley fascism's quest for national unity. The fascist regime Mosley fascism sought to build was to be controlled by neither the sectional interests of the political right nor left, but was in fact to be driven by a nationally unifying (and ultimately beneficial to all) desire to regenerate the ailing British economy. In Lewis's analysis fascism had the potential to gain support from both the left and right of the political spectrum as a result of its position at the centre of this spectrum, and had the intrinsic strength of being able to appeal for national consensus based upon a call for spiritual and patriotic unity over sectional and class differences. This central position, in Lewis's opinion, results in both fascism's great strength of being able to grow quickly and fascism's great weakness, its internal ideological contradictions, the result of fascism's attempt to placate and eventually synthesise ultimately incompatible demands.

Lewis's analysis is very interesting, but flawed. To describe fascism as an extremism of the centre is misleading and is unsuitable as a generic theory. Lewis has been led into this centrist description by fascism's central, declared intention of uniting the nation as one in what the Nazis, for example, referred to as a *Not-Brot- und Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (a community of shared need, bread and destiny). However this vision of unity stems not from a desire to champion the political centre and impose social compromise, but at the root from the brand of integral nationalism fascism, ideologically, is based upon which has an organic conception of the nation. For a fascist a nation was a living organism made up of millions of individuals, who were in effect the individual cells of this 'super-organism', it was upon this concept that the fascist notion of collectivism

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis, D.: *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester, 1987) p.2.

was based. Fascist literature and that of the BUF is awash with the vision of the triumph of fascism heralding the dawn of a new age based upon collectivism replacing the old, failed age which had been based upon individualism.

Alexander Raven Thomson extended this 'superorganic philosophy of history'<sup>2</sup> to encompass human civilization with the belief that not only may civilization:

"be compared by analogy with a natural organism: it is asserted that civilization is a natural, if super, organism...it is only in the co-operation for a higher superorganic purpose that individual men become invested with the attributes of a 'superman'. Civilization is the result of human co-operation and is hence in itself the actual 'superman' whose immense powers are used by modern democracy for the enrichment and indulgence of the people."<sup>3</sup>

Thomson considered the defining quality of civilization to be 'the attribute of a community, which, after meeting the absolute needs of its members, accumulates a surplus of production, and co-operates on a large scale to apply this surplus to the realization of wider, higher aims than the mere gratification of immediate individual wants.'<sup>4</sup> The recognition of the need for human co-operation was the result of the historical realisation by man 'that self-sacrifice is greater and finer than self-indulgence.'<sup>5</sup> The appreciation by man of such a 'superorganic reality' was because 'just as the superman, civilization, is so much greater and more powerful than the human units of which He is composed, so are His interests more vital and important than those of the puny human individual.'<sup>6</sup>

It was as the result of such a philosophical view of history that the unity of the nation was thus central to the fascist political vision and its ideological mythic core as it needed to integrate all member 'cells' in to the 'body national' if the nation was to be fit and healthy once more. For fascism to achieve this it meant that it needed to accommodate, synthesize, placate and reconcile all sectional interests within the nation, just as a living organism requires all its cells if it is to be healthy and functional. Furthermore if the nation was healthy then the cells which comprised it would be also, hence the appearance of fascism as at times a 'something for everyone' ideology. This reconciliation and placation of interests for their own benefit would inevitably have to be forced, as fascism would have to enforce the fascist maxim 'No state within the State'.

Consequently this organic conception and desired national unity compelled the BUF to appeal to all sections, regions and classes of the nation, as all were vital to the well being of the 'body national'.<sup>7</sup> Fascism thus made concerted efforts to appeal to both the middle-class and the working-class.

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<sup>2</sup>The subtitle of Thomson's book *Civilization as Divine Superman*.

<sup>3</sup>Raven, A., (pseudonym for Thomson, A. R.) *Civilization as Divine Superman* (London, 1932) p.225.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p.50.

<sup>5</sup>ibid., p.227.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p.227.

<sup>7</sup>The obvious exception to this were those deemed unsuitable to belong to the national community.

Furthermore fascism's synthesis of socialism and nationalism compounds Lewis's mistaken belief that fascism was a form of centrism, as it was not, as Lewis claims, 'Fascism's position in the centre of the political spectrum [that] enabled it to appeal to left and right, radical and reactionary, with equal candour'<sup>8</sup> but in fact this synthesis of strands of socialism and nationalism. A synthesis which sought in fascism, not the triumph of the political centre, but the vehicle to overhaul the existing political, social and economic structures of the establishment which the traditional right and left had sold out to, and thus led to certain strands on right and left to abandon the traditional parties and seek their (and the nation's) salvation in fascism.

The seemingly contradictory ideologies of socialism and nationalism are quite compatible within fascist ideology if fascism is viewed through the definitional lens of Griffin's, Sternhell's, Eatwell's or Payne's generic theory, the nuances of which make it far more acceptable than Lewis's more crude attempt.<sup>9</sup> As has been previously discussed Griffin defines fascism not in terms of set policies or ideas, but in terms of its political mythic core. In Griffin's definition fascism is seen as a brand of integral (ultra-) nationalism which has a palingenetic myth as its ideological 'main-spring'.<sup>10</sup> This palingenetic myth is 'the vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth-pangs of a new order. It crystallizes in the image of the national community, once purged and rejuvenated, rising phoenix-like from the ashes of a morally bankrupt state system and the decadent culture associated with it.'<sup>11</sup> Consequently, as Griffin explains, fascism's 'core myth of palingenetic ultra-nationalism is susceptible to...many nuances of interpretation in terms of specific 'surface' ideas and policies'<sup>12</sup> thus seemingly contradictory ideas can exist in a form of harmony by sharing a palingenetic vision of a particular nation and the need for its rebirth into a new order, in the case of Mosley fascism, a 'Greater Britain'.

To summarise then, at its inception (at least) Mosley fascism was a genuine ideological endeavour to synthesize 'patriotism and revolution' in an attempt to solve the socio-economic problems facing Britain in the inter-war period, in particular unemployment. The ideas and policy of the BUF were a genuine attempt to tackle the modernising needs of the British state and British society. Mosley fascism's critique of the inter-war economic crisis led it to believe that a new political and economic organisation based upon new economic and philosophical thinking was necessary if the

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although, theoretically, exception of the national interest above all else would guarantee even Jews a place in the 'sun' of Mosley fascism.

<sup>8</sup>Lewis, *Illusions*, p.72.

<sup>9</sup>'Extremism of the centre' is simply a poor concept with which to analyze the BUF's political ideology. Even when examining it from the perspective of its left-wing roots the concept of the 'conservative revolution' would be a preferable analytical tool.

<sup>10</sup>Such an approach is particularly appropriate for the BUF's political ideology. See Matthew Coupland's article, 'The Blackshirted Utopians', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.255-72.

<sup>11</sup>Griffin, R., *Fascism* (Oxford, 1995) p.3.

<sup>12</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.39.

current long-term trend of decline was to be prevented from turning into a condition of terminal decline. Mosley declared that 'we have no place for those who have sought to make Fascism the lackey of reaction, and have thereby misrepresented its policy and dissipated its strength. In fact fascism is the greatest constructive and revolutionary creed in the world...In objective it is revolutionary or it is nothing.'<sup>13</sup> Mosley fascism considered its critique part of the tradition of British (as opposed to Marxist) socialism.

This discussion in many ways simply returns us to one of the thesis's original premises, that fascism is a legitimate political ideology and consequently contains the potential, over time and space, for the kind of morphological-ideological developments which characterises all ideologies.<sup>14</sup> In this case fascism as a form of nationalist sentiment must always initially be categorised upon the right of the political spectrum, but its potential to render linear and dichotomous categorisation impotent, by its ability to be influenced from beyond the political right, is clear, indeed this thesis argues it is proven by the BUF. The BUF, like all permutations of fascism, had the potential to appeal to different people in different places at different times.

There are two further points which need to be borne in mind when dealing with the question of the BUF's political essence and its left-wing roots. Firstly, this grouping of fascist 'socialistic' sentiment was not particularly representative of the BUF movement nationally. Recruits such as John Beckett and John Scanlon were not typical BUF recruits. The east London movement, as two recent studies have concluded, did contain a very significant strand for which 'the BUF was a true expression of socialism - a grass-roots, British socialism.'<sup>15</sup> But the east London movement was never representative of the BUF as a whole. Secondly, this socialist strand was only one of several 'radical' strands within British fascism. The split within the BUF between the administrative clique of Neil Francis-Hawkins and the radical anti-Semites concentrated around William Joyce revealed a much more significant type of 'radicalism' within the movement.

It is however important to ultimately consider fascism as an ideological whole rather than as either left or right wing strands because the progressive and reactionary aspects within fascist political ideology exist side by side within the same political phenomenon. As a recent study of Nazi Germany correctly insists, 'Nazi racial and social policy must be studied as an indivisible whole. It is a travesty of a complex reality to write in terms of either allegedly progressive social policies or reactionary racial policies. Both were merely different sides of the same coin.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Mosley, O., *The Greater Britain* (London, 1934) p.21/2.

<sup>14</sup>See Roger Griffin's article 'The 'Post-Fascism' of the Alleanza Nazionale: a case study in ideological morphology', *Journal Of Political Ideologies*, 1 (1996) pp.123-46.

<sup>15</sup>See Thomas Linehan's *East London for Mosley* (London, 1996) & 'The British Union of Fascists' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1992) and Stephen Cullen's 'The British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940: Ideology, Membership and Meetings' (MLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1987). Quote Cullen, 'The British', p.120.

<sup>16</sup>Burleigh, M., & Wippermann, W., *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge, 1991) p.4.

This reference to Nazism leads us to this chapter's third task of briefly comparing the BUF to continental fascism - in Italy, France and Germany - in terms of ideology, specifically the left-wing strand, and points of physical contact.

Italian and French variants of fascism shared with the BUF healthy left-wing roots, in terms of both converts and ideas. Indeed it is important to note that Sternhell's generic theory, which Mosley and the BUF fit so well, was devised in fact upon the back of the academic studies Sternhell had made of French fascism, and to a limited extent Italian Fascism (it would also be wrong to overlook the strands of fascist 'socialism' in Nazism).<sup>17</sup>

This point, combined with the fact that Mosley also fits the generic theories of Griffin, Eatwell and Payne 'like a glove', suggests very strongly that Mosley, Mosley fascism and the BUF are classical examples of a fascist, a manifestation of fascist ideology and a fascist movement respectively. This means that the BUF is particularly closely related to its continental brother fascists as being such a classical manifestation of fascism, the BUF has to be one of the central illustrative components of any social scientific analysis of fascism. Interestingly enough it was the BUF's chronic failure - and it being consequentially untainted by the inevitable compromises which would have been necessary upon gaining power - that results in it exhibiting such a pure manifestation of fascism and making it of such interest to social scientists and historians.

The physical points of contact between Mosley and his continental 'comrades' were: shared intellectual influences such as Oswald Spengler; the important role played by Mosley's visit to Italy in 1932 with Harold Nicolson which persuaded him to take the final step into fully blown fascism; the name itself which Mosley adopted, the British Union of Fascists, and later changed in 1936 to the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists in order to 'doff his cap' to Nazi Germany (although from 1937 onwards the BUF referred to itself simply as 'British Union'); the adoption of a fascist style of politics (such as the wearing of the blackshirt, the use of fascist symbols, marches and the martial liturgy of BUF organisation and meetings); the financial aid given to the BUF by Mussolini's regime between 1933 and 1935; the fact that Mosley married his second wife Diana Mitford in Berlin in 1936, with Hitler in attendance; and the fact that the BUF press was constantly advertising official trips to Germany and Italy for BUF members to experience the reality of the fascist miracle for themselves, as well as carrying a steady stream of praise for the achievements of the fascist powers in contrast to the 'ineffectiveness' of the Western democracies.

These points having been briefly considered it is now possible to turn to the next chapter and the question of the precise nature of the internal ideological dynamics

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<sup>17</sup>See Mark Burrows' 'Nazism from the Left? An investigation of the SA as a discrete strand of 'socialistic' radicalism within the Nazi movement' (MA Dissertation, Oxford Brookes University, 1994).

of Mosley fascism and the role played by the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' within this ideological fermentation.



## Chapter Five

### Fascist 'Socialism' and the Development of Mosleyite Ideas

This chapter will examine the political ideology of the BUF as a unitary ideological phenomenon and consider certain aspects of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism's' relationship to this ideological whole. Specifically the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' relationship to the right-wing ideological strand within BUF ideology, the intrinsic racism of the BUF's ideology and the post-war development in Sir Oswald Mosley's political writings will be considered.

A central tenet of this thesis is the belief that within fascist political ideology there can be found two strands, an originally right-wing one built upon the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit to fascism and an originally left-wing one built upon the 'rational-radical' ethos of the disillusioned socialist recruit to fascism. This thesis argues that both strands are present in Mosley fascism, forming the syncretic core of the BUF's political ideology. Further to this it is suggested that the philosophical cornerstone of this ideology is synthesis, and the reason for the adoption of such a philosophical cornerstone is the belief held by Mosley fascism that synthesis 'is the solution to many of the false dilemmas of our time',<sup>1</sup> provided that the synthesis resulted in the weaving of ideas 'into a harmonious whole of effective action.'<sup>2</sup>

Mosley clearly believed this synthesis of right and left was the ideological and philosophical basis of the BUF, and as a result of this core synthesis fascism had been given the potential to appeal to both the right and the left. Mosley considered that this potential had begun to be realised in the ranks of the BUF, as his declaration at the start of *The Greater Britain* clearly illustrates:

"In the ranks of Conservatism there are many who are attracted there by the Party's tradition of loyalty, order and stability - but who are, none the less, repelled by its lethargy and stagnation. In the ranks of Labour there are many who follow the Party's humane ideals, and are attracted by its vital urge to remedy social and economic evils - but who are, none the less, repelled by its endless and inconclusive debates, its cowardice, its lack of leadership and decision.

These elements comprise the best of both Parties: and to both Fascism appeals."<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter it is ideology which is to be considered. In attempting to ascertain the exact nature of the relationship between these two strands, or more specifically the way in which the strand of fascist 'socialism' relates to its right-wing counterpart, it is perhaps best to examine the features held in common between the two strands.

It has to always be remembered that for the fascist, nationalism and socialism were in effect 'two sides of the same coin', two sentiments which fed off each other

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<sup>1</sup>Mosley, O., *My Life* (London, 1968) p.91

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.187. An ironic belief given the abject failure of the BUF in its self-appointed mission of instigating national and imperial renewal for Britain.

<sup>3</sup>Mosley, O., *The Greater Britain* (2nd edition, London, 1934) p.23.

within the syncretic brew of fascist ideology. The concepts of 'national' and 'social' were often viewed as identical. For the fascist to be a nationalist meant to place your love of your country before all else, whilst to be a socialist meant to work selflessly and solely for the national community rather than being motivated out of self-interest to work for oneself alone. Economic differences between the classes could not be allowed to become struggles that broke the deeper, stronger and eternal ties of nation and community. The two strands needed each other. The right-wing needed a brand of fascist 'socialism' so that they could win over the workers to nationalism (something which their organic conception of nationhood compelled them to do) and the left-wing strand needed a practical area in which to work and restructure and co-ordinate society and the economy - the nation.<sup>4</sup>

The two strands shared a belief in the fact that the economic system of liberal capitalism and the political system of democracy had failed. These systems were incapable of solving the modernising problems facing Britain and her empire and were thus guilty of betraying the heritage of the nation, the needs of the British people and the sacrifices made by the 'war generation' to bring about the building of a 'Land Fit for Heroes.' Interestingly, both strands also shared a belief in the traitorous betrayal of the Labour Party (LP) upon, for the right-wing strand, the nation via its internationalism and upon, for the left-wing strand, the working-class via its failure to carry out its promise to create socialism (a betrayal which meant that it was not only the British working-class the LP had betrayed but its own ideals as well).

The two strands also shared a belief in what needed to be done. What was called for above all else was action and the radical overhaul of the entire economic and political system. This overhaul could only be brought about by a new dedicated movement whose authoritarian hierarchy would act as an embryonic plan for the future fascist state's own hierarchy. Both would be led by a strong man freed from the bonds of political democracy and loyalty to sectional interests and thus able to act in the face of the impending crisis which would result from the bankruptcy of the existing political and economic system.

In terms of the vision of the new system which would replace the old, both strands agreed that it would be anti-capitalist, anti-internationalist, authoritarian and philosophically based upon a collectivist ethos and view of the nature of society and the nation. This collectivist ethos construed that the essential essence of a nation and a society was organic and integral. The two strands shared the view that the most appropriate form of political and economic organisation to reflect this organic and integral essence was the Corporate State.

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<sup>4</sup>Noting of course this strand's obvious predisposition to nationalism on a spiritual level as reflected in its presence in the fascist ideological melting-pot in the first place.

The Corporate State had two major advantages as a form of political and economic organisation when it came to the fusion of these two strands in the fascist ideological whole. Firstly the Corporate State was able to satisfy simultaneously fascism's right-wing desire for a spiritual transformation of society and fascism's left-wing desire for a more efficient and technocratic re-ordering of society. Secondly upon its creation it would inaugurate a political system based upon functional rather than geographical franchise, a development which would lead to the eventual establishment of a technical state to replace the existing bureaucratic and sectionally divisive state.

The marching songs of the BUF are an excellent example of the nature of the simultaneous presence in BUF ideology of these two strands:

#### **A Marching Song**

Comrades: the voices of the dead battalions  
 Of those who fell that Britain might be great,  
 Join in our song, for they still march in spirit with us  
 And urge us on to gain the Fascist State!  
 We're of their blood, and spirit of their spirit,  
 Sprung from that soil for whose dear sake they bled;  
 'Gainst vested powers, Red Front, and massed ranks of Reaction  
 We lead the fight for freedom and for bread!  
 The streets are still; the final struggle's ended;  
 Flushed with the fight we proudly hail the dawn!  
 See, over all the streets the Fascist banners waving -  
 Triumphant standard of a race reborn.

#### **Britain Awake!**

Britain awake! Arise from slumber!  
 Soon comes the daybreak of Rebirth.  
 We lift again thy trampled banners,  
 Our marching legions shake the earth.  
 We gather from thy lanes and cities,  
 With men of action at our head.  
 In us division and delusion,  
 And all hypocrisies are dead.  
 We follow Mosley and Fascism,  
 We fight for freedom and for bread!

We bring a saving Revolution,  
 We are aware of deceit,  
 We will avenge the long betrayal,  
 We will acknowledge no defeat.  
 We breathe the spirit of our fathers,  
 As dauntless and as proud as they.  
 O'erthrow the tyranny of falsehood -  
 The powers of darkness and decay!  
 We will be victors of tomorrow,  
 Who are the victims of today!

Britain, assert thine ancient honour,  
 Who never knew a foreign yoke.  
 Oh, turn thy face toward the future;  
 Thy life and strength are in thy folk.  
 If Britain to herself be faithful,  
 And each man to his fellow true,  
 Through all the world come forth against us,  
 We even yet shall make them rue.  
 We'll build a Britain fit for heroes,  
 With courage fresh and splendour new.<sup>5</sup>

The songs were written for the BUF by the young poet E.D. Randell, the purpose behind their composition being the belief that all 'inspired movements' need such songs 'to uplift their votaries and infuse them with that sense of sacred purpose without which nothing can be done.'<sup>6</sup> As this quote from the former BUF District Inspector for the North of England, Richard Bellamy, suggests the right-wing palingenetic vision of spiritual rebirth dominates the left-wing call for a technocratic and more efficient re-ordering of society and the economy in these songs. This is perhaps emblematic of their relationship in the greater context of the BUF's political ideology. However Bellamy did identify the importance of the ideals of the 'war generation' in the development of fascism and fascism's central synthesis of right and left. In an unpublished autobiography Bellamy suggested that fascism was 'conceived first in the mud and blood and brotherhood of the frontlines' and was then 'born out of the hopeless misery, squalor and chaos of the post-war slump.'<sup>7</sup>

What makes the BUF different from continental fascism is that this 'birth' in the trenches of the First World War resulted in the BUF adopting an aggressively anti-war stance rather than glorifying war. An interesting example of this is the BUF's foreign policy, in particular its peace campaign of the late 1930s, 'Mind Britain's Business'. An examination of this aspect of the BUF's political ideology leads to the question of to what extent BUF foreign policy reflected subservience to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, practical politics or a genuine ideological anti-war stance, borne out of the movement's members war experience?

The BUF's stated foreign policy aims were world peace and the protection and preservation of the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> This meant two things: Britain would not be allowed to become embroiled in the affairs of other nations unless the interests of the empire were directly at threat; and Britain's armed forces would be strengthened. War was rejected as a tool of foreign policy. As ever at the level of high politics, Mosley's ideas were rational, coherent and their validity defensible.

The BUF were undoubtedly sympathetic towards the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini, their continental fascist brothers, but the support lent to these regimes was

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<sup>5</sup>Griffin, R. *Fascism* (Oxford, 1995) p.177/8.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p.177.

<sup>7</sup>Bellamy, R. R., *We Marched With Mosley* (unpublished, 1968) p.299.

<sup>8</sup>See Mosley's *Tomorrow we Live* (London, 1938) p.61.

ideologically determined in that the antipathy of the western democracies towards them was interpreted as being purely ideological; motivated by the twin creeds of international finance and international socialism.<sup>9</sup>

Mosley and the BUF displayed from the outset a consistent anti-war outlook, an outlook very much part of the 'war generation' ethos, so central to both Mosley's personal and the BUF's political ideology. Indeed the influence of the ex-servicemen of the 'war generation', so prominent in the sociological make-up of the BUF, can be seen in more than just the martial style of politics adopted by the movement.<sup>10</sup> The BUF, in contrast to its continental brothers, neither glorified war and violence nor considered it essential to the successful rebirth of the nation. It was the war-time spirit of comradeship, loyalty and union of purpose which was admired and deemed essential to the task of regeneration, not war itself. The BUF considered itself the embodiment of the revolt of the betrayed 'war generation' against the waste of the First World War, who were determined to prevent the same thing happening again. Whilst the BUF could not be described as pacifist, the isolationist outlook it had in its foreign policy, a direct growth from its political critique of the contemporary situation and socio-economic programme, was certainly geared to the avoidance of war. Admittedly this would involve the building up and permanent maintenance of modernized armed forces, especially the RAF who would have the vital role of air defence. The BUF's desire to create a self-contained, autarkic and fully insulated British Empire formed the basis for the BUF's solution to the problem of achieving permanent world peace. Within the BUF's analysis it was the economic war for markets and resources between nations, caused by free trade, that created the conditions for, and causes of war. World peace could be achieved if the world could develop into a collection of autarkic economic blocs, primarily though not necessarily fascist.

The BUF showed in its stance upon the Spanish Civil War this commitment to isolation. The BUF considered it a Spanish matter, of no relevance to Britain, and thus no official assistance was given to the Spanish Nationalists; the BUF members who attempted to help the Spanish Nationalists by manning Spanish ships stranded on Merseyside were expelled. However, no action was taken against a group of BUF members from east London who, under unofficial orders from BUF HQ, seized a Spanish Republican ship and sailed it to Hamburg.<sup>11</sup>

The BUF's foreign policy also reflected certain practicalities of its and Britain's position. The financial support given to the movement by Mussolini was dependent upon the BUF's support for Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. Further to this, the BUF was aware that war between Britain and the fascist powers would prove fatal to the movement, a

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<sup>9</sup>See above.

<sup>10</sup>See Stephen Cullen's article 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22 (1987) pp.115-136.

<sup>11</sup>See Thomas Linehan's *East London For Mosley* (London, 1996) p.84/5.

fear borne out in 1940 and the enforcing of Defence Regulation 18b. Britain was also in no position, militarily, to act as the world's policeman due to the cumulative effect of economies in defence spending and it has to be remembered when examining the BUF's foreign policy, which preached peace and prosperity rather than war and expansion, that Britain was historically a satisfied imperial power. Thus the BUF's foreign policy was geared towards maintaining the imperial status quo.

But these points do not detract irreconcilably from the sincerity of the ideological basis for the BUF's foreign policy, and in fact the relationship between this policy and Britain's historical position as a satisfied imperial power merely illustrates, as ever, that the specific content of a fascist political programme merely reflects the specific historical and cultural context of the environment in which it germinates. Although it would be wrong to attempt to place this aspect of the BUF's political ideology in the socialist tradition of pacifism, there was a certain similarity between the anti-war pacifist strand of thought within the Independent Labour Party (the main source for the BUF's left-wing converts to fascism) and the BUF's anti-war stance. The desire to avoid the appalling slaughter of the First World War and the belief that war was ultimately fought 'in the service of capitalism'<sup>12</sup> predominated in both.

Nevertheless, even if the anti-war stance of the BUF cannot be placed easily within the socialist tradition of pacifism, Bellamy's comment that 'the New idea could not accurately be described as 'reactionary', as its Social outlook was as progressive as anything that emanated from the left; it was in its ultra-patriotism, and its recognition of the bonds of family and race, that it differed entirely from the unpractical internationalism of the doctrinaire socialists'<sup>13</sup> is still valid. What these two strands shared was an all-pervading desire for a new socio-economic ordering of the nation combined with the belief that the politico-economic system, liberal democracy, was a barrier to this re-ordering.

For the fascist 'socialist', fascism represented an economic revolt against an obsolete capitalism, whilst for the conservative revolutionary in the ranks of the BUF, fascism was a spiritual revolt against materialism and internationalist Marxism. For both strands it was a national revolution geared towards a radical overhaul of all aspects of the nation's life. Bill Allen, the former Conservative MP and BUF sympathiser, described the BUF as a populist crusade for national unity and a movement driving towards 'a national revolution, carried in the cold anger of a disciplined intent to integrate the race.'<sup>14</sup> BUF literature is imbued with references to this total renewal such as the reference to the emergence of this 'New Order...Phoenix-like, from the smouldering

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<sup>12</sup>Quote from a speech by Mosley in East London in 1939. Skidelsky, R., *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), all quotes from the 1990 edition, p.439.

<sup>13</sup>Bellamy, *We Marched*, p.309.

<sup>14</sup>Drennan, J., (pseudonym for Allen, W.) *The B.U.F., Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London, 1934) p.21.

ashes of the old.<sup>15</sup> It was at this level of a populist quest for national unity and national rebirth that the two principal strands in the make up of Mosley fascist ideology merged and the principal BUF policy which formed the programmatic basis of this merger was the BUF's commitment to the creation of a Corporate State.

Radical ideas of both a rational 'socialist' nature and a vitalistic 'conservative revolutionary' nature are present side by side in Mosley fascist ideology, and any overall analysis must examine them as a whole rather than as two separate parts. Whilst from a non-fascist standpoint this synthesis is one of incompatible elements leading to chronic contradictions at the heart of fascist ideology, for the fascist it is quite natural and harmonious, the nationalist and socialist strands being seen as intrinsically linked, in effect 'two sides of the same coin.'

In the second part of the chapter the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and Mosley fascism's intrinsic racism, in particular its anti-Semitism, will be examined. The overview of this relationship will be constructed around the answers to two key questions: firstly, to what degree was Mosley anti-Semitic?; and secondly, to what degree was anti-Semitism an integral part of the BUF's political ideology from its inception in 1932, and to what degree was it a tactical addition to the movement's message after 1934 following the failure of the appeal of its left-wing brand of fascism to the British worker?

At the general level fascism, and thus Mosley fascism, is intrinsically racist. As Griffin correctly suggests:

"By its nature fascism is racist, since all ultra-nationalisms are racist in their celebration of the alleged virtues and greatness of an organically conceived nation or culture. However, fascist ultra-nationalism does not necessarily involve biological or social Darwinian concepts of race leading to eugenics, euthanasia, and attempted genocide. Nor does it necessarily involve anti-Semitism...if such elements of 'heterophobia'...are already present in the particular culture of the nation where fascism arises, it is more likely that they will be incorporated into its myth of national decadence and hence into the policies for creating the new order.

Fascism is also intrinsically anti-cosmopolitan, axiomatically rejecting as decadent the liberal vision of the multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-racial society. However, this does not necessarily lead to a call for other races to be persecuted *per se*, but may express itself 'merely' in a campaign of propaganda and violence against their presence as 'immigrants' who have abandoned their 'natural' homeland. This type of fascism thus tends to produce an *apartheid* mentality calling for ethnically pure nation-states, for 'foreigners' to go back, or be returned, to 'where they belong', and vitriolic hatred of 'mixed marriages' and cultural 'bastardization'.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently it is not the question of whether or not the BUF and Mosley acted in an anti-Semitic manner which needs to be addressed, but the causes for the adoption

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<sup>15</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.138.

<sup>16</sup>Griffin, *Fascism*, p.7/8. Though fascism is intrinsically racist it is important to realise it is not predisposed to anti-Semitism as the fact that the percentage of fascists in Italy who were Jewish was larger than the percentage of Jews in the Italian population at large shows. See Zeev Sternhell's *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton, 1994) p.5.

of anti-Semitism and the form this anti-Semitism took, biological or cultural, 'genocide' or 'apartheid'.

The multi-causal explanation for the development and adoption of anti-Semitism by Mosley fascism is based around four factors. Firstly, Mosley's (and consequently Mosley fascism's) ethnocentric and chauvinistic racism was a reflection of the latent racism in British society of the imperial period. Secondly, racism is intrinsic to fascism (and thus Mosley fascism), it being an inevitable ideological growth from fascism's (and thus Mosley fascism's) solidarist and organic view of nations and societies. Perceived insular sections of society, such as Jewry, inevitably were seen as outside the 'national community' and thus deemed hostile and alien to the fascist vision of national and social harmony. Thirdly, it was deemed politically expedient, by the BUF leadership, to embrace a full blown variant of anti-Semitism (after mid-1934) in an attempt to regain support after the Olympia débâcle. Fourthly, its adoption by the BUF was partly caused by the interaction between the BUF and the bitter opposition the BUF encountered after its formation, which was predominantly (and quite understandably) often Jewish led and inspired.

In the most recent consideration of Mosley's anti-Semitism it was suggested that Mosley should ultimately be seen as an 'amoral opportunist' who sought in anti-Semitism a vehicle through which to gain popular support for his movement.<sup>17</sup> This is a potentially persuasive line of argument, it being quite possible to suggest as the cause of the partial recovery of BUF membership after 1934 (and the loss of support of Lord Rothermere and his press) the deliberate cultivation of an anti-Semitic ethos (particularly in east London) which was scarcely present in the early propaganda of the movement, in order to gain support following the initial failure of the appeal of the BUF's left-wing brand of fascism to the British worker. However this does overlook two very important points which must be central to any explanatory model.

Firstly, Mosley was racist in at least the sense that Mosley was a reflection and product of a society which was latently racist. Consequently although Mosley had no previous history of holding anti-Semitic views prior to forming the BUF, he nevertheless shared with the rest of British society the trait of holding unflattering stereotypical views of Jews. He was predisposed to the beliefs that on the one hand the Jews in east London were foreigners with no right to interfere in 'British' business, whilst on the other hand Jewish financial power enslaved governments throughout the world.

It was thus easy for Mosley, without any previous history of anti-Semitism, to develop a form of anti-Semitism as a result of this social 'context'. Mosley's latent racism was further exacerbated by his chauvinistic belief in Britain's imperial and civilizing mission (which whilst recognizing the racially diverse nature of Britain's imperial destiny contained a narrow and racist conception of British citizenship) which lent itself to a

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<sup>17</sup>Eatwell, R., *Fascism* (London, 1995) p.186.



fascistic apartheid mentality in terms of not only race but culture, as this quote from *Tomorrow We Live* illustrates:

"It remains to inquire whether in fact it is fair to regard the Jew as a foreigner. The simple answer is that he comes from the Orient and physically, mentally and spiritually, is more alien to us than any Western nation. If a community of several hundred thousand Frenchmen, Germans, Italians or Russians were dumped in our midst they would create a grave national problem. That problem would be particularly grave if they maintained themselves as a community in our midst, owning spiritual allegiance to their nation, and indulging in methods and practices altogether alien to British character and temperament. Such an event would create a problem so serious that a solution would have to be found. Yet the Jew is more remote from British character than any German or Frenchman, for they are Westerners and the Jews are Orientals."<sup>18</sup>

The accusation that Anglo-Jewry 'maintained themselves as a community in our midst, owning spiritual allegiance to their nation' leads to the second important point which must be central to any explanatory model. This is the fact that there was also an ideological dynamism (or route) which enabled the previously rational message of Mosley (and indeed Mosley fascism) to adopt anti-Semitism as an increasingly central tenet of its political philosophy. Mosley and the BUF press claimed that the movement did:

"Not attack Jews on account of their religion, for our principle is complete religious toleration, and we certainly do not wish to persecute them on account of their race, for we dedicate ourselves to service of an Empire which contains many different races and suggestion of racial persecution would be detrimental to the Empire we serve. Our quarrel with the Jewish interests is that they have constituted themselves a state within the nation, and have set the interests of their co-racialists at home and abroad above the interest of the British State."<sup>19</sup>

Thus it is possible to view the anti-Semitism of Mosley fascism as a reflection of the typically fascist stress upon the need for national unity to be its chief objective and thus the desire to ensure that the social order is united, uniform and inclusive. The BUF's dislike of party, class-based and sectional politics is a consequence of this and assisted the BUF's slide towards, and adoption of, anti-Semitism. The insular community of Anglo-Jewry represented for the BUF an 'outgroup' in their vision of national solidarity, its separateness threatening the concept of collective social harmony which lay at the very heart of Mosley fascism's political ideology.

This Mosley fascism notion of 'collective social harmony' is well illustrated by the first objective of the BUF printed on the back of its membership card, 'All shall serve the State and none the Faction'<sup>20</sup> and this passage from Mosley which elaborates on this sentiment:

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<sup>18</sup>Mosley, O., *Tomorrow We Live* (London, 1938) p.59.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p.58.

<sup>20</sup>Mosley, N., *Beyond the Pale* (London, 1983) p.24.

"Government, or rather the Corporate State, will lay down the limits within which individuals and interests may operate. These limits are the welfare of the nation...But so soon as anybody, whether an individual or an organised interest, steps outside those limits, so that his activity becomes sectional and anti-social, the mechanism of the Corporate system descends upon him. This implies that every interest, whether right or left, industrial, financial, trade union or banking system, is subordinated to the welfare of the community as a whole, and to the overriding authority of the organized State. No state within the State can be admitted. "All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state."<sup>21</sup>

Mosley fascism accused British Jewry of being 'an organised interest within the State'<sup>22</sup> and the letter Mosley wrote to Lord Rothermere in July 1934, following the Olympia débâcle and Rothermere's decision to end his support for the movement, illustrates how Mosley introduced anti-Semitism into his rational analytical framework:

"We have given our pledge that no racial or religious persecution will occur under Fascism in Britain; but we shall require the Jews, like everyone else, to put the interests of 'Britain First'...they [the Jews] have organised as an international movement setting their racial interests above the national interests and are, therefore, unacceptable as members of a national movement which aims at national organisation and revival."<sup>23</sup>

A further enabling factor in Mosley's adaptation of his rational analytical framework to accommodate anti-Semitism (when he had no previous history of anti-Semitism) was the deeply held convictions Mosley already had, in particular his dislike of international finance. It was a small step to take to go from a dislike of this anonymous enemy of the nation to a dislike of the group with which it had been connected historically, the Jews. This is borne out by a review of Mosley's chief works. In his 1925 *Revolution By Reason* Mosley rails against the 'hidden bankers' hands':

"In economic reality the purchasing power is transferred from the pockets of the workers to the pockets of the idle rentier and owner of fixed interest-bearing securities...By the obscure and secret working of the hidden bankers' hands, wealth is thus filched from the poor and poured into the coffers of the idle rich. When we regard the present condition of the anguished masses, may we not ask whether history itself holds evidence of a more sinister and heartless villainy?"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Mosley, *The Greater*, p.35.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, D., *Illusions of Grandeur* (Manchester, 1987) p.94.

<sup>23</sup>Mosley, *Beyond*, p.65. The first official statement on the BUF's attitude to Anglo-Jews, following the withdrawal of Rothermere's support, was in a speech by Mosley at the Albert Hall in October, 1934. It is worth noting:

"I have encountered things in this country which I did not dream existed in Britain. One of them is the power of organised Jewry which is today mobilised against Fascism. They have thrown down their challenge to fascism, and I am not in the habit of ignoring challenges. Now they seek to howl over the length and breadth of the land that we are bent on racial and religious persecution. That charge is utterly untrue.

Today we do not attack Jews on racial or religious grounds; we take up the challenge that they have thrown down because they fight against Fascism and Britain." *ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>24</sup>Mosley, O., *Revolution By Reason* (Birmingham, 1925) p.24/5.

Mosley's concentration upon the role of finance capital, and in particular the 'dictatorial power over industry and governments possessed by the great banks'<sup>25</sup> in *Revolution By Reason*, represents a left-wing variant upon the traditionally right-wing conspiracy theory. For 'great banks' simply read 'Jews.'

In his 1932 treatise, *The Greater Britain*, Mosley complains that 'we have within the nation a power, largely controlled by alien elements, which arrogates to itself a power above the State, and has used that influence to drive flaccid governments of all political parties along the high road to national disaster'<sup>26</sup> and that the city of London was 'dominated by its great alien and International interests' which Mosley fascism alone could combat by combining 'a policy of national reconstruction, putting foremost the interest of the British Producer, with a revolutionary challenge to the alien and international interests of High Finance to which the interests of the British Producer has been ruthlessly sacrificed by all Parties of the State'.<sup>27</sup> Further to this with the triumph of Mosley fascism in Britain 'the only interest which stands to lose [as a result of it] is the alien finance of the City of London which has been the most consistent enemy of the Home Producer and the most constant threat to the stability of the nation ever since the war.'<sup>28</sup> By 1938 and Mosley's *Tomorrow We Live* this 'financial parasite', which fed off 'the industry and life of Western Man',<sup>29</sup> was identified as being predominantly Jewish:

"A remarkable proportion of Jews [are] engaged in practices which the system we proposed would bring to an end. Throughout the ages Jews have taken a leading part in international usury and all forms of finance and money lending, while smaller exemplars of the method have engaged in such practices as price cutting, the sweating labour, and other means of livelihood which any ordered and regulated economy must bring to an end. So the reason was not far to seek why we had incurred the bitter and especial enmity of Jewish interests."<sup>30</sup>

Mosley's anti-Semitism was an irrational ideological development erected upon the base of a set of genuine and rationally considered issues. Mosley's anti-Semitism was, however, not highly conceptualized and it never became a total ideological explanation for Mosley. Indeed it should be remembered that Mosley only attacked the Jews intermittently in his writings and speeches.<sup>31</sup> Robert Skidelsky, Mosley's biographer, has argued that to Mosley 'the Jew was a metaphor rather than a belief, a word added to pre-existing structure of thought to sharpen the propaganda line.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>ibid., p.7.

<sup>26</sup>Nugent, N., 'The Ideas of the British Union of Fascists' in King, R. & Nugent, N., (eds) *The British Right* (Farnborough, 1977) p.149.

<sup>27</sup>Mosley, *The Greater*, p.127/8.

<sup>28</sup>ibid., p.131.

<sup>29</sup>Mosley, *Tomorrow*, p.36.

<sup>30</sup>ibid., p.58.

<sup>31</sup>Cross, in his study, analysed Mosley's speeches and concluded that on average Mosley talked about the Jews for less than 10 minutes out of every hour of any given speech Mosley gave. See Colin Cross's *The Fascists in Britain* (London, 1961).

<sup>32</sup>Thurlow, R., 'The Black Knight', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 9 (1975) p.17.

Ultimately, in the BUF's political ideology, anti-Semitism, a clear right-wing influence over it, never replaced the *Greater Britain* critique and programme as the movement's bedrock ideological explanation and 'worldview'. The BUF's anti-Semitism is best seen, historically, as both part of the historically strong nativist tradition of anti-immigration sentiment in London's East End<sup>33</sup> and as cynical, political opportunism. In terms of the BUF's political ideology it is best understood as simply the practical manifestation of the inclusive nature of the BUF's organic, integral nationalism, which whilst always preordained to be racist is not necessarily preordained to be anti-Semitic. The exact nature and identification of the specific offending 'alien' group within fascist racism is a reflection of the cultural and historical factors which shape the specific environment in which the particular manifestation of fascism is attempting to grow. In the case of the BUF, the anti-semitic tradition in east London gave it the cultural context from which to develop its anti-semitic campaign, it being no coincidence that the BUF's 'hotbed' of anti-Semitism was to be found in its east London movement.

This interpretation is strengthened when placed in relationship to, and the context of the overall history of the BUF, where it is important to understand that following the withdrawal of Lord Rothermere's support for the movement the BUF adopted a policy of pursuing localised, populist campaigns which reflected the concerns of the specific local population. Consequently, campaigns concerning the decline in the textile industries, particularly wool and cotton, were vigorously pursued in Lancashire and Yorkshire, the heartlands of those particular industries, and likewise mining in South Wales.<sup>34</sup> In east London the strong nativist tradition opposed to immigrants and specifically the recent influx of Jews, between the 1880's and the 1930s, meant that the local issue seized upon was the Jews. Of course it was not simply a case of a directive from BUF HQ initiating the campaign, because the local membership had in many ways activated an anti-Semitic campaign unilaterally already, but it did lead to its encouragement from beyond the boundaries of the east London movement.

This was because for many individual BUF members, both prominent, such as William Joyce, and at grass-roots level, particularly in east London, anti-Semitism and race did come to represent a total ideological explanation and 'worldview'. Indeed the anti-Semitism of one such prominent member, John Beckett, is worthy of further note due to the thesis's placement of him within the BUF's strand of fascist 'socialism'.

Beckett, like Mosley, exhibited no sign of anti-Semitism prior to joining the BUF and always denied being anti-Semitic. There would seem to be four main causes or conditions which resulted in Beckett being predisposed towards and eventually developing anti-Semitism. Firstly, Beckett's socialism had always exhibited a clear

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<sup>33</sup>The nativist strand of anti-Semitism in London's East End, which the BUF 'tapped into', is discussed in the next chapter in the context of the BUF's recruitment 'success' in east London.

<sup>34</sup>For the BUF's campaign aimed at Welsh miners see Stephen Cullen's article 'Another Nation-alism: The British Union of Fascists in Glamorgan', *The Welsh History Review*, 17 (1994) p.103.

nationalist trait and thus lent his personal views a clear racist potential and resulted in Beckett's distrust of, and hostility towards Russian dominated communism. Thus a potential pathway to anti-Semitism for Beckett to take was created due to the large Jewish presence and influence in British and European communism, and the subsequent potential for Beckett to make communism synonymous with Jews. Secondly, his fierce opposition to capitalism, in particular finance capitalism, and the social and economic injustice and misery it caused, recreated a similar reinforcing potential for anti-Semitism to develop in Beckett's personal political ideology due to this being another historical phenomenon synonymous with Jews. Thirdly, in 1925, when Beckett was a Labour MP, he became involved in a 'scandal' involving Sir Alfred Mond. During the war the Germans had devised a cheap and efficient secret method of extracting nitrogen from the air, nitrogen fixation, which was used in the production of explosives. Under the terms of the Armistice, the British Army had the right to investigate any such German secrets and three Army officers were duly dispatched to do so. However, the report they wrote concerning nitrogen fixation was 'lost', and shortly after their mission the three officers left the Army and gained employment with a company owned by Mond, who at the time of the report into nitrogen fixation had been a serving member of the Government. This company was now making substantial profits in the production of fertiliser by exploiting the secret method. Further to this a factory, at Billingham-on-Tees, which had been at the heart of the British wartime attempt to produce nitrogen cheaply, with little success, had been sold to a company owned by Mond for a nominal sum. Despite Beckett's concerted efforts in Parliament, Government evasiveness ensured that Mond survived the 'scandal' untouched. This episode left Beckett deeply disillusioned with the political system and with a very real sense of the betrayal inflicted upon the 'war generation' due to Beckett's conviction that Mond was in effect profiting from the war. The fact that Mond was a Jew gave Beckett's later anti-Semitism its first personal 'justification'. Fourthly, Beckett's Mother was in fact Jewish but had been ostracised by her ultra orthodox family because she had married a gentile. Beckett, particularly close to her, may have become embittered by her unjust treatment at the hands of her Jewish family and thus become that much more susceptible to anti-Semitism.<sup>35</sup>

The example of Beckett and his anti-Semitism can operate as a convenient metaphor for the whole nature of the relationship of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism', and both the BUF's racism and its predominant right-wing strand of political ideological influence.

Nevertheless it is quite legitimate to see the BUF's anti-Semitism as ultimately 'rabble rousing' populism and cynical opportunism, whose connection to the BUF's political ideology was as a natural outgrowth from the BUF's integral, organic

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<sup>35</sup>See the article by Beckett's son Francis. Beckett, F., 'The Rebel Who Lost His Cause', *History Today*, 44 (May 1994) pp.36-42.

nationalism, rather than as a bedrock belief which stood alone as an ideological explanation.

This interpretation of Mosley's, and indeed Mosley fascism's anti-Semitism as cynical political expediency is backed up with an analysis of the BUF's press. David Lewis drew the important conclusion that this interpretation:

"Is strengthened by the way in which the BUF's anti-Semitism developed in inverse relation to the propensity of the economy to produce crisis. Reading the party's propaganda one is struck by the degree to which anti-Semitism declined from the spring of 1937 to the end of 1938; this was the period of renewed depression which had been predicted, and throughout its duration spurious anti-Semitism gave way to the type of cogent economic analysis which had provided the *raison d'être* and the bedrock of Mosley's fascism. Even the traditional link between international finance and the Jews was no longer laboured, as in the context, the unpatriotic internationalism of 'the City of London' was singled out for blame [however]...it became increasingly apparent that it [the economic crisis] was not of sufficient severity to sweep fascism to power in Britain. Indeed by late 1938 the indications of economic recovery were undeniable, and with them came a return to anti-Semitism with articles on racial differences, and references to the 'Dusky Men of International Finance.'<sup>36</sup>

This point in itself is true, however one cannot afford to overlook the virulence of the attacks Mosley made upon the Jews, the psychological and personality traits, characteristic of the anti-Semite, which Mosley clearly exhibited (namely a strong sense of individuality, a conviction that society stands on the edge of an imminent crisis and the belief that they are caught up in a life and death struggle against powerful and devious adversary) and his connivance in allowing anti-Semitism to develop within the BUF in the hope of making political gain out of it.

For the sake of completeness it is worth noting Mosley's proposed answer to the 'Jewish Question': 'the statesmanship of the future must find a solution of this question on the lines of the Jews again becoming an integral nation...a final solution of this vexed question by the creation of a Jewish National State, in full accord with the age-long prayers of the prophets and leaders of the Jewish race. Is this persecution or is it justice?'<sup>37</sup> As well as Mosley's self-defence at his appearance before the Advisory Committee in 1940:

"Q[uestion] On what grounds did you attack them [the Jews]?"

A[nswer] Their whole influence upon National Life...I had never looked into the problem in any shape or form. I always actually thought it was the work of cranks.[Having then discovered that Jews opposed fascism because fascism wanted to stop activities Jews were heavily engaged in] I was compelled to look at the Jewish problem by their opposition to us and having looked at the Jewish problem I developed what is called anti-Semitism...[My solution] is constructing a national home for them which would put an end to all this friction it engenders which is as harmful to the Jews as it is to us."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Lewis, *Illusions*, p.101/2.

<sup>37</sup>Mosley, *Tomorrow*, p.60/1.

<sup>38</sup>Skidelsky, *Mosley*, p.3/4.

It is necessary to note two points: firstly, unlike in later life, Mosley does not deny his anti-Semitism; and secondly, his seeming belief in the fact that his solution is humanitarian, just and beneficial to all sides, including the Jews.

The second question to be addressed is to what degree anti-Semitism was an integral part of the BUF's political ideology from its inception in 1932, and to what degree was it a tactical addition to the movement's message after 1934 following the failure of the appeal of its left-wing brand of fascism to the British worker? The points already covered in answering the first question go a long way to answering this question. A multi-causal explanation to the development in Mosley fascism of anti-Semitism is required. This explanation consists of five points.

Firstly, the BUF had a psychological predisposition and receptiveness to anti-Semitism. This stemmed from the intrinsic racism within fascism, and in the case of Mosley, the influence of Oswald Spengler upon him. Spengler believed history to be a process based upon the continual rise and fall of different cultures and that intermixing between these different cultures would result in atrophy and the decline of both cultures. Mosley applied this idea to race and as a result developed an apartheid perspective regarding different races.

Secondly, the BUF had an ideological predisposition to anti-Semitism, which made the transition to anti-Semitism easier due to the integral and organic nature of the BUF's ultra-nationalism which demanded total national unity and the placement of national interest above sectional and personal interest and well-being at all times. In the BUF's *Weltanschauung* Jews were identified as a section within the British nation which placed its own interests above those of the nation due to their association with, and thus eventual synonymity with two groups: communists and bankers. Firstly, the high proportion of Jews who played a leading role in the Bolshevik Revolution and in the Communist opposition to the BUF, particularly in east London, led to Jews becoming synonymous with Communism. This identification with Communism laid the path for a 'smooth' shift from patriotism, and its natural corollary anti-communism, to anti-Semitism. Secondly, the causes of Britain's decline and the general economic crisis which had been rationally and coherently discussed by Mosley in his 1932 book *The Greater Britain*, became increasingly simplified in the course of the popularising of the BUF's original political and philosophical standpoint. This simplification of the complex causes of economic decline resulted in them becoming closely associated, and eventually identified, with the machinations of the world's international financiers. Given the association of Jews with international finance in the popular imagination the close identification of Jews with another interest group ruthlessly placing its interests above those of the nation by the BUF was inevitable.

Thirdly, the Jews were thought to be attempting to embroil Britain in European war with Germany in order to help their co-religionists in Germany, thus placing sectional interests above national ones.

Fourthly, the BUF was in need of a 'populist' issue through which they could reverse their drastic decline in the wake of the Olympia fiasco of June 1934 and the loss of the 'Rothermere fascists.' The value of anti-Semitism, politically, as a populist issue had been proven in the course of European history because of the latent racism (and thus anti-Semitism) in European societies.

Fifthly, the anti-Semitic campaign of the BUF is partly explained by the interaction of bitterly opposed fascists and anti-fascists, within whose ranks there was a strong Jewish presence.

Any analysis of Mosley fascism and anti-Semitism must accommodate both the sincerity of Mosley fascism's anti-Semitism and the cynical way in which it was used by Mosley fascism out of political expediency. Ideally an explanation should begin from the basis that fascism (and thus Mosley fascism) is intrinsically racist and any fascist expression of anti-Semitism, whilst not inevitable, is a result of this latent racism. In the case of the BUF it needs to be noted that in the first couple of years of its existence the movement's potential for anti-Semitism lay largely dormant and inert. However in late 1934 this potential was 'unleashed' by the leadership of the movement. This piece of political opportunism was perhaps not consciously played upon, but was certainly seized upon as a possible answer to flagging fortunes, when its recruitment potential in east London was realised.

Furthermore any such analysis must highlight two key points. Firstly, anti-Semitism was a latent element within both Mosley and Mosley fascism, as a result of the intrinsically racist nature of fascism. Secondly, the cause of this intrinsic racism was Mosley fascism's (and fascism's) solidarist concept of society and nationhood. Elements, such as Jewry, which could be perceived as separate social entities, 'outside' of the normal socio-economic framework of the nation, were as a result deemed a threat to fascism's palingenetic 'dream' of social syncretic-harmony in a reborn *Greater Britain* and thus targeted for persecution and expulsion.

As can be seen from this overview there were four reasons for, or perhaps ways in which, the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' accommodated the racist aspects of the BUF's political ideology. Firstly, the intrinsic racist nature of fascism and its brand of organic, integral nationalism meant that the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' would inevitably contain an ultimately racist *Weltanschauung* due to its synthesis with this brand of organic, integral nationalism. Secondly, the prevalence of racist ideas in society at large, even in 'left-wing' circles, in the inter-war periods smoothed the transition from socialism to fascism on both a personal and an ideological level. Thirdly, the way in which racism and anti-Semitism were absorbed into a 'version' of socialism via the tendency of the British left in the first half of the twentieth century to hold 'paternalistic' views towards the working-class and non-white races, an essentially elitist outlook which had little problem in accommodating itself with the non-egalitarian ethos of fascism's brand of social radicalism, namely state control over all aspects of society and



the economy. Fourthly, the way in which racism and anti-Semitism were absorbed into a 'version' of socialism via the left-wing form of conspiracy theory centred on the financiers of international capitalism, the banks, in which Jews simply became synonymous with the banks.

The third part of the chapter will consider the post-war development in Mosley's political writings and ideas.<sup>39</sup> Specifically Mosley's post-war development from the narrow nationalism of his *Greater Britain* vision to the pan-nationalism of 'Europe-a-Nation' and his inception of the idea 'European Socialism' will be discussed in order to throw further light upon the questions of the ultimate essence of Mosley's own fascism and the consistency of his political thinking. In a certain sense this part of the chapter almost acts as a postscript to the thesis's findings by examining the developments in Mosley's post-1945 ideas in this way. An overview of Mosley's post-'45 development will be presented, followed by a more detailed examination of this development's key components.

Mosley's post-'45 political and philosophical work<sup>40</sup> is, if anything, a more sophisticated and intellectually superior body of work than his pre-'39 body of work, which in its own right is an intellectually sophisticated, coherent and cogent body of work (let alone by general fascist standards).

Whilst undoubtedly Mosley's desperate desire to justify (or excuse) his past and hasten his reacceptance into the political mainstream acted as a considerable spur to him in his political testamentary output, this output represented a genuine attempt from Mosley to learn from his mistakes and produce a political programme equipped to deal with the considerably different realities of the post-'45 world in which he now found himself. Mosley turned in essence to a Eurofascist perspective, a development paralleled in his new idea 'European Socialism' and previously hinted at in a 1936 article he wrote called 'The World Alternative', in which he eulogised upon the idea of the nations of Europe being united by a common embrace of fascism.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>See Richard Thurlow's overview of Mosley after 1945 'The Guardian of the Sacred Flame: The Failed Political Resurrection of Sir Oswald Mosley after 1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.241-54.

<sup>40</sup>Mosley's major political and philosophical post-1945 works are *The Alternative* (Ramsbury, 1947), *Europe: Faith and Plan* (London, 1958) and *Mosley - Right Or Wrong?* (London, 1961).

<sup>41</sup>Mosley, O.; 'The World Alternative', *Fascist Quarterly*, 2 (1936) p.377-396.

There were, however, clear links in Mosley's analysis between his pre- and post-war thinking as his first political discourse after the war, his 1946 *My Answer*, clearly illustrates. *My Answer* was basically a preface, condemning the BUF's wartime treatment and internment, published in a joint volume with the seventh edition of Mosley's 1938 book *Tomorrow We Live*. It gave a clear sign to the faithful that Mosley had kept the faith:

"Sombre is the scene, and bitter will be the disillusionment of yet another returning generation, who were told, as we were in 1914, that a new world would be born of their sacrifices. Once again, that world of mirage fades into a morass...all questions will be canvassed but nothing done...the union of war will give place to the divisions of peace; the shrill voice of a thousand little egos will again drown clear command, and inhibit resultant action; ignoble will again overwhelm the noble...the young will wonder why, as once we wondered; when we too were young, and brushing from our eyes the blood and dust to glimpse a fairer world...the old must be worked out to the end before new life can begin; this is the law of nature which rules the lives of men within the will of God. When next, together, we turn our eyes toward the future, we may discern - rising like Phoenix from these ashes - the undying soul of England and the European man."<sup>42</sup>

The principal development in Mosley's thought was what he described as 'the extension of patriotism'<sup>43</sup> from narrow nationalism to a pan-Europeanism embraced in the cornerstone of Mosley's new thinking Europe-A-Nation. Mosley explained this need to develop an idea 'beyond both Fascism and Democracy'<sup>44</sup> by arguing that what had caused fascism to fail was the fact that 'the fascist outlook in each land was too National.'<sup>45</sup>

Mosley considered it was necessary for Europe to unite as one nation, and using Africa as a dependent 'bread basket', become a third power independent from both Capitalist America and Communist Russia. The process of European union was defended by Mosley, in his 1947 book *The Alternative*, as being a natural and biological form of human evolution, 'in harmony with all nature and history.'<sup>46</sup> Mosley claimed that 'throughout history' such processes of increasing human social integration had 'been natural and inevitable' because 'as the mind of man grew and his circumstances enlarged, his sense of patriotism extended always in the same natural manner.'<sup>47</sup> That 'natural manner', 'that has been the way of nature and of history',<sup>48</sup> was the way in which 'Man moved from the village to the nation in the natural process of uniting with his nearer kinsmen as his mind and spirit grew. Now the time is come to move from the nation to the continent, or even beyond it, under the same natural impulse and process of next

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<sup>42</sup>Mosley, O., *My Answer* (Ramsbury, 1946) p.39.

<sup>43</sup>Mosley, *Europe*, p.4.

<sup>44</sup>Mosley, O., *The Alternative* (Ramsbury, 1947) p.11. See Roger Griffin's article, 'The 'Post-Fascism' of the Alleanza Nazionale: a case study in ideological morphology', *Journal Of Political Ideologies*, 1 (1996) pp.123-46, for another attempt to go 'beyond both fascism and democracy.'

<sup>45</sup>ibid., p.12.

<sup>46</sup>ibid., p.150.

<sup>47</sup>ibid., p.149.

<sup>48</sup>ibid., p.150.

uniting with those nearest us in blood, tradition, mind and spirit.<sup>49</sup> For Mosley the Union of Europe was merely the continuation of a natural process 'which has been manifest throughout History in the tendency to unite with related peoples of adjoining territory.'<sup>50</sup> The difference now however was Mosley's belief that 'we have reached the point where nature must be assisted; the Mother of all in her present conception needs midwifery of Destiny. Deliberately we must accelerate evolution.'<sup>51</sup> The Spenglerian and Nietzschean overtones of this immediate post-war Mosley text are striking.

This development clearly illustrates two very important points: firstly, from the BUF's core creed of 'Patriotism and Revolution', in the new post-'45 situation it is patriotism which is discarded<sup>52</sup> rather than the desire for action and radical, revolutionary change; and secondly, the ever visionary nature of Mosley's thinking based upon, for Mosley, pragmatic and practical choices.<sup>53</sup> With the British Empire no longer a viable option to form an area large enough to be autarkic and thus insulated from both the capitalist and communist systems, what other 'natural' area could? For Mosley the obvious answer was Europe and the only choice European union or European servitude to one or other of the superpowers.

Mosley was still trying to provide modern solutions to the problems of the modern age and thus create, in typical fascist fashion, a 'third way' between Capitalist America and Communist Russia via his concept of 'Europe-a-Nation'. Although his new proposals tried via his new concept of 'European Socialism' and his new economic device the 'Wage-Price mechanism' to create a less rigid and controlled system than his *Greater Britain* vision, he still believed firmly in the authoritarian and autocratic role of the leader and the need for a spiritual 'will-to-triumph'. Even the greater democratisation of Mosley's post '45 fascism was a simple development of Mosley's *Greater Britain* proposals.

As in his pre-war fascist vision Mosley was not just simply trying to create a new political and economic system he also wanted to create a new type man, in the mould of his classic Christianesque self-sacrifice and dedicated service to the national community synthesis with Nietzschean virility, dynamism and will to triumph. This desired economic and spiritual overhaul of the whole system indicated that Mosley's post-'45 fascism still contained the classical combination of his pre-'39 fascist vision of the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit to fascism and the 'rational-radical' ethos of the disillusioned socialist recruit to fascism.

Mosley's post-'45 ideas were a clear outgrowth from his pre-'39 ones:

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<sup>49</sup>ibid., p.14.

<sup>50</sup>ibid., p.151.

<sup>51</sup>ibid., p.151.

<sup>52</sup>it is interesting to read A.K. Chesterton's less than complimentary comments upon Mosley's conversion from nationalist leader to internationalist leader. See Griffin, *Fascism*, p.322/3.

<sup>53</sup>Although it may be more accurate to refer to it as the utopian fantasy of a megalomaniac.

"What was right in fascism was the urge to act. What was wrong was action at any price. In a period of bad housing, vast unemployment, low wages, etc. - when modern science could remedy all these things - it was right to feel the drive to action...It was right to want to get rid of the old Conservative, Liberal and Socialist parties who had failed and were sunk in complacency. It was right to organize movements of action. What was wrong was that some people were driven by the desire for action and by the sense of national humiliation to the point of overriding human liberty and ignoring the basic decencies of life. Even action to remedy unnecessary suffering can be too dearly bought at the expense of the things which are essential...The basic difference [between Mosley's pre- and post war policies] is that fascism faced facts of the pre-war world, and we face the facts of the modern world which science has brought. Fascism was essentially a national movement, in the sense of belonging to each of the individual nations which then existed. That is why it naturally took different forms and had such different policies in various countries...Now the old individual nations of Europe are too small to survive separately between the giants of America and Russia. That is mainly why we have passed beyond nationalism, and have become a European movement with the aim of Europe a Nation. The main differences between our policy to-day and the fascism of the past are the movement beyond the old nationalism to a patriotism which seeks union of all the European countries, and our belief in the prime importance of maintaining personal liberty."<sup>54</sup>

The organic, integral nationalist ethos of Mosley's *Greater Britain* vision was still very much a part of pan-nationalism upon which Mosley's 'Europe-a-Nation' vision was based, what was required was 'a decisive act of faith and of will',<sup>55</sup> with Mosley believing that 'the qualities of the various European peoples are complementary to each other in remarkable degree. Bring them together, and you make something approaching a perfect whole.'<sup>56</sup> It still contained the populism of his pre-war ideas with his call for 'a new spirit [and] a movement of the peoples towards union' and his continued belief in the necessity of change coming from below if the old was to be swept away to make way for the new, 'let it come up from the roots like a force of nature to meet the necessity and the opportunity. It is the duty of everyone of us to rouse the peoples' will to union. Then this great enterprise can quickly succeed if it is driven forward by popular enthusiasm.'<sup>57</sup> Mosley was still operating at a higher plane of idealism, remaining contemptuous of the materialism of the present world, believing that this act of European transformation would come about not through 'the haggling of merchants each seeking his own advantage, but the fiery force of a new European idea which will fuse the divisions of the present nations into the union of a new and greater nation at a higher level.'<sup>58</sup>

The key difference between Mosley's post-'45 ideas and his pre-'39 ones is of course this 'extension of patriotism' from Britain to Europe, a European wide extension which would be accomplished by Europe undergoing the inevitably palingenetic experience of a 'new birth'<sup>59</sup> in order for Europe to become 'Europe-a-Nation'.

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<sup>54</sup>Mosley, *Mosley*, p.184-6.

<sup>55</sup>ibid., p.38.

<sup>56</sup>ibid., p.38.

<sup>57</sup>ibid., p.38.

<sup>58</sup>ibid., p.38.

<sup>59</sup>Mosley, *Europe*, p.17.

Nevertheless it is clear that Mosley's new vision still shared much with his old one with the conservative revolutionary qualities of vitality, urge to action and the belief in the need for humanity to evolve into 'higher forms' still prominent. It is however the 'rational-radical' trait in Mosley's political ideology which shines through strongest.<sup>60</sup> Within the insulated and autarkic geo-political area which was Mosley's vision 'Europe-a-Nation', two new political and economic concepts were to be constructed - the Wage-Price Mechanism and European Socialism. The Wage-Price Mechanism was the economic construct which Mosley believed would solve the major economic problem of the age:

"The equation of production and consumption has been the major problem of the industrial age...the question has only been solved at all by wars, armament booms, foreign loans...all desperate and dangerous expedients by which a bankrupt system sought to escape from the basically simple problem which has always baffled it, how to enable its own people to consume what its own people produced...Economic leadership through the wage-price mechanism can enable government to do this for the first time, in a regular, systematic and scientific method."<sup>61</sup>

Mosley believed that within such a geo-political area, whilst it was essential that government gave a political and economic lead it was only necessary for government to intervene in the economy at two key points; the level of wages and prices:

"First of all, a complete united Europe will provide a market of about 300 million people. It will also contain all the foodstuffs and raw materials we can possibly require...we shall not require anything from the rest of the world at all. It will, therefore, be a completely secure market insulated from the present chaos of the world...A home market of 300 million people will be large enough for all requirements of industry, as well as being secure from dumping, under-cutting, cheap labour competition, etc. for that sure market we can have mass production on a great scale. This will enable us to both raise wages and reduce prices because...the cost of the article depends far more on the rate of production than on the rate of wage...it is only necessary for the government to intervene at two key points: wages and sometimes prices. Within the new economic system of Europe...government must ensure that similar wages are paid throughout similar industries...it will be relatively easy for a government to raise wages equally through such similar industries, as science increases the power to produce. It is essential to do this if we are not to have over-production and glut, with a return to slump and unemployment. Purchasing power must increase as productive power increases. This can only be achieved by the definite economic leadership of government in an area large enough to be independent of world markets and supplies, and therefore independent of the world costing system...to avoid slump and unemployment by equating production and consumption we need a viable area, and the economic leadership of government. Europe and its overseas territories will form the viable area, because it will contain its own supplies and markets. Economic leadership within this area will solve the problem by raising the national income as science increases the means to produce...price control should be necessary only where monopoly conditions prevail...Economic leadership by government through the wage-price mechanism means government will intervene where it really matters, but nowhere else. That will be a change from the present method of government interfering when it is not necessary instead of taking action when it is needed...Government must give economic leadership, but must not remain to conduct

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<sup>60</sup>With the exception of Mosley's 1947 *The Alternative* and its striking 'conservative revolutionary' influences.

<sup>61</sup>Mosley: *Europe*, p.47/8.

industry or to control it...the action of the state is essentially that of the pioneer when the initial task is too big for private enterprise...Our state is a leader creating new things...science will add limitless opportunities of creative state undertakings in spheres which are too big for private enterprise...once we have economic leadership of government in an area containing the resources of Europe and our overseas territories, we can organize, through stimulus of private demand, or the creation of public works, to keep every man and machine in full employment. This is the real use of public works."<sup>62</sup>

This passage also illustrates an ever constant in Mosley's thinking, his faith in the power of science to alleviate all socio-economic ills. The reason that Mosley believed in government intervention at just the key points of wages and prices can be found in his politico-economic concept European Socialism. What Mosley hoped to create was a technocratic mixed economy (something quite appropriate as this was in effect a synthesis of command and market economies) where the running of the economy would be left, by and large, in the efficient hands of the technician, whose loyalty lay not with any one faction but ultimately in the desire to ensure that the smooth and efficient running of industry benefited the whole of the community:

"European Socialism is the development by a fully united Europe of all the resources in our own continent, in white Africa, and in South America, for the benefit of all the peoples of Europe and of these other European lands, with every energy and incentive that the action of European government can give to private enterprise, workers' ownership or any other method of progress which science and a dynamic system of government find most effective for the enrichment of all our people and the lifting of European civilisation to ever higher forms of life...At once, I state a preference for the conduct and development of industries already nationalised by syndicalist method rather than by the present state bureaucracy. It is far healthier for industries which have already lost the principle of private enterprise to be owned and conducted by the workers in them than by the mandarins of state socialism. Either method would, of course, under our system be subject to the wage-price mechanism. The wages of these industries would also be determined by government, and, as they are monopolies, the price they charge would be determined by government. In these conditions it would surely be far better that they should be worker-owned, and that the workers in them should be told they would get the benefit of any increased efficiency, which kept the prices they charged stable but enabled their own wages to be raised. Such direct incentive to efficiency and workers' co-operation in new methods would bring far better results than leaving the matter to the present functionaries who have no direct personal interest in efficiency, or even much concern whether the industry runs at a profit or loss...The basic idea of European Socialism in this respect was that industries should become worker-owned instead of nationalised at the point when the original individual initiative was entirely lost, and they became large long-established concerns which were in effect conducted by a bureaucracy, and often also acquired a monopoly character...[European Socialism is] a synthesis between private enterprise and socialism, using each motive force at the appropriate period of industrial development. That private enterprise was to be in every sense a freer private enterprise than it is today - as always in our thinking - while the socialism derived from the syndicalist and not from the bureaucratic tradition of European thinking...the natural and organic movement of the English and European workers.

We sought to bring back the true tradition of the working-class movement and at the same time to find a synthesis with the indispensable force of private enterprise and individual initiative at a higher level, which the driving impulses of both systems exercised in due time and on due occasion, could give forward and harmonious urge to the whole. This attempt in new thinking was right and necessary, but it may well now be

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<sup>62</sup>Mosley, *Mosley*, p.38-43.

surpassed by further thinking and by great possibilities. The plain fact, which must be recognised by all realists, is that the workers have very little interest in questions of ownership of industry, or any other theoretical matters, when things are going really well. Small blame to them, for they find better things to do with their spare time and money than attending committee meetings; and as opportunity occurs for real leisure, holidays, travel, and general culture arising from protracted facilities of education, the use of spare time and money will find ever more desirable outlets.

If we can construct the economy of Europe-Africa and then release within it the force of modern science, both to increase wealth production and to reduce the hours of labour, the thoughts of the workers are likely to turn increasingly to higher things than the old industrial dogfight which found expression in acute questions of the ownership of industry. And this will not necessarily mean a lessening of social consciousness, but rather an extension and deepening of individual consciousness. Already the tendency is notable whenever for a short time things go well; it is bound to gather force and momentum directly an economic system which is both stable and expanding brings durable hopes of a fuller life for the mass of the people...Very few of the workers may want to be bothered at all with such things...the people who will continue...to be bothered with the daily life and development of the great concerns which they administer, will be the new class of managers and industrial technicians. For the next stage of development we may have to look more to the managerial revolution than to syndicalism. When the individual pioneer and his family pass away and the concern becomes too big for any form of individual management, it is the new category of highly trained managers and departmental experts who are ready to take over...they rank next to the scientists [in importance]...at the point when the role of the new managers becomes decisive, the industrial future may well rest between them and the Trade Union leadership which increasing opportunity will evoke...we must rely very largely on the existing trade unions and employers' organisations to perform many vital services to industry."<sup>63</sup>

Mosley was keen to present his post-'45 proposals, as he had done his pre-'39 ones, as being beneficial to Trade Unionism:

"Every level-headed Trade Union leader who is concerned with safeguarding the present standard of his followers from the growing threat of unfair competition in the chaos of world markets, and with progressively raising it to the level which modern science can make possible and his members therefore justly demand, is beginning to realise that his task is impossible within the limits of small individual countries, without supplies on which they can depend and without a market which they can organise by modern methods...[the workers ask] why the mass production which modern technique makes possible cannot bring plenty for all; and they can find the answer only in a large and viable economy which can be consciously organised to equate full production and consumption as science continually increases the power to produce."<sup>64</sup>

An economic system which, to the benefit of the working-class, would:

"Secure steady employment at wages which will continually and surely increase as science increases production...the fear and the abuses will end together in a state which serves the whole and not the faction...we want the trade unions to play not a lesser but a greater part in the new system...We want them in every way to be free to play the part of another "Estate of the Realm." For instance, they can take on the job of doing many of the things done to-day by a wasteful state bureaucracy, such as questions affecting conditions of work, unemployment pay, welfare, sick-pay, holidays, compensation claims, legal representation. The administration of these matters should be entirely taken over by the

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<sup>63</sup>Mosley, *Europe*, p.122-6. It is interesting to compare Mosley's paternalistic remarks concerning the interests of the workers to Hitler's famous comment that 'the mass of the working classes want nothing but bread and games.' Noakes, J & Pridham, G., *Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 1* (Exeter, 1991) p.66.

<sup>64</sup>Mosley, *Europe*, p.19/20.

trade unions. A larger life awaits trade unions in our new system, as it does everyone else who works, produces and creates."<sup>65</sup>

The new system would be a meritocracy, as well as a technocracy, with 'promotion by merit, and by merit alone'<sup>66</sup> and with a unified currency, a codified law and a plurality of language. Any initial difficulties resulting from this plurality would be overcome through education and by ensuring that the main languages were learnt by all. This would not only help to ensure the smoothness of the process to unite all the European peoples as one, but would also ensure that national cultures and identity would be protected in this European multi-national super-state. A central tenet of the system would be the belief in the essential need of maintaining and defending personal liberty. Mosley had become convinced that he had overcome the problems of pre-'39 fascism by producing a system based upon a set ideas and policies that 'cuts clean across the "right" and "left" of the old world', which was 'a creation of the modern age' based upon a movement of 'the vital forces of Europe.'<sup>67</sup> This movement was determined to create a system that would by synthesizing 'the principle of freedom with action to secure continuous progress'<sup>68</sup> manage to overcome the conflicts and divisions of the old system and achieve 'the union of authority with liberty, action with thought, decision with discussion, power with responsibility, vigour with duty, strength with kindness, and service of the people with the attainment of ever higher forms of life.'<sup>69</sup> It would be a system that would have moved 'beyond both fascism and democracy.'

Although during the course of the 1950s Mosley, economically, subtly developed from a neo-syndicalist to a 'managerial revolution' perspective in terms of his views on industrial management the core essentials to his vision remained the same. In fact it is essential to realise that at the core of all of Mosley's political tracts and visions are two constants: Mosley's philosophical obsession with synthesis; and his attempts at a central synthesis of patriotism and revolution. His 'Europe-a-Nation' vision is no exception, as this explanation by Mosley of his quest for such a synthesis, from his 1961 book *Mosley - Right Or Wrong?*, illustrates:

'In my first election I stated the principles of socialistic imperialism. It was a crude and clumsy phrase which belonged to that period, but it contained the idea to develop our home and overseas territory for the welfare of all. Progress was then regarded as belonging to the left and patriotism to the right. This was my first attempted synthesis of progress and patriotism. Later I developed the idea considerably.

In brief, patriotism is a vital principle not only because it is a fine emotion without which anyone is less than a man, but also because it embodies the essential principles of stability and order without which no state or community can endure. Progress is also a vital principle, it is at one with the natural principle that every organism must grow and develop or decline and perish, and it embodies the essential principle of using science,

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<sup>65</sup>Mosley, *Mosley*, p.251-3.

<sup>66</sup>ibid., p.254.

<sup>67</sup>ibid., p.255.

<sup>68</sup>ibid., p.186.

<sup>69</sup>ibid., p.186.



the energy and invention of man's mind, to elevate his condition, without which stability and order - even life itself - cannot be preserved.

Progress is frustrated without conditions of order and stability. That is why the anarchic character of the left ends not with progress but in chaos. Also order and stability cannot be maintained without progress, particularly in modern conditions. Because life does not stand still, and any policy which tries to conserve what exists without recognizing the urgent need for progress ends equally in chaos.

Rightly regarded, progress and patriotism are not antithetical but complementary principles. You cannot have progress without the stability and order which patriotism includes, and you cannot have patriotism, the preservation of the state, without the progress which alone enables the state to live, prosper and advance. Yet those two great principles of progress and patriotism have been divided by the war of the parties. Our thought once again cuts right across the division of the parties. We achieve synthesis at a higher level, by uniting the principles of patriotism and progress."<sup>70</sup>

This 'higher level' Mosley frequently refers to also illustrates the central synthesis in Mosley himself of the rational-radicalism of socialism and the spiritualism of the conservative revolutionary. This is because for Mosley the materialistic aspects of overcoming and solving the problems of the way humanity lived, namely solving 'the basic problem of providing the means to live well, by organising a market for the new production of which science is capable - a market which will simply be the fair reward of all who work according to their effort, assured by a conscious, deliberate and organised mechanism of the state',<sup>71</sup> were not motive enough for what he was doing. What Mosley desired was an answer to the questions: 'What then is the purpose of it all? Will the whole urge be satisfied when everyone has plenty to eat and drink, every possible assurance against sickness and old age, a house, a television set and a long seaside holiday each year?'<sup>72</sup> For Mosley the answer was no. He believed the answer lay in man's constant striving for the betterment of himself and his race:

"The ideal of creating a higher form on earth can now rise before men with the power of a spiritual purpose, which is not simply a philosophic abstraction but a concrete expression of deep human desire. All men want their children to live better than they have lived, just as they have tried by their own exertions to lift themselves beyond the level of their fathers whose affection and sacrifice often gave them the chance to do it. This is a right and natural urge in mankind, and, when fully understood, becomes a spiritual purpose. It is the way the world works, has always worked from the most primitive beginnings to the relative heights where humanity stands today. And we may, therefore, believe that if there be divine purpose, this is how it is expressed in practical life...the purpose of life is a movement from lower to higher forms...It is not only a reasonable aim to strive for a higher form among men; it is a creed with the strength of a religious conviction. It is not only a plain necessity of the new age of science which the genius of man's mind has brought; it is in accordance with the long process of nature within which we may read the purpose of the world. And it is no small and selfish aim, for we work not only for ourselves but for a time to come. The long striving of our lives can not only save our present civilisation, but can also enable others more fully to realise and to enjoy the great beauty of this world, not only in peace and happiness, but in an ever unfolding wisdom and rising consciousness of the mission of man."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup>ibid., p.255/56.

<sup>71</sup>Mosley, *Europe*, p.134.

<sup>72</sup>ibid., p.143.

<sup>73</sup>ibid., p.145-147.

The fascist overtones of such Nietzschean struggles for improvement as these are clear. Although, of course, Mosley's struggle clearly has a humanistic and universal quality Hitler's own *Mein Kampf* never contained, Hitler's struggle for improvement being at the direct expense of the majority of humanity due to the genocidal urge it contained, whereas Mosley's heavily Spenglerian influenced views on race and culture resulted in his development of an apartheid perspective regarding race, which repugnant and offensive in their own right are clearly different from Hitler's views on the same subject.

By examining the political ideology of the BUF as a unitary ideological whole and specifically having examined the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' to this ideological whole, this chapter has demonstrated three key points concerning the issues with which this thesis is concerned.

Firstly, fascism as a political ideology, as manifested in the political ideology of the BUF, is built upon a syncretic core of two strands: an originally right-wing one built upon the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit to fascism; and an originally left-wing one built upon the 'rational-radical' ethos of the disillusioned socialist recruit to fascism. The common features of the fascist *Weltanschauung* around which these strands fuse were a shared all-pervading desire for a new socio-economic ordering of the nation combined with the belief that the politico-economic system liberal democracy was a barrier to this re-ordering. This fusion manifested itself at the level of a populist quest for national unity and national rebirth and the principle BUF policy which formed the programmatic basis of this fusion was the BUF's commitment to the creation of a Corporate State. Ultimately, the two strands needed one another. The right-wing strand, compelled by the organic, integral nature of its nationalism, needed a brand of 'socialism' with which to win over the workers to the nationalist cause, while the left-wing strand needed an attainable autarkic geo-political area in which to undertake the restructuring and re-co-ordination of society and the economy. The British Empire was the obvious choice for it.

Secondly, anti-Semitism was a latent element within both Mosley and Mosley fascism, the result of fascism's intrinsic racist nature which resulted from fascism's solidarist concept of society and nationhood. As a consequence of this, and its synthesis with fascism's brand of organic, integral nationalism, the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism', 'helped' by the prevalence of racist ideas in inter-war British society (even in 'left-wing' circles), inevitably contains an ultimately racist *Weltanschauung*. The way in which this racism was absorbed into a 'version' of socialism was twofold. Initially the absorption was a simple extension of the tendency within the British left in the first half of the century, especially middle-class socialist intellectuals, to hold 'paternalistic' views towards the working-class and non-white races. This elitist outlook was easily accommodated within fascism's non-egalitarian ethos, as specifically exhibited in the

belief for the need for state control over all aspects of social and economic organisation. This was complemented by the adaptation of a left-wing conspiracy theory centred on the financiers of international capitalism, the banks. The adaptation was to replace the banks with the Jews, with whom they simply became synonymous.

Thirdly, the developments in Mosley's post-'45 political and philosophical thinking reveal both the pragmatic and practical nature of Mosley's thinking and the fact that from Mosley's syncretic core creed of 'Patriotism and Revolution' it is patriotism which is discarded, or most readily adapted to the post-'45 situation, rather than the left-wing desire for action and radical, revolutionary change.

The thesis will now need to address the question of the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the causes for the BUF's abject failure.

## Chapter Six

### Fascist 'Socialism' and the Failure of the BUF

The final chapter in the section, which considers the relationship between the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and the failure of the BUF, will examine three specific issues. The first part of the chapter will review the nature and extent of the support the BUF managed to generate, as it is the BUF's lack of support which is the most obvious and important manifestation of its abject failure as a political movement. The second part of the chapter will then examine the general reasons for the failure of the BUF. In the course of this examination, whilst the very important socio-economic and politico-cultural factors behind Mosley fascism's failure will be noted, it is the ideological perspective upon this question of failure which is of most importance to this thesis: that is the intrinsic weakness of fascism, in general, and the way the syncretic ideological core of Mosley fascism (in particular its socialistic component and pretensions), in reflecting this, plays a significant role in its almost preordained failure. The final part of the chapter will examine the specific reasons for the failure of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and will include an assessment of the reasons for the failure of the majority of the New Party's (NP) former Labour Party (LP) MP's to join the BUF, the 'falling by the wayside' of the leading left-wing recruits to the BUF and the failure of the BUF to attract so few disillusioned socialists into its ranks. Griffin's methodology will play a key role in this chapter as it is the way in which the intrinsic ideological deficiencies within Mosley fascism help to account for its failure that are key to one of the thesis's main arguments concerning the ironic inability of the originally left-wing message of the BUF to attract working-class support.

Consequently the three specific questions which will be addressed by this chapter, related to the nature of the working-class support the BUF managed to gain, are: firstly, to what extent (in terms of both absolute numbers and relative to other social groups) did the BUF successfully recruit from the British working-class?; secondly, to what extent was any working-class support for Mosley fascism the result of the successful appeal of the BUF's left-wing brand of fascist 'socialism' to the British worker?; and thirdly, the most important question, why did this particular aspect of the BUF's message fall so resoundingly on 'deaf ears'?

Any attempt at examining the sociological profile of the BUF and the related questions of what type of recruit Mosley fascism was able to attract and the success or otherwise of Mosley fascism's appeal to the British worker is inevitably hindered from the outset by the fact that it is particularly difficult to obtain the necessary primary material from which any sociological profile of the BUF has to be constructed.<sup>1</sup> This has

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<sup>1</sup>This difficulty is caused by the twin obstacles of the Government's reluctance to release for public scrutiny the BUF's own records relating to its membership, seized by the Government in 1940, and the natural reluctance of ex-BUF members to discuss their past. This reluctance is compounded by the fact

resulted in the fact that, compared to other aspects of Mosley fascism, there has been a relatively small amount of work done on the sociology of the BUF. The work that has been completed concerning the BUF's social base, as a result of these difficulties, is not completely reliable with both the primary sources and the conclusions drawn from samples which were predominantly too small, and consequently not completely trustworthy.<sup>2</sup> However, with these reservations firmly in mind, it is still worth reviewing the conclusions of the most important commentaries which have been written on the nature of the BUF's social base, having first briefly outlined (for the sake of completeness, context and the highlighting of the BUF's failure) the growth patterns it exhibited during its eight year lifespan.

The general contours of the BUF's growth can be outlined thus. Between 1932 and 1934 the BUF grew to a membership of 50,000. Following the Olympia débâcle of that year and the withdrawal of the support of the Rothermere press,<sup>3</sup> it declined to 5,000 in October 1935 before recovering to between 20,000 and 25,000 by the outbreak of the war, which signalled its inevitable demise. There was a very uneven geographical distribution of this support with a strong urban bias. Throughout its lifespan 50% of the BUF's membership was to be found in London (and some 80% of this membership was to be found in the BUF's East End branches),<sup>4</sup> while other pockets of urban support were to be found in the Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham conurbations.

Robert Skidelsky considered 'the early BUF to be heavily middle class', making the important point that 'this is perhaps not what Mosley wanted. But it was what he got.'<sup>5</sup> John Brewer concluded that the BUF appealed predominantly to the young, and whilst it was predominantly middle-class it did have a substantial working-class minority.<sup>6</sup> Brewer does qualify this however by suggesting that these workers were 'marginal types' from the unorganised sectors of the labour market, where there was a lack of traditional working-class political institutions.

Rawnsley painted a picture of the BUF's membership, in its early years, as being unstable, suffering from a high turnover rate and an unfortunate attraction to

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that as time passes fewer and fewer ex-BUF members remain alive.

<sup>2</sup>Further to this the sociological profiles compiled by Cullen and Linehan, discussed here, were dependent upon the Mosleyite organisation 'Friends of OM' for source material.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that in a recent article, Martin Pugh questions the importance played by Olympia in the decision by Lord Rothermere to withdraw support from the BUF. See Pugh, M., 'The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate', *The Historical Journal*, 41 (1998) pp.529-42, especially p.535/6.

<sup>4</sup>See Gerry Webber's 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984) p.599 & Thomas Linchan's *East London For Mosley* (London, 1996) p.199.

<sup>5</sup>Skidelsky, R., *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), all quotes from the 1990 edition, p.317.

<sup>6</sup>Brewer, J., 'The British Union of Fascists: Some Tentative Conclusions on its Membership' in Larsen, S., Hagtvet, B., & Myklebust, J., (eds) *Who Were the Fascists* (Oslo, 1980) pp.542-56 and 'Looking back at fascism: a phenomenological analysis of BUF membership', *Sociological Review*, 4 (1984) pp.742-60. Brewer's conclusions were based on a sample of 15 former BUF members allegedly from the Birmingham area and consequently his findings are of little use.

adventurers, the unstable, opportunists and petty villains.<sup>7</sup> It was not until after 1934 and the disappearance of the 'Rothermere fascists'<sup>8</sup> that the ideologically more committed became attracted to Mosley fascism. Rawnsley draws the slightly academically defeatist conclusion, that a 'fascist stereotype' does not exist and that 'the BUF...attracted all sorts of people who joined for a variety of reasons.'<sup>9</sup> This conclusion represents, as Webber suggests, 'the trend amongst academics...to stress the heterogeneity of the fascist movement not so much because the existing evidence proves this to have been the case, but rather because it fails to prove anything else.'<sup>10</sup> The study by Webber is the best overall work on the BUF's social base made to date.<sup>11</sup> His 1984 study was based upon research into Home Office papers released in the early 1980s. Webber's study divides the history of the BUF into four periods: its formation in 1932 to 1934 and the Olympia débâcle; 1934 to its membership low-point in 1935; 1935 to 1938, when the movement underwent a period of steady recovery; and 1938 to 1940, during the BUF's involvement in the peace campaign.

Webber characterises the BUF in its first period of growth as composing 'two fairly distinct 'wings' - the working-class recruits (who were often unemployed) and members of the 'professional classes', the latter of which could broadly be subdivided into those who were old enough to be ex-officers and those who were still young enough to be at public school.'<sup>12</sup> It then declined, between 1934 and 1935, 'into a small number of predominantly working-class enclaves relying almost entirely on the support of employed and unemployed cotton workers in the North and an indeterminate collection of individuals in the East End.'<sup>13</sup> Between 1935 and 1938, when the BUF's membership slowly recovered, the movement attracted 'more working class supporters...but almost certainly it attracted fewer than it would have liked or that it claimed...[further to this] circumstantial evidence suggests that there may well have been a growth of interest among the predominantly middle-class areas of the south and south-east of England.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Rawnsley's comments are based largely on correspondence with ex-BUF members from the north of England. See Stuart Rawnsley's 'The Membership of the British Union of Fascists' in Lunn, K. & Thurlow, R., (eds) *British Fascism* (London, 1980) pp.150-65 and 'Fascism and fascists in Britain in the 1930's', (PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 1983). The involvement in the movement of petty villains led to many problems such as: several members absconding with branch funds; expulsions; branch closures; the eventual re-organisation of the movement; and perhaps worst of all an unsavoury image (worsened by its association with anti-Semitism and violence) which the BUF could not throw off.

<sup>8</sup>So called because they joined the movement as a result of the backing of the BUF by the Rothermere press. A support which was withdrawn following the Olympia débâcle in 1934.

<sup>9</sup>Rawnsley, 'The Membership', p.164.

<sup>10</sup>Webber, 'Patterns', p.589/90.

<sup>11</sup>Webber, G., 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984) pp.575-606. See also Webber's 'The British Isles' in Mühlberger, D., (ed.) *The Social Basis of Fascist Movements* (London, 1987) pp.140-54.

<sup>12</sup>Webber, 'Patterns', p.591.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., 591.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., 593.

During the 1938 to 1940 period, Webber suggests that the BUF became predominantly middle-class.

Webber, whilst being careful to avoid suggesting that his picture of the BUF's sociological profile is definitive, concludes his study with the reflection (on the type of recruit, working- or middle-class, that the BUF attracted) that 'it was only when the Conservatives were weakened by serious internal divisions...that the BUF could prosper'.<sup>15</sup> An assertion Webber places 'hand-in-hand' with the belief that 'the BUF appeared to have relatively little success in its attempts to attract the 'steady workman type' or to capitalize upon industrial disputes via the Fascist Union of British Workers.'<sup>16</sup> Webber did however go on to say 'nor did it [the BUF] seem capable of attracting the petit bourgeoisie in large numbers',<sup>17</sup> an interesting comment bearing in mind 'traditional' interpretations concerning fascism's natural social constituency.

This comment is backed up by a history of anti-fascism in the north-east of England.<sup>18</sup> Todd's book highlights the BUF's general failure in a predominantly working-class area, particularly hard-hit by the depression and suffering high unemployment. While the book may not be written from an entirely objective angle, it still provides a very useful insight into an area clearly targeted by the BUF for its recruitment drive into the working-class. A drive stimulated by the fact that the BUF had managed to recruit Gateshead's former ILP MP John Beckett, who was sent on several campaigns to the North East, all of which proved fruitless. What recruits the BUF did attract in the north-east were, in Todd's opinion, of a poor quality, 'the corner ends',<sup>19</sup> of whom:

"A "large proportion" of the Newcastle and Gateshead membership were unemployed - possibly attracted by Mosley's ability to pay Blackshirts for part-time work - and the bulk of the North East members "consisted of energetic youths who probably have little or no knowledge of the politics of the Party", explaining why efficient platform speakers "are few and far between".<sup>20</sup>

Todd's book presents a strong argument in its claim that the highly politicised working-class, in the north-east of England at least, with its radical traditions and heritage, was immune to the BUF's twin appeals of patriotism and revolution.

In slight contrast the leading communist Phil Piratin admitted that many 'ordinary working-class folk', including trade unionists, supported Mosley in the East End of London.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>ibid., p.598.

<sup>16</sup>ibid., p.591.

<sup>17</sup>ibid., p.591.

<sup>18</sup>Todd, N., *In Excited Times* (Newcastle, 1995).

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p.38.

<sup>20</sup>ibid., p.37.

<sup>21</sup>Piratin, P., *Our Flag Stays Red* (London, 1948) p.18.

This view of the BUF's east London social base is backed up by the recent work done by Thomas Linehan on the BUF in London's East End.<sup>22</sup> Linehan has highlighted the BUF's relative success in attracting working-class support in this area (the BUF's largest stronghold) a traditional working-class heartland of the LP. The BUF nevertheless campaigned heavily in the East End with some success. Linehan suggested that 'during the brief period of the BUF's intervention into local politics in the East End, fascism clearly acted as a rival focus of allegiance for large numbers of local manual workers who, for various reasons, decided not to align themselves with the traditional organisations of the labour movement.'<sup>23</sup> For Linehan it was clear from this that the east London working-class 'were not immune to the appeal of the BUF's industrial propaganda, an aspect of its overall political programme which always threatened to be submerged by the controversies surrounding its association with political antisemitism and political violence.'<sup>24</sup> A fact which meant that:

"The participation of unskilled and skilled industrial manual workers in the ranks of BUF District formations reveals that the local 'movement' did not conform to the classic petit-bourgeois or bourgeois profile usually employed to define the social character of other fascist movements. The existence of a wide range of occupational 'types' within the ranks of these industrial and manual workers also suggests that the BUF's appeal to local workers cannot simply be related to local economic tensions at the point of production between Gentiles and Jews."<sup>25</sup>

Linehan based these conclusions on his findings from a sample of 232 former East End BUF members. Linehan deduced from this sample that in the period 1933 to 1940, 58% of the BUF's membership in east London (Hackney, Stoke Newington, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar) was working-class and 35% of its membership middle-class.<sup>26</sup> Although these figures obviously refer to a predominantly working-class area they still, as far as they can be trusted, fail to conform to 'classical' *petit-bourgeois* interpretations of the social base of fascist movements.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly Linehan does not explain this working-class presence in the BUF simply in terms of anti-Semitism. Linehan is careful to highlight the strength and importance of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' within East End Mosley fascism, in terms of both the BUF's political ideology and the reasons for its appeal to the working-class fascist recruits in the East End. For Linehan the BUF's political essence

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<sup>22</sup>Linehan T., *East London For Mosley* (London, 1996) & 'The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex, 1933-40', (PhD thesis, University of London, 1992) p.498.

<sup>23</sup>Linehan, 'The British', p.377.

<sup>24</sup>ibid., p.387.

<sup>25</sup>ibid., p.496.

<sup>26</sup>Linehan, *East London*, p.214.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen Cullen however concluded, albeit based upon a very small sample of 41 former BUF members, that his own sample was dominated by 'those emanating from the grey area of respectable working class/ lower middle class,' the classic *petit-bourgeoisie*. Cullen, S., 'The British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940: Ideology, Membership and Meetings' (MLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1987) p.45.



was highly diverse and ultimately contradictory, Mosley fascism being ideologically and sociologically highly pluralistic in its nature and appeal.<sup>28</sup>

A brief review of how the BUF fared in the various elections it fought will complete the picture of the support it obtained in the 1930s. The impression the BUF made electorally was minimal to say the least. The only 'success' of any note coming in the small number of local municipal elections it contested in the East End in 1937. Amongst the handful of seats the BUF contested, despite the ratepayer franchise which operated in local elections and thus excluded the younger members of the community from whom the BUF gained most support from voting, the BUF gained 23% of the vote in Bethnal Green. The three parliamentary seats it contested in 1939-40, where the BUF averaged between 1% and 2% of the vote, were more typical of its electoral performance.

Having outlined the sociology of Mosley fascism, it is the general reasons behind its failure which need to be examined next, in particular the BUF's failure amongst those whom its brand of fascist 'socialism' was supposed to, theoretically, benefit most: the working-class and unemployed. The BUF failed to get its message across to this constituency, appealing to, in absolute terms, very few members of the working-class and unemployed 'legions'. Why?<sup>29</sup>

There would seem to be five principle reasons for this failure: firstly, the BUF was a political latecomer and thus lacked the political space in which to grow; secondly, fascism, arguably, sprang from continental cultural traditions as opposed to British ones, so was never able to take root here, a fact reflected in the ridicule which was directed at Mosley and the BUF for its un-British martial style of politics; thirdly, the Labour movement (including the LP, Independent Labour Party (ILP), Communist Party (CP), Trade Unions and Anti-Fascist organisations) successfully resisted the BUF's attempt to muscle in on its traditional areas of support; fourthly, a 'crisis' (which Mosley had prophesied would grip Britain rendering the political system impotent) deep enough and prolonged enough to break the bonds of traditional working-class loyalties (and thus enable the BUF to overcome problems one, two and three) never materialised; and fifthly, the intrinsic weaknesses within the nature of fascism itself.<sup>30</sup>

As a political latecomer the BUF was faced with the classic problem confronting any new force attempting to break into the British political mainstream: the deep-rooted

<sup>28</sup>See the historiographical review in the Introduction for a fuller consideration of this aspect of Linehan's work.

<sup>29</sup>It should be remembered that in terms of its own limited membership and support, the BUF did attract support from these groups, the areas where the BUF enjoyed its greatest success being traditional Labour strongholds, not Conservative ones. It is important to note that British fascism's greatest successes have been in traditional Labour areas not in traditional Conservative ones.

<sup>30</sup>Other reasons, such as careful surveillance of the movement by the state, the denial of the 'oxygen of publicity' by the media, which more or less ignored the BUF during the 1930's, upon Government 'advice', the organisational and financial problems the BUF encountered and Mosley's style of leadership, played a complementary role in the failure of Mosley fascism.

loyalties of the British public to the traditional parties. This loyalty reflected the stability and deep-rooted nature of the British political system and the 'success' of its brand of liberal democracy at accommodating and placating all interests within a relatively harmonious framework (an ironic problem for the BUF to face as part of its *raison d'être* was to impose harmony over the supposedly fractured and sectionalised British political and socio-economic system). This meant that the BUF lacked the political space in which to grow, being unable to break the Conservative and Labour (and Liberal) stranglehold upon the political loyalties of the British public, and consequently had no natural political constituency from which to gain support.<sup>31</sup> This resulted in the BUF's tendency to recruit and receive support from the marginal members of society: the young, people who had little or no previous political experience, people who had led a rootless, wanderlust lifestyle and petty villains. The socially and politically alienated would seem to have been the most susceptible to the message of Mosley fascism. Many sought in the BUF the sense of purpose and belonging that society and normal life had failed to give them. The BUF formed a quasi-religious role in the lives of many Mosley fascists,<sup>32</sup> as Linehan's comment that many BUF members believed they were 'participating in a unique, all embracing, emotional, cultural and aesthetic experience invested with an heroic, spiritual and utopian dimension'<sup>33</sup> reflects.

Mosley fascism also faced cultural difficulties in its assault upon the citadels of political power. Fascism was viewed by the majority of the British population as being a foreign import with an image tarnished by its association with political violence, paramilitarism and anti-Semitism. The BUF's association with violence was particularly damaging despite the fact that more often than not the BUF was the victim of violence rather than the perpetrator. The Communists had a strategy of political violence aimed at the BUF based around disturbing BUF events which proved very effective in provoking a violent response from the BUF. This meant that many BUF events, especially the larger ones, inevitably ended in violence and ensured that in the public mind the BUF became firmly associated with political violence.<sup>34</sup> Incidents such as 'The Night of the Long Knives', the Olympia débâcle of 1934 and the 'Battle of Cable Street' did little to lessen this association in the popular imagination. Furthermore the BUF's style of politics, consisting of the wearing of uniforms, marches, torchlit processions and demagogic

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<sup>31</sup>Some academics would argue, with some justification, that the ideological contradictions of Mosley fascism's synthesis of 'revolution and patriotism' resulted in the BUF having no natural political constituency in the first place.

<sup>32</sup>See especially Trevor Grundy's *Memoir of a Fascist Childhood* (London, 1998). Grundy's mother considered Mosley to be the 'second coming' of Jesus Christ.

<sup>33</sup>Linehan, 'The British', p.490. See also David Mayall's 'Rescued from the Shadows of Exile: Nellie Driver, Autobiography and the British Union of Fascists' in Kushner, T., & Lunn, K., (eds) *The Politics of Marginality* (London, 1990) pp.19-39 for an example of the type of social profile and political motivation exhibited by this type of Mosley fascist recruit.

<sup>34</sup>See Stephen Cullen's 'Political Violence: The Case of the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993) pp.245-67.

oratory, attracted more ridicule to the movement than it did would-be recruits. The BUF was often seen as little more than a political joke, denigrated for having seemingly foreign influences and appearance.

Complementary to these cultural prejudices against fascism, and the more important factor of the stability of the existing system in disabling the BUF's development, was the resistance to the BUF by the Labour movement. The hostility exhibited by the left towards the BUF certainly hampered its progress, tainting it in the eyes of the nation as violent, extreme and foreign influenced, whilst also ensuring that it failed in its attempts to recruit from the working-class and unemployed.<sup>35</sup> The latter was also as a result of the conservative nature of the British working-class, the unemployed being more susceptible to the reformist policies of the trade unions and the LP than to radical solutions. Those that did become radicalised turned, more often than not, to the CP and its front organisation the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM), rather than the BUF. The role of the NUWM was vital in denying the BUF potential support from the unemployed. The NUWM proved itself to the unemployed as worthy of membership by its reformist activity of representing claimants at referees' tribunals for benefit payments, ensuring that the unemployed received all the benefit they were entitled to. Also the popularity of the radical 'light and air' slum clearance and re-housing policy pursued by the LP controlled London County Council kept the majority of the East End working-class loyal to the LP.

This failure to penetrate the unemployed was fatal to the BUF, because it was solving unemployment that was Mosley fascism's chief *raison d'être*. In the theory of Mosley fascism, mass unemployment would lead to disillusionment with the existing political system. This would lead to growing political radicalism amongst the unemployed who would thus turn to the BUF, as only Mosley fascism was suitably radical enough in its ideas, and pragmatic enough in its approach, to be able to cure the economic problems facing Britain and thus end the misery of unemployment forever. The failure of this process to materialise left Mosley fascism facing a difficult question; if the unemployed would not support the BUF *en masse* who would?

These three obstacles to the success of the BUF may well have been overcome had it not been for the fact that the deep and prolonged economic crisis which Mosley based his entire political analysis upon, and which was required if the political system was to be destabilised enough to allow the BUF to take root, never materialised. The depression, even at its height, was a very regionalised affair and before the actual formation of the BUF, in 1932, there were signs of recovery. Indeed in the 1930s there was considerable growth in new industries, such as chemicals and cars, and a housing boom in the south-east of the country. Consequently, not only was Mosley mistaken in

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<sup>35</sup>It should be noted, however, that 'The Battle of Cable Street', in 1936, rather than smash fascism actually resulted in increased fascist recruitment and activity in the East End of London.

terms of his economic analysis but also in his analysis of the failings of the existing system. The existing system, in the end, was able to cope, albeit almost in spite of itself. The National Government, in many ways a 'watered down' version of some of Mosley's proposals, was able to bring gradual economic recovery to the country whilst also maintaining a democratic political system. Thus it was the *raison d'être* for the BUF's necessary intervention in British politics that was swept away, rather than 'the united mutttons' of 'the old gangs'.

This leads us to the fifth reason for Mosley fascism's failure. Mosley fascism's need for a sustained social, economic and political crisis, if it were to succeed, is the result of an intrinsic weakness within the ideological nature of Mosley fascism itself, indeed in all variants of fascism. As Griffin correctly suggests fascism's palingenetic mythic core means that fascism:

"Tends to generate a wide range of competing currents and factions even within the same political culture...[consequently] it is only ideal circumstances that this movement may hope to achieve a substantial rank-and-file following which enables it to make an impact on the political developments of the day...mean[ing] that fascism is in its element as an oppositional ideology only as long as the climate of national crisis prevails...which is necessary for some degree of mass or populist appeal to be generated."<sup>36</sup>

In short Mosley fascism was reliant upon too many external factors for its success, all of which were beyond its control and none of which developed in the favourable way necessary to ensure this success. Such intrinsic ideological weaknesses were 'complemented' by the practical weaknesses the BUF had of internal organisational and personal divisions which simply exacerbated an already hopeless situation.

The nature of Mosley fascism thus contains two core threads, around which the brief history of the BUF was played out. Ideologically Mosley fascism was an attempt to synthesize the patriotism of the right with the radicalism of the left, into an effective answer to the political and socio-economic problems facing inter-war Britain. However as a political latecomer it needed a prolonged and severe socio-economic crisis to grip the country if it were to take hold as an ideology and movement. The depression of the 1920s and 30s was not severe enough for this to happen, the traditional political loyalties of the British public held and the BUF found it could only recruit from the margins of society.

There were of course exceptions, particularly in the East End. Although even here the BUF's 'success' has to be seen in the context of two historical factors: firstly, the even greater success enjoyed by the CP in east London, whose size of local branches, number of local councillors and even MPs (although one of them was elected at the post-war 1945 general election in an atmosphere of post-victory pro-Sovietism) dwarfs the achievements of the BUF; and secondly, the BUF's success here was exceptional and

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<sup>36</sup>Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991) p.39/40.

by no way atypical for the BUF outside of east London, an area whose unique demography played an important role in the BUF's success here.

Mosley fascism, despite such limited success, was racked at its core by two contradictions. Firstly, a movement, whose *raison d'être* was the resolving of the socio-economic grievances which gripped the unemployed and the working-class, failed to gain any significant support from these groups. Secondly, a principle reason for this failure was the lack of a socio-economic crisis severe enough to destabilise the political system. However it was the prediction of such a crisis which would render the existing system inoperative, but which failed to materialise, that was the initial impetus behind the development of Mosley fascism.

Following the failure of the BUF's ideological appeal in the first two years of its existence, the loss of support following the Olympia débâcle in 1934 and the economic recovery, this central contradiction left Mosley fascism facing a dilemma in its pursuit of power. How could it recover support and launch a successful assault on power? It was a question to which Mosley and his movement never found an answer.

This leads us to the final part of the chapter and the question of the specific reasons for the failure of BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' (reasons which are naturally inter-linked to the more broader general reasons for the failure of the BUF). An initial crucial point needs to be made first however. Whilst in terms of absolute numbers the BUF failed in its appeal to the British worker, the little evidence there is suggests that relative to its appeal to other social groups, the BUF did have a comparatively strong appeal to the British working-class. This is a general phenomenon within many manifestations of fascism, borne out in particular by recent sociological analysis of the social base of Nazism as a pre-'33 movement of opposition.<sup>37</sup>

However this point, whilst important, does not change the fact that the important and related questions which need to be answered when considering the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' are: why did the 'socialistic' aspect of the BUF's message, political programme and vision of a 'Greater Britain' fail so disastrously in the BUF's continuous attempts to attract recruits from the British working-class and the left?; why was the great bulk of organized labour, trade unionists and the working-class, in general, immune to the fascist virus?; and why were there so few disillusioned socialist converts to the BUF?

The answers to these questions, which also help to explain the related problems of why the former LP MPs who supported Mosley in the NP failed to join Mosley in his move to a fully blown fascist movement, and why leading converts to the BUF from the left, such as Dr Robert Forgan<sup>38</sup> and John Beckett, 'fell by the wayside', roughly fall into

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<sup>37</sup>See Detlef Müllberger's *Hitler's Followers* (London, 1991) & Conan Fischer's (ed) *Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>38</sup>See Geoffrey Alderman's interesting short article on Forgan. 'Dr Robert Forgan's resignation from the British Union of Fascists', *Labour History Review*, 57 (1992) pp.37-41.

two groups: the external political and social environment which confronted the BUF and the intrinsic qualities of the BUF which rendered its drive for power impotent from the start.

There were five main causes for the failure of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' to be found in this external environment. Firstly, as has been mentioned previously, there was a lack of political space. In terms of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' this meant that the 'cravings' for socialism, radicalism and revolutionary change, many people may have harboured, were in effect catered for already by other political organisations. As has already been mentioned the communist NUWM played an important role in catering for any increase in radicalism amongst the working-class caused by high unemployment.

Secondly, complementary to this there was a general lack of disillusionment in left-wing circles at any perceived failings on the part of the LP. What there tended to be was disappointment at the failings of the 1924 and 1929-31 governments allied to hope and optimism for future Labour governments, who would have learnt the lessons of these previous governmental experiences.

Thirdly, even where there was disillusionment amongst socialists there were more credible alternatives to the Labour movement other than the BUF, in particular communism, hence the growth of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1930s.<sup>39</sup> John Strachey and Allan Young, Mosley's close colleagues from his ILP and NP days, are excellent examples of this preference for communism over fascism when confronted with a stark choice.

Fourthly, the 'socialistic' aspect of the BUF's message, political programme and vision of a 'Greater Britain' were always overshadowed by the BUF's anti-Semitism, political violence and nationalism. The 'socialism', in practical terms, simply never sat comfortably within a movement bedecked in Union Jacks and the motto 'For King and Country'.

Fifthly, the craving for radical alternatives did not really exist. Britain had won the last war and still had a large empire. Consequently national self-esteem was high with the majority of the population (of all classes), rightly or wrongly, satisfied with the general state of the nation.

Complementary to this grouping is a group of three causes, connected to the intrinsic qualities of the BUF, all of which rendered its brand of fascist 'socialism' ineffective and ultimately impotent. Firstly, the BUF was simply never a credible alternative for disillusioned socialists. Mosley fascism's seemingly contradictory blend of nationalism and socialism lacked genuine appeal outside of the fringes of society and the unique demographic environment of east London. The BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'

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<sup>39</sup>Although the relationship between communism and fascism, at a sociological level, is more complicated than might be expected. See Conan Fischer's *Stormtroopers* (London, 1983) & *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1991).

was perceived to be a travesty, ultimately to represent false socialism not 'real socialism.' This perceived image was not helped by the martial style of politics which did not convey an image of classless union but of violence and buffoonery.

Secondly, there was a considerable degree of suspicion of Mosley, following his flit from party to party and flouting of nonconformist ideas. He lacked credibility, many people simply viewing him at best as a wealthy adventurer playing at politics<sup>40</sup> and at worst a deluded megalomaniac out of touch with the real world.<sup>41</sup> His own movement, the BUF, suffered a similar fate as a result of this suspicion.

Thirdly, the movement's lack of success simply made it, as time passed, less and less of a credible alternative. If you were serious about changing the country why join a failing movement which had no hope of orchestrating any such change?

So why did people join the BUF in the 1930s or perhaps more specifically in the context of this thesis, why did those British workers who joined the BUF decide to become Mosley fascists?

The role played by anti-Semitism in Mosley fascism's appeal to these converts is central to any answer to this question. This is particularly so in the light of the BUF's cynical use of anti-Semitism as a recruitment weapon in east London following the failure of the appeal of its left-wing brand of fascism to the British worker between 1932 and 1934. It was for the East End working-class that Mosley fascism held such a strong appeal relative to its abject failure elsewhere. As has been mentioned already, the east London movement in accounting for up to 50% of the national movement's membership during the history of the BUF (in particular between 1935 and 1938) was the most important part of the movement. Consequently it is the east London movement which needs to be examined in order to understand why those working-class fascists who joined the BUF did so. Anti-Semitism unquestionably played an important role in this recruitment process and consequently the question becomes why was anti-Semitism such a potent political and recruiting weapon for the BUF in the East End of London?

When examining the BUF's east London movement it is important to understand that the east London movement was quite different from the rest of the BUF. It was the one part of the movement to spring up from the grass-roots, having little connection with the rest of the movement and being run almost autonomously under 'Mick' Clarke. Its only direct link with the rest of the BUF was Mosley.

The first BUF branches in east London were not opened until 1934, when two in Bow and Bethnal Green were formed. These were followed by ones in Shoreditch, in 1935, and Limehouse in 1936. These dates seem to suggest that the successful growth the BUF enjoyed in east London took place after the BUF's clear and conscious

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<sup>40</sup>See Nicholas Mosley's subtle defence of his father in *Rules of the Game* (London, 1982) & *Beyond the Pale* (London, 1983).

<sup>41</sup>See A. K. Chesterton's bitter attack on Mosley in Baker, D., *Ideology of Obsession: A.K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, 1996) p.134/5.

development of anti-Semitism as a political and recruiting weapon towards the end of 1934. The BUF's targeting of the East End after its formal adoption of anti-Semitism in 1934 was undoubtedly inspired by the fact that anti-Semitism had a long history in the area, having existed there long before Mosley fascism made its appearance on the local political stage, albeit as an unorganised and unexploited potential political issue. This long standing presence is well described by one commentator:

"Political anti-Semitism in the East End of London had deep social causes and utilized a historical tradition of anti-alien hostility...[Jewish immigration] exacerbated many of the social problems of this decaying inner city area...[Anglo-Jewry] came to be blamed for the ills of the locality, including the use of sweated labour by unscrupulous employers, rack-renting by slum landlords, and the increased crime rate. Both the Labour and Communist parties had already been highly critical of some Jewish employers before the fascists arrived in the area. Both they and the Jewish establishment argued that the best way to fight fascism was to eliminate the festering sores allegedly caused by some Jewish elements, by exhorting the whole community to adopt behaviour patterns which would give no grounds for offence. Some nativist elements in the host community were critical of what they saw as an assault on local culture by alien Jewish values and it was this ethnocentric attitude to change, when allied to the existence of genuine social grievances, which was to make some parts of the East End a fertile reception area for racial populist and anti-immigrant movements right through from the British Brothers League in 1900, the BUF from 1936 to 1940, the League of Ex-Servicemen and the Union Movement in the 1940's, to the National Front in the 1970's."<sup>42</sup>

A crucial, and perhaps obvious, factor in the East End's susceptibility to anti-Semitism was the fact that 50% of Anglo-Jewry, some 250,000, lived in the East End. This factor was further exacerbated by the fact that in the East End the Jews were highly concentrated, both geographically and occupationally. This was a crucial factor in helping to create an environment in which Mosley fascism's claims of the alien and insular nature of Jewry could be believed by the host Gentile community. Jewish immigration also compounded the host community's socio-economic problems. The East End was historically an area of derelict buildings, impoverishment and decay. The high level of Jewish immigration intensified these problems, in particular the fight for jobs and decent housing.

In effect east London, following the first big wave of Jewish immigration at the turn of the century from Eastern Europe, functioned as a staging area in the general dispersal of these Jews to other parts of London, the country, the British Empire and the rest of the English speaking world. By the 1930s the older immigrants who had stayed in east London, following this initial wave of immigration, had only been partially assimilated. However they were now joined by a new wave of Jewish immigrants for whom the East End functioned in a similar role as a staging area and first experience of Britain. Consequently, in east London there was a constant Jewish presence. A presence which took the form of a large and identifiable Jewish minority with its own culture, Yiddish language, Jewish law, traditions and deeply held religious practices. As a

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<sup>42</sup>Thurlow, R., *Fascism in Britain* (Oxford, 1987) p.108.



consequence of the sheer size, density and insular nature of this Jewish minority in the area, the possibility of the development of an anti-Semitic mentality within the local community emerged.

The way in which the Jews were perceived, by their Gentile hosts, as a result of these developments and factors was crucial in the area's (relative) predisposition to anti-Semitism. Jewish immigrants and their effect on the area were consequently almost always viewed in negative terms by the host Gentile community. Inward movement of the Jewish population was often viewed in 'fascistic' terms by the host communities as posing a direct threat to that community's economic stability, cultural traditions, sense of identity and oneness. Jewish immigration also came to be viewed as the social manifestation of encroaching industrialisation and socio-economic deprivation. The Jews thus came to function as a scapegoat for the effected community in the face of extensive social and economic transformation and upheaval.

The East End Jews were easily identifiable as a separate and distinct social (and economic) entity, a fact easily exploited by the BUF and its 'nation within a nation' claim which formed (in the main) the basis of its particular brand of anti-Semitism. This fact, when combined with the historical and social context of the East End, enabled Mosley fascism to become an outlet in the local community for these local tensions and consequently exploit them for political gain. As Linehan's study concludes, whilst carefully highlighting the fact that the nature of East End Mosley fascism was locally determined by 'municipal 'particularisms' of a 'topographical, economic, social, political, and ethnic and cultural'<sup>43</sup> environmental nature, 'local Mosleyite fascism derived much of its ideological content and coherence from antisemitism' due to the 'demographic factor' of the Jewish presence in the East End.<sup>44</sup>

Consequently it must be understood that even in the East End where the BUF had success with working-class recruitment, fascist 'socialism' whilst noted and believed in by the local Mosley fascists was not the key to its recruiting success, anti-Semitism was.

The whole problem of examining the failure of the BUF and its brand of fascist 'socialism' is perhaps emblematically illustrated by the story of the female former Mosley fascist, who joined the movement because an attractive paper-seller had persuaded her to. In her words 'after all, it could easily have been a communist selling papers that day.'<sup>45</sup> The fickleness of the would-be member of an organisation like the BUF and their arbitrary nature of joining, is captured perfectly by this story. Whilst there were undoubtedly ideologically committed Mosley fascists, both conservative revolutionaries and believers in national socialism, this story is emblematic of the problem facing the BUF in its struggle for political space and political air in which to

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<sup>43</sup>Linehan, *East London*, p.xviii.

<sup>44</sup>ibid., p.xix.

<sup>45</sup>*The Guardian* (4/3/78) p.11.

breathe. The BUF, and the 'socialism' contained in its political message and vision of a nation reborn into a Greater Britain', failed because it was simply not believed in by the overwhelming majority of the population as a credible alternative or truthful vision of Britain, past, present or future.

## CONCLUSION

The hole in academic understanding this thesis was written to fill, was basically an investigation into the existence of, and nature of, a brand of fascist 'socialism' espoused within the political ideology of the BUF. The academic process of labelling a strand of similar political ideas and beliefs under this heading was an admittedly heuristic step taken to highlight the presence of an identifiable strand of political thought, suitably described as fascist 'socialism', within the political ideology of the BUF. In order to summarise the most important conclusions to be drawn from this study of this strand of political thought it is necessary to re-examine two areas and consider for the first time a third. Firstly it is necessary to define the exact nature of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'; secondly, it is necessary to underline the reasons for the failure of this strand of thought within the syncretic brew of Mosley fascism and thus fascist 'socialism's' absence from 'classical' interpretations of fascism; and thirdly, the academic importance of the thesis (particularly in terms of how such a 'case study' as this reflects upon generic theories of fascism) needs to be considered.

When defining the exact nature of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism', as has been mentioned, it is important to remember that this is a heuristic label rather than the reflection of a concrete self-contained group of individuals or ideas which existed within the BUF, sociologically or ideologically. There was no *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* grouping in the BUF. What this process was designed to do was to give an appropriate name to one of the strands which made up the syncretic core of the BUF's political ideology. As these strands had been, in effect, fused together in the fermentation process which created this ideology it became necessary, in order to examine one strand, to go through the artificial procedure of academic surgery in order to place a particular strand, in this case the socialist one, beneath the microscope of academic inquiry. Mosley fascism's brand of 'socialism', like Mosley fascism as a whole, does have to be seen as a phenomenon which contained both right-wing and left-wing traits, specifically the classic fascist ingredients of a fascist vision based upon the 'romantic-reactionary' ethos of the conservative revolutionary recruit to fascism and the 'rational-radical' ethos of the disillusioned socialist recruit to fascism. The right-wing strand incorporated a social dimension through a call for a greater kind of real patriotism which sought to bring the working-class back into the nationalist fold, while the left-wing strand incorporated a national dimension through a call for true, 'British' socialism which was only concerned with the task of building socialism for the British people.

Subsequently, this thesis does not suggest that fascism is a heretical brother of socialism but that it is a highly eclectic political ideology into which there are many roads. This thesis's task was to illustrate that one of these roads is from the left.

Sections of the BUF undoubtedly considered itself to be ideologically a form of socialism, taking very seriously the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism'. Indeed it is worth

noting that the contemporary embodiment of the Mosleyite movement, 'Friends of OM', takes a similar view of the BUF's political ideology as presented in this thesis. The fascist heretic and 'true' socialism had two major traits in common. They both rejected the individualistic and *laissez-faire* philosophy which underpinned capitalism, whilst wishing to orchestrate direct state control over the economic, political and social spheres within society with the objective of ensuring that the collective interest came before sectional and individual interest. The chief ideological developments which distinguish the fascist heretic from its humanistic brother were: the replacement of the working-class with the mythical concept of the nation as the focus of its revolutionary assault upon capitalism (fascist 'socialism' opposed capitalism not solely in the name of the working-class but in the name of the entire nation, claiming to stand for all members of the national community, because capitalism was rejected by fascism due to capitalism's inherent economic philosophy, practice and internationalism which threatened the unity and identity of the nation); and the rejection of internationalism, materialism and Marxism<sup>1</sup> opting for the practical geo-political area of the nation within which to orchestrate central state control, national planning and achieve autarky. What fascist 'socialism' sought above all else was that within this national area, national interests were placed at all times above sectional ones. Consequently fascist 'socialism' never represented a form of working-class radicalism or militancy within fascism, as it was consciously opposed to class politics and any society based upon sectional interests. What fascist 'socialism' did do however, was to claim that the fascist rejuvenation of the nation would mean the overthrow of the existing political and economic elites, the creation of a classless society, the harnessing of all the nations socio-economic and technological resources for the benefit of all and the creation of a new order in which all productive members of the new nation would be justly rewarded rather than exploited as they currently were under the present system. For fascist 'socialism' the only way the socio-economic plight of the working-class (bad housing, poverty and unemployment) could be conquered was through the national rebirth the triumph of fascism would orchestrate, not the utopian tomorrow promised by international socialism. This new age of national unity would enable these problems to be tackled successfully, unhindered by vested sectional and financial interests. The genesis of the British version of this 'new age' was in the trenches of the First World War and the birth of the dream to build a 'Land Fit for Heroes'. The dream of the 'war generation' to build a new Britain harboured a determination to solve the socio-economic grievances of the entire nation, in particular bad housing, poverty and unemployment. It is a very important fact that the overwhelming majority of both

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<sup>1</sup>It must be noted that the predominant school of thought within the British socialist tradition, from Keir Hardie to Tony Blair, never claimed or pretended to be marxist. Further to this the early history of British socialism consists of a Mosleyesque unshakeable faith in the power of science, central planning and the cool wisdom of the rational élite. See Jonathan Freedland's interesting article 'Master Race of the Left' in *The Guardian's The Week* section (30/8/97) p.1/2.

left-wing and right-wing recruits to the BUF were disillusioned veterans of the 'Great War'.

The appeal of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' to disillusioned socialists lay in this vision. In particular, in its critique of the Labour movement and the present political system, both of which were condemned as ineffective and self-serving, more of an obstacle to change than a vehicle for it, and in its promotion of a Corporate State as a reconciling mechanism which would embrace economic planning, provide a central role for Trade Unions in the industrial and economic decision making process and provide a solution to the socio-economic grievances of the British working-class.

For socialists and communists, who were disenchanted with the Labour movement and the Russian control of communism, a form of fascism preaching such a message was a quite acceptable answer to the questions the Labour movement had failed to answer, particularly when such a brand of fascism was led by such a prominent and previously well thought of former comrade.

Mosley, when judged either by the generic theories employed in the writing of this thesis or by the volume and quality of his political written output, can quite rightly be seen as a major fascist ideologue, intellectually at the forefront of fascist thought. However, even within fascist circles he lacked any real influence.

Perhaps such lack of influence is ironically reflected in the fact that in many ways it sometimes seems as if this former comrade has been 'airbrushed' out of the picture of 1920s British socialism, a fact that stands emblamatically for the general absence of fascist 'socialism' from 'classical' interpretations of fascism. Robert Soucy reflected a general misunderstanding of fascist political ideology when he dismissed fascist 'socialism' as just bourgeois anti-capitalism, 'the "socialism" of doubletalk.'<sup>2</sup> But as this thesis has demonstrated, fascist 'socialism' in theory did give a genuine and lucid answer to the 'social question'. Soucy's misinterpretation simply illustrates the wider misinterpretation in historical studies of the real depth and 'hidden' meaning of fascist ideology and the utopian political vision of a 'new' world which inspired it.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for such an absence and misunderstanding can be found in the practical and abject failure of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' to attract trade unionists, the working-class and disillusioned socialists to the BUF, the 'socialistic' aspect of the BUF's message, political programme and vision of a 'Greater Britain' falling on stony ground.

There are eight main reasons for this failure, found in the external political and social environment which confronted the BUF and the intrinsic qualities of the BUF which rendered its drive for power impotent from the start.

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<sup>2</sup>Soucy, R., *Fascist Intellectual: Drieu la Rochelle* (Berkeley, 1979) p.392.

<sup>3</sup>See Matthew Coupland's article 'The Blackshirted Utopians', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.255-72.

Firstly, there was no political space in which the BUF could grow. In terms of the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' this meant that the 'cravings' for socialism, radicalism and revolutionary change, many people had harboured, were in effect catered for already by other political organisations. Secondly, there was a general lack of disillusionment in left-wing circles with the Labour movement. Thirdly, even when socialists did become disillusioned there were more credible alternatives to the Labour movement other than the BUF, in particular communism. Fourthly, the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' was overshadowed by the BUF's anti-Semitism, political violence and nationalism. Fifthly, within Britain the craving for radical alternatives to the present system did not exist, Britain was still a successful, imperial power. Sixthly, the BUF was never a credible alternative for disillusioned socialists, its brand of 'socialism' being perceived to be a travestic, false socialism and not 'real socialism' as the BUF claimed. This image was not helped by the martial style of politics which did not convey image of classless union but of violence and buffoonery. Seventhly, Mosley lacked credibility, being considered, by the vast majority of the population, at best a wealthy adventurer playing at politics and at worst a deluded megalomaniac out of touch with the real world. Eighthly, the BUF's lack of success simply made it, as time passed, less and less of a credible alternative. If you were serious about changing the country why join a failing movement which had no hope of orchestrating any such change?

The political message and vision of a nation reborn into a 'Greater Britain' contained in the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' was for the British population neither credible nor desirable. The grandiose vision and syncretic philosophy of 'high' politics which underpinned this message and vision lacked appeal at street level, a lack of appeal which in some ways helps to explain the BUF's descent into the gutter politics of anti-Semitism and political violence in a desperate, and ultimately hopeless, attempt to reverse its flagging fortunes.

Mosley fascism had spontaneously and spectacularly failed before the outbreak of war in 1939, internment was an act of euthanasia carried out on an already terminally ill patient. What the Second World War did do was turn the mixture of fear, loathing, ridicule and indifference which the British people felt for Mosley and the BUF into a general public mood of hatred. The BUF, self-perceived as arch-patriots, were considered 'fifth columnists' and potential traitors and Mosley became the most hated politician ever in British politics by the end of the war.<sup>4</sup> It proved a particularly bitter pill to swallow for both leader and movement.

The thesis's academic importance to the particular debates surrounding fascist studies lies in its illustration of the necessity of taking fascist ideology seriously if a complete understanding of the phenomenon is to be acquired, and the clear illustration of

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<sup>4</sup>See Richard Thurlow's 'The Guardian of the Sacred Flame: the failed political resurrection of Sir Oswald Mosley after 1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998) pp.241-54.

the potential for fascism (admittedly not always or inevitably realised) to concoct its own brand of heretical 'socialism' in certain manifestations of the phenomenon. The BUF is an excellent example of the realisation of such a potential. As a consequence of this the contribution to our understanding of fascism which would be gained from a clear understanding of the BUF and its own brand of political ideology is considerable. As Griffin, in recent comment upon the debate over fascist ideology, suggests:

"Fascism, far from warranting an early retirement, is to be given a permanent position as an indispensable category on a par with other political 'isms'. Moreover, the 'common sense' now emerging is that, despite its overt appeal to the mythic and charismatic, its tactical alliance with reactionary forces and its relentless onslaught on liberal and Communist conceptions of progress, Fascism is definable in terms of a common denominator of ideology rather than organization or style, contains a genuine revolutionary rather than 'counter-revolutionary' or nihilistic thrust, and represents a new permutation of modernity rather than a rejection of it."<sup>5</sup>

This thesis has strengthened this particular school of historical thought and what Griffin has identified as the emerging consensus within fascist studies concerning the possibility of treating fascism as a generic term, both as a historical phenomenon and as a political ideology.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis has also attempted to highlight the strengths of a methodological approach to fascism based upon generic theories of fascism, in particular, those of Roger Griffin and Zeev Sternhell. Such an approach undoubtedly furthers our existing understanding of fascism as a political ideology, making it easier to examine a particularly eclectic ideology at both a specific level, and as an ideological whole. In effect the thesis adopted a syncretic approach to the theories of Sternhell and Griffin, viewing the BUF from the lens of a hybrid version of Griffin's and Sternhell's theories.

This adapted syncretic version used Sternhell to indicate the negative reasons for the socialist conversion (both ideological and sociological) to fascism (disillusionment) and Griffin to indicate the positive ones, whether left-wing in influence (social, economic and political (action) renewal) or right-wing in influence (cultural, spiritual and political (leadership) renewal).

The generic theories of Eatwell and Payne also highlight both the archetypal fascist nature of Mosley and the BUF and predict the ideological capacity the BUF contained to come under left-wing influence and exhibit its own brand of fascist 'socialism'. But when dealing with the BUF, if not necessarily any other fascist movement, the balance between profundity and lucidity is less well struck by the typological approach of Payne and more complex syncretic approach of Eatwell.

Nevertheless all these particular generic theories of fascism are excellent heuristic academic tools based upon, in the main, accurate theories. The BUF and Mosley

<sup>5</sup>Griffin, R., 'Solving the Fascist Conundrum', *European History Quarterly*, 27 (1997) p.573.

<sup>6</sup>See Roger Griffin's most recent work *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London, 1998).

representing for all four, archetypal fascist movement and fascist ideologue. The considerable sophistication of its political programme's analysis, critique of the then present situation, its message of socio-economic and politico-cultural renewal and national rebirth, coupled with this programme's utopian 'purity' of intent due to the BUF's considerable distance from political power and the inevitable process of pragmatic compromise are largely responsible for this. This political sophistication was largely due to the influence of Mosley himself and illustrates the value of the methodology of generic theories. Such political sophistication also repudiates the recent suggestion by one commentator that the BUF had not been 'in any way original.'<sup>7</sup> Such sophistication in Mosley can result in the temptation to consider it far easier to simply view Mosley as being in effect, not a classical fascist at all, sharing little in common with Hitler or Mussolini (a reflection of the difficulty in 'squaring the circle' between Mosley's high politics and his low politics). However when examined generically in this way, Mosley is shown to be an archetypal fascist.

There are limits to the usefulness of generic theories. These theories are, quite naturally, only a starting point, in effect a springboard from which the researcher still has to leap into the unknown, but they do in effect provide the researcher with an accurate map and powerful torch.

Ultimately what this study represents, by establishing the existence of what has been termed the BUF's brand of fascist 'socialism' and mapping out the exact nature of its influence over, and role within, the political ideology of the BUF, is a case study designed to help our understanding of fascism. The two key conclusions of this thesis, the necessity to treat fascism as a legitimate political ideology and the potential for that ideology to cut across the traditional political lineation of right and left by exhibiting and growing from left-wing roots, means that there are two sobering messages to be drawn from this study. Firstly, fascism by having the potential to grow from any idea along the political spectrum will always be a potential actor upon the political stage and secondly, given the right (or perhaps what should be more accurately described as the wrong) circumstances, no one is immune from the fascist virus and its message of a new dawn and bright beginning. Beware the charismatic prophet and his call for a new beginning because fascism represents no clearer example of the verity that the means do not in fact justify the end they in fact corrupt the end.

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<sup>7</sup>Laqueur, W., *Fascism: Past, Present and Future* (New York, 1996) p.119.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: The New Party's 1931 Document *A National Policy*:

#### SUMMARY

The pamphlet is described by its authors as a "programme of disciplined national effort to meet the emergency with which we are faced."

#### THE CRISIS

The symptoms of national emergency are mass unemployment, heavy wage attacks throughout industry, and budgetary deficits leading to demands for reductions in Unemployment Insurance, social services, etc.

#### THE POLICY

The pamphlet proposes an emergency policy of national reconstruction as the only tolerable way out of this crisis. After a brief analysis of the economic position of Great Britain both in regard to home and export trade, a series of definite proposals for national reconstruction are made. These proposals fall under three headings: -

##### 1. Control of Imports

The protection of the home market by a system for the control of imports which is described in detail.

##### 2. Commonwealth Partnership

Economic partnership with the Dominions and the Colonies and the basis of mutual advantage and, trade agreements with any foreign countries made for the maintenance of protection of our export trade.

##### 3. National Planning

A comprehensive scheme of National Planning through a National Economic Planning Council which would recruit the assistance and advice of the best brains in industry. They would co-ordinate the Commodity Boards for the regulation of imports, and the rationalisation of production and marketing.

The chief executive instruments for National Planning must be:

##### (a) A National Investment Board

A National Investment Board to mobilise our capital resources and make them available for industrial reconstruction on a defined method.

##### (b) Science

The mobilisation in connection with the Investment Board of our resources in scientific and technical fields.

##### (c) Currency and Finance

A new policy in regard to currency problems which makes the establishment and maintenance of a stable internal general price level an essential aim to which everything else must be subordinated.

### **THE REVISION OF PARLIAMENT**

It is recognised that in order to make feasible the carrying out of this comprehensive programme of economic reconstruction the parliamentary and Governmental machine need drastic revision. Accordingly proposals are made which would relieve parliament of all detail work. Parliament under these proposals would again find its place as a guardian of the liberties of the Nation, able to change Executive at will; but it would abandon the attempt to control every detail of executive action.

### **AN EMERGENCY CABINET**

The Executive itself, however, has become unwieldy, and proposals are made for a complete reform of the Cabinet System. A small inner Cabinet Committee of Ministers without portfolio is proposed to assist the Prime Minister in carrying out the general policy.

### **IMMEDIATE RECONSTRUCTION**

The pamphlet of fundamental economic reconstruction which it proposes will take time to mature. In the meanwhile, and in order to prepare the country for economic revival, the physical reconstruction of reconstruction of Great Britain must be undertaken on a far larger scale than has yet been proposed. The pamphlet proposes in this direction:-

#### **(a) National Slum Clearance**

A National Slum Clearance scheme by which the task of freeing our Cities from their plague spots is taken out of the hands of local Authorities and placed in those of a national Housing Board formed on the lines of the Central Electricity Board.

#### **(b) Agricultural Reconstruction**

A comprehensive scheme for the reorganisation and rehabilitation of agriculture is proposed and is made possible by the control of agricultural imports.

Source: Young, A., Strachey, J., Brown, W., & Bevan, A. *A National Policy* (London, 1931) p.62/3.

**Appendix B:** The BUF's 1937 pamphlet *British Union and the Transport Workers*.

**BRITISH UNION  
and the Transport Workers**

[Page 1]

1. Under National Socialism in Britain every worker of whatever kind who gives useful service to the community will be entitled to an honourable status within that community, and to have his own needs supplied according to the maximum power of science and organisation to supply them.  
Transport workers will themselves take an equal share with employers in legislating for their own requirements in the matter of hours, wages, holidays, superannuation schemes and general conditions of work.
2. This will be done through direct representation through their Trade Unions upon the Councils of the National Transport Corporation. Employers and consumers will be similarly represented. In the event of disputes which cannot be solved in the highest councils of the Corporations, the decision will rest with the referee appointed by the National Socialist Government who, taking into account the general financial position, will give his judgement in accordance with the National Socialist principle that the welfare and happiness of the workers must be secure and given preference over profits.
3. When the National Transport Corporation promulgates any measure, subject to the approval of the National Council of Corporations, that measure will have the force of law, and any employer or the leader of any other section who breaks these laws will be answerable for his actions in a court of law.
4. National Socialist Government will insist that the interests of workers entrusted with special responsibility, and, therefore, subject to severe nerve strain, such as those of bus and railway workers (e.g., drivers, signalmen, etc.), engaged in the Transport Industry, will receive the special protection of the Corporation.  
National Socialist Government will guarantee the protection of the corporate structure against sabotage and corruption either from Right or Left. In return it will require Transport Workers to use their best brains and energies to solve their problems, secure equity within the industry, and provide for the harmonious relationship of that industry with the national community which it serves.

[Page 2]

### **Strike Action Today**

1. Causes suffering to everybody except the great capitalist interests, which now possess vast reserves with which to combat the workers.
2. Leaves both sides free to ignore national and community interests by fighting for their own ends.
3. Leaves almost unfettered control in the hands of Capitalism, with the subsequent exploitation of the workers.
4. Leaves the worker still the underdog.
5. Encourages the workers to think only of sectional interests which they are impotent to further.

### **Power Action To-morrow**

1. Will destroy the financial racket and treat both Capital and Labour as twin and complementary functions essential to the national life.
2. Insists upon a sense of responsibility towards the community and the nation.
3. Makes Capital the servant and not the master, treating exploitation as punishable crime.
4. Exalts the worker to the co-equal position which he has a right to hold.
5. Empowers the workers to protect their interests, but insists that the national interests must at the same time be advanced.

[Page 3]

### **International Socialism**

1. Promises the nation a Socialist Utopia, but serves only the interests of international finance, so that big-scale capitalism continues on before.
2. Makes Trades Unionism the playground of political intrigue for those who seek to climb upon the backs of the workers.
3. Hopes to smash the British Empire, leaving our over-populated island a slum of Moscow.
4. Preaches the class-war, calculated to bring a red riot and Civil war to these shores.
5. Has no pride in the epic history of the British race.

### **National Socialism**

1. Promises the nation no utopia but the progressive raising of living standards by wrenching the nation from the dictatorship of high finance and then planning a national economy.
2. Determines to create 100% Trade Unionism for the protection of the workers' interests.
3. Vows to strengthen the Empire, and intensively to develop its immense wealth for the benefit of all its people.
4. Abolish "class" barriers and conducts a national war against poverty, disease, foul housing and every form of parasitism and decay.
5. Holds high the flame of Britain's great tradition and is served by British manhood and womanhood alone.

[Page 4]

### **Objects of the British Union**

To win power for Fascism and thereby establish in Great Britain the Corporate State which shall ensure that -

All shall serve the State and none the Faction;

All shall work and thus enrich their country and themselves;

Opportunity shall be open to all but privilege to none;

Great position shall be conceded only to those of great talent;

Reward shall be accorded only to service;

Poverty shall be abolished by the power of modern science released within the organised state;

The barriers of class shall be destroyed and the energies of every citizen devoted to the service of the British Nation which, by the efforts and sacrifices of our fathers, has existed gloriously for centuries before this transient generation, and which by our exertions shall be raised to its higher destiny - the Greater Britain of Fascism.

#### **Transport Workers**

**JOIN THE BRITISH UNION AND UNITE FOR POWER  
ACTION.**

#### **Remember**

**If you love our Country you are National.**

**If you love our People you are Socialist.**

#### **National Socialism**

**Alone can help the Workers to help themselves.**

Source: *British Union and the Transport Workers* (London, 1937)., 1937).

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