CHAPTER SIX

'BARLEY AND PEACE': THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS IN NORFOLK, SUFFOLK AND ESSEX, 1938-1940

1. Introduction

The local impact of falling agricultural prices and the looming prospect of war with Germany dominated Blackshirt political activity in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex from 1938. Growing resentment within the East Anglian farming community at diminishing returns for barley and the government's agricultural policy offered the B.U.F. its most promising opportunity to garner rural support in the eastern counties since the 'tithe war' of 1933-1934. Furthermore, deteriorating Anglo-German relations induced the Blackshirt movement to embark on a high-profile 'Peace Campaign', initially to avert war, and, then, after 3 September 1939, to negotiate a settlement to end hostilities. As part of the Blackshirts' national peace drive, B.U.F. Districts in the area pursued a range of propaganda activities, which were designed to mobilise local anti-war sentiment. Once again though, the conjunctural occurrence of a range of critical external and internal constraints thwarted B.U.F. efforts to open up political space in the region on a 'barley and peace' platform.

2. The B.U.F., the 'Barley Crisis' and the Farmers' March, 1938-1939

In the second half of 1938, falling agricultural prices provoked a fresh wave of rural agitation in the eastern counties. Although the Ministry of Agriculture's price index recorded a small overall reduction from 89.0 to 87.5 during 1937-1938, cereals and farm crops were particularly affected due to the heavy yields from the 1938 harvests.[1] Compared with 1937 levels, wheat prices (excluding the subsidy) dropped by 35 per cent, barley by 23 per cent, and oats by fourteen per cent.[2] Malting barley, a

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[1] Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Agricultural Statistics 1938 (London: H.M.S.O., 1939) Vol. LXXIII, Part I, p. 7 and pp. 11-12.
[2] The Agricultural Register 1938-9 (Oxford: Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute, 1939), pp. 30-31.

staple of Suffolk and Norfolk farming, fetched 11s. 3d. per cwt. in December 1937 but could command only 6s. 10d. per cwt. twelve months later.[3] Faced with dwindling returns, East Anglian barley growers were also highly critical of the limited scheme introduced under the 1937 Agriculture Act, whereby oats and barley producers were subsidised when the price for oats from September to March did not rise above 7s. 7d. per cwt.. Financial assistance was given at a rate per acre which amounted to six times the difference between the average price of oats per cwt. and a standard price of 8s., up to a maximum of £1 per acre. Thus, barley payments were also determined by the price of oats. The full subsidy was restricted to a 'standard acreage', an area eleven-tenths the size of the oats and barley acreage qualifying for government support in 1937. If this limit was exceeded, the rate of subsidy per acre decreased proportionately. Farmers were not entitled to apply for the oats and barley subsidy if they were already receiving deficiency payments for wheat. The latter (averaging £3-4 per acre) covered the total output per acre, whereas the oats and barley subsidy was paid only on 6 cwt. per acre.[4]

Across the region, farmers aired their grievances at various protest meetings, which were convened to express concern at the plight of the barley grower in particular and the condition of the agricultural sector in general. On 22 November 1938, for example, business at the Ipswich Corn Market was brought to a halt by a public gathering of farmers and merchants, which unanimously endorsed a resolution calling on the government to take immediate action to tackle the low prices being received for barley and other agricultural commodities.[5] The following month, nearly 500 Norfolk farmers assembled at the Stuart Hall, Norwich to voice their concerns. At this meeting, arranged independently of the National Farmers Union (N.F.U.), the government's

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[3] Ibid., pp. 190-191.
[4] The Agricultural Register 1937-8 (Oxford: Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute, 1938), pp. 6-7 and p. 199. The Agricultural Register 1938-9, pp. 192-194. The Agriculture Act, 1937 (I Edw. VIII and I Geo. VI, c.70, 30 July 1937) made subsidy payments available for land under oats and barley for the five years from 1937 to 1941.
[5] Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury (S.C.M.), 25 November 1938, p. 2. This resolution was sent to the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture.

attitude towards agriculture was condemned. It was also agreed that Norfolk farmers should arrange a protest march to Westminster, invite other rural areas to participate, and approach Charles Joice, the Norfolk delegate to the Council of the N.F.U., to organise and lead such a demonstration.[6]

Between November 1938 and February 1939, the B.U.F. launched what was, in effect, a renewed agricultural campaign in Norfolk and Suffolk in an attempt to capitalise on the growing discontent within the farming community. During this period, Mosley addressed large audiences at Fakenham, Lowestoft, Ipswich, King's Lynn and Eye on the general Blackshirt programme and the movement's proposals for agriculture.[7] Speaking at the Central Cinema, Fakenham, on 20 November 1938, for example, Mosley argued that only the B.U.F.'s exclusionist policy could save the barley grower, since the "financial masters of the old parties" preferred the interest on their foreign loans to be paid in imported goods and produce, and this arrangement enabled the government to buy "allies in the foreign wars in which they were forever meddling".[8]

The B.U.F. press also highlighted the specific difficulties faced by the East Anglian farming community from late 1938. Articles appeared in Blackshirt and Action condemning the profits made by the brewing industry at a time when barley growers in the eastern counties were facing poor returns.[9] According to Blackshirt commentators, cheap foreign barley had flooded the British market, causing the domestic price to fall to such a level that home producers could not recoup their initial financial outlay. Furthermore, in the B.U.F.'s estimation, some brewing firms were engaged in "price depressing conspiracies" by failing to honour an agreement to use a fixed percentage of British barley and purchasing inexpensive imported supplies instead

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[6] Eastern Daily Press (E.D.P.), 16 December 1938, p. 9.
[7] E.D.P., 22 November 1938, p. 7; Lowestoft Journal (L.J.), 3 December 1938, p. 6; East Anglian Daily Times (E.A.D.T.), 13 December 1938, p. 12; Lynn News and County Press (L.N.C.P.), 31 January 1939, p. 10; Norfolk and Suffolk Journal and Diss Express (N.S.J.D.E.), 3 February 1939, p. 2; Action, 26 November 1938, p. 1, 17 December 1938, p. 11, 4 February 1939, p. 3.
[8] Action, 26 November 1938, p. 1.
[9] Ibid., 26 November 1938, p. 6, 3 December 1938, p. 8; Southern Blackshirt, January 1939, p. 1.

to reduce their raw material costs.[10] The movement maintained that, under 'Financial Democracy', brewing enterprises were able to act in such a self-interested way because their wealth gave them an influence denied to the less affluent farming sector. Consequently, Mosleyite propagandists stressed that the only effective solutions to this problem were to reorganise agriculture within the protective framework of the proposed Corporate State and to adopt the fascist policy of excluding all imports which could either be grown or produced in Britain.

Local Blackshirts echoed these themes at rural meetings and in the East Anglian press. Three District Leaders from the area, Ronald Creasy, Charles Hammond and William Sherston, attracted a large farming audience when they addressed an open air meeting outside the Diss Corn Exchange on market day in early December 1938.[11] The speakers concentrated on the B.U.F.'s proposals for agriculture and the economic difficulties currently facing the barley growers. Shortly afterwards, the three men held a similar gathering at Eye.[12] Henry Williamson, one of Norfolk's most prominent Blackshirts, attended the farmers' meeting at the Stuart Hall, Norwich in December 1938 and offered to organise a march in London to demand justice for the British barley growers in the third or fourth week of January. Openly stating his B.U.F. affiliation, Williamson told those present that "Mosley has promised me by telephone that he will come to address this meeting on this subject if you like".[13] In November 1938, Charles Westren, a Blackshirt who farmed at Elmsett Hall, near Ipswich, contributed a pro-fascist piece to the North Suffolk Messenger on the "scandalous" barley prices.[14] A month later, the same newspaper carried an article by Ronald Creasy, the District Leader at Eye, deploring the "Chaos of the Agricultural Industry".[15] In letters to the Eastern Daily Press, Henry Williamson also advocated

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10 Action, 3 December 1938, p. 8.
11 Norfolk News and Weekly Press (N.N.W.P.), 10 December 1938, p. 5; Thetford and Watton Times (T.W.T.), 10 December 1938, p. 6.
12 E.A.D.T., 13 December 1938, p. 3.
13 E.D.P., 16 December 1938, p. 9.
14 North Suffolk Messenger (N.S.M.), 19 November 1938.
15 Ibid., 17 December 1938

that both the barley issue and the wider problems of agriculture required National Socialist remedies.[16] The most unusual local Blackshirt method of publicising the barley growers' plight was devised by Charles Westren, who drove through two counties in a light van emblazoned with large posters which read "BARLEY HALF PRICE, BEER STINKING RICH" and "ONE BREWER LEFT THIRTEEN MILLIONS, HE ALSO LEFT THE WORKHOUSES FOR FARMERS AND FARM WORKERS".[17]

Impressionistic evidence suggests that the Blackshirt agricultural campaign of 1938-1939 provided a partial and temporary boost in support for the East Anglian movement. Mosley's meetings in Norfolk and Suffolk during this period attracted sizeable audiences, which often greeted the fascist message on farming with enthusiasm.[18] For example, the B.U.F. leader addressed 200 farmers and businessmen in related commercial areas at the first Suffolk Agricultural Dinner of the British Union, which was held at the Great White Horse Hotel, Ipswich on 12 December 1938.[19] According to William Sherston, District Leader at Woodbridge, this event had been arranged independently by farmers in the county without assistance from B.U.F. National Headquarters (N.H.Q.).[20] Mosley's speech at Fakenham in November 1938, which included the suggestion that the farmers should organise a protest march in London and the offer that such a demonstration would be fully supported by the Blackshirt movement, was received with an "outburst of cheering".[21] When this proposed course of action was repeated the following month at Ipswich, Mosley drew "roars of applause", and, at Charles Westren's prompting, about three-quarters of the

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16 E.D.P., 10 November 1938, p. 13, 17 November 1938, p. 13, 21 December 1938, p. 13.
17 Southern Blackshirt, January 1939, p. 1.
18 E.D.P., 22 November 1938, p. 7; E.A.D.T., 13 December 1938, p. 12.
19 Woodbridge Reporter and Wickham Market Gazette (W.R.W.M.G.), 15 December 1938, p. 4; E.A.D.T., 13 December 1938, p. 12. Mosley's meeting at the Central Cinema, Fakenham on 20 November 1938 was "crowded", and an audience of 400 listened to his speech at Eye Town Hall on 30 January 1939. See E.D.P., 22 November 1938, p. 7, 31 January 1939, p. 7.
20 W.R.W.M.G., 15 December 1938, p. 4.
21 E.D.P., 22 November 1938, p. 7. At the Fakenham meeting, Mosley advised the farmers to demonstrate in London, and he offered the support of ten Blackshirts for every East Anglian who participated in such a protest in the capital.

audience agreed that such a procession could take place in the capital on 21 December 1938.[22]

Mosley's speeches also brought public endorsements from at least two prominent farmers in the eastern counties. At the conclusion of the Fakenham meeting, C.G. Davey, "a well-known Norfolk farmer's leader", obtained permission to address those present and endorsed the B.U.F.'s agricultural policy.[23] Another farmer in the vanguard of the growing local protest movement, Victor de Appleby Shepherd, who resided at Shottisham Hall in Suffolk, attended the B.U.F. dinner at Ipswich and was similarly impressed. In a subsequent letter to the East Anglian Daily Times, Shepherd maintained that the Blackshirts had "the best policy for agriculture" and considered Mosley to embody "the class of man the farmers want".[24] Furthermore, fascist sources indicated that the movement was making some headway in rural areas. During December 1938, Charles Westren claimed that the B.U.F. was "gaining favour among farmers", and the Blackshirt press reported that membership in the Woodbridge division had doubled within a fortnight.[25]

However, as with Blackshirt intervention in the East Anglian 'tithe war' in 1933-1934, the B.U.F.'s efforts to achieve a political breakthrough in the region proved disappointing. Even though farmers were prepared to make public protests against what they saw as the government's neglect of agriculture in the late 1930s, a number of constraints, central to the Griffin-Copsey model, prevented the B.U.F. from translating this disaffection into significant support. Consequently, despite its renewed impetus, the movement remained on the margins of East Anglian political life. The two most notable manifestations of discontent in the area - the introduction of a local agricultural candidate in the East Norfolk by-election of January 1939 and the

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[22] E.A.D.T., 13 December 1938, p. 12. See also Action, 17 December 1938, p. 11.
[23] Action, 26 November 1938, p. 1. Davey qualified his support by adding that the N.F.U. should first try to settle the barley problem, but if this proved to be unsuccessful then a non-political farmers' march should then take place in London. See T.W.T., 26 November 1938, p. 9.
[24] E.A.D.T., 27 December 1938, p. 2.
[25] E.A.D.T., 29 December 1938, p. 2; Action, 17 December 1938, p. 11.

'Farmers' March' in London at the beginning of February - illustrate the problems which faced the B.U.F. in its continuing search for a rural heartland.

In November 1938, Lord Elmley, the Liberal National M.P., who had represented the East Norfolk Division since 1929, succeeded to the peerage as Earl Beauchamp, following the death of his father.[26] A 35 year old London solicitor named Frank Medlicott was chosen as the Liberal National candidate to contest the seat at the ensuing by-election. The selection of an urban professional from outside the area offended sections of the local Tory agricultural community, but those opposed to Medlicott's nomination did not transfer their loyalties to the B.U.F.. Instead, disaffected Conservative farmers in the constituency took independent political action to focus attention on the agricultural sector's economic difficulties. Under the aegis of the hastily established East Norfolk National Conservative and Agricultural Committee (E.N.N.C.A.C.), J.F. Wright, a prominent Norfolk farmer, was put forward as a National Conservative and Agricultural candidate.[27] Captain H.J. Cator, the largest landowner in the division, who resided at Ranworth Hall, became Wright's principal backer and chairman of the new political organisation. The E.N.N.C.A.C. set up offices at Norwich and six other centres and, within a few weeks, had assembled a team of nearly 60 paid election workers.[28] The third by-election candidate, Norman R. Tillett, carried Labour's hopes of profiting from the split in the traditional government vote and overturning the 12,647 majority Lord Elmley obtained at the 1935 general election.[29]

The B.U.F was poorly placed to exploit the disaffection within agricultural circles which threatened to undermine the National Government's hold on the seat. Wright's candidature effectively marginalised the B.U.F. by offering a more credible political alternative for disgruntled farmers in the constituency. As a local farmer and N.F.U. official, he possessed the necessary qualifications and status to mount a realistic

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26 E.D.P., 16 November 1938, p. 9.
27 R. Douglas Brown, East Anglia 1939 (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1980), p. 80.
28 Ibid..
29 Ibid.. See also E.D.P., 16 November 1938, p. 9.

challenge on an independent agricultural platform. His by-election campaign was further enhanced by the creation of the E.N.N.C.A.C., which possessed money, support, organisational skills and influential backers. In contrast, as Mosley had conceded in December 1937, the B.U.F. had been able to establish only a rudimentary District organisation in the East Norfolk constituency, which precluded the selection of a Blackshirt prospective parliamentary candidate.[30] Lacking material resources, activist personnel and prominent local figureheads, the East Norfolk B.U.F. was unable to conduct the type of sustained high profile propaganda campaign which was vital if the Blackshirts were to have any success in winning over a significant number of wavering National Government supporters.

Ultimately, government pressure, combined with official assurances regarding the future of British agriculture, ended the E.N.N.C.A.C.'s potentially damaging electoral challenge before polling day and also helped to neutralise the B.U.F.'s appeal. On 17 January 1939, Wright received a letter from the Prime Minister pointing out that the Ministry of Agriculture, in consultation with the N.F.U. and others, was presently reviewing the farming industry and would introduce "Whatever legislation is found to be necessary".[31] Chamberlain also stressed that this issue did not constitute grounds for "splitting the National Government vote", and he requested that, in the interests of the National Government and agriculture, Wright should withdraw.[32] Captain David Margesson, the government Chief Whip, reinforced the Prime Minister's intervention by holding two interviews with Cator in London on 16 January. At these meetings, the chairman of the E.N.N.C.A.C. was made aware of the "imperative need for a national united front at this critical period" and was informed of Chamberlain's intention "to make agriculture an essential feature of our national defence".[33] This information, together with the Prime Minister's personal involvement and Cator's "realisation of the international situation", persuaded Wright's main backer that the candidature should be

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30 E.D.P., 14 December 1937, p. 9.
31 Ibid., 18 January 1939, p. 9.
32 Ibid..
33 Ibid., 18 January 1939, p. 13.

abandoned.[34] Just a few hours before nominations closed on 17 January 1939, the E.N.N.C.A.C. convened a meeting at the Norwich headquarters of the Norfolk Branch of the N.F.U., attended by 110 people, to consider these dramatic eleventh hour developments. A vote was taken, and by a small majority it was decided that Wright should withdraw.[35] The would-be challenger attempted to put the best possible gloss on this climb-down:

> I am entitled to claim a victory for the cause that I set out to promote. There is an assurance in the Prime Minister's letter that has never been given to the farming industry...I know I would have won the election all right. But I have always been a supporter of Mr Chamberlain and when he personally asked me to do a thing what else could I do ?[36]

Polling took place on 26 January 1939. Frank Medlicott retained the seat for the Liberal Nationals with 18,257 votes, a drop of almost 5,000 compared with the last general election. Labour's total of 10,785 represented only a marginal improvement on its 1935 performance. On a 53 per cent turnout, the government's majority fell from 12,647 to 7,472.[37] Before the result was announced, the B.U.F. ran a front page headline in Action claiming that "Wright Betrayed Farmers".[38] According to the fascist analysis of these events, Wright had demonstrated the "technique of democratic politics" in making way for a London solicitor to contest an agricultural constituency.[39] His 'manipulation' of rural discontent, Chamberlain's personal popularity and the mounting criticism of party politics was deemed to be "worthy of a Baldwin".[40] The Blackshirts claimed that, by providing an outlet for local agricultural discontent, Wright's candidature prevented the introduction of a "real farmer's candidate", and his last minute withdrawal effectively handed the seat to the National

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[34] Ibid..
[35] Ibid., 18 January 1939, p. 9.
[36] J.F. Wright. Quoted in Brown, East Anglia 1939, p. 82.
[37] E.D.P., 28 January 1939, p. 5.
[38] Action, 28 January 1939, p. 1.
[39] Ibid..
[40] Ibid..

Government's nominee.[41] Furthermore, the B.U.F. maintained that Wright's "strategic retreat" had been induced by Chamberlain's assurances, even though these were "virtually identical with the pious sentiments which agriculturalists have been hearing from political platforms every year that the National Government has been in office".[42] In the estimation of the fascist press, neither the present administration nor Conservative Central Office would take steps to help the farmers until the latter "break with a loyalty which is being shamefully exploited".[43]

Blackshirt attempts to derive significant long-term political benefits from a proposed farmers' march in London were equally unsuccessful. Mosley's call for the East Anglian rural community to demonstrate in the streets of the capital apparently induced a small number of Suffolk farmers to try to arrange an independent protest in the city.[44] However, they "found progress impossible" and approached A.G. Mobbs, Chairman of the Suffolk N.F.U., with the suggestion that the County Branch should take charge.[45] Mobbs persuaded the Suffolk N.F.U. Executive to plan the event and a small organising committee was set up in December 1938 under the chairmanship of Neville Stanley, who farmed near Ipswich. By the beginning of 1939, a London march and mass meeting had been provisionally arranged for 1 February, and the organisers issued an appeal for farmers from other counties, including Norfolk and Essex, to support this demonstration.[46]

On 10 January 1939, approximately 1,200 farmers, farmworkers, landowners and representatives of allied interests attended a meeting at the Public Hall, Ipswich, held under the auspices of the Suffolk N.F.U., and passed two resolutions. The first, which was carried unanimously, called for a "united front of all agricultural interests" as a means of pressing the government to take steps to improve the prosperity of the

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41 Ibid., p. 10.
42 Ibid., p. 1.
43 Ibid., p. 10.
44 A.G. Mobbs, 'Eighty Years on Suffolk Soil' (Untitled unpublished memoir), p. 73. See also A.G. Mobbs, 'Suffolk Farmers Change The Face Of British Agriculture In Less Than Three Weeks', Suffolk Farmers Journal, Vol. 11, No. 11 (1963), p. 19.
45 Mobbs, 'Eighty Years on Suffolk Soil', pp. 73-74.
46 Ibid., p. 74; S.C.M., 6 January 1939, p. 14.

farming sector so that agriculture "could play its rightful part in national affairs".[47] A second resolution, moved by Neville Stanley, which stated that, unless the authorities endeavoured to ensure that agricultural prices fairly reflected production costs, Suffolk farmers would oppose the return of National Government candidates at the next election, was passed with "a storm of cheering and applause".[48]

Galvanised by this show of agricultural solidarity, a group of Suffolk representatives, headed by A.G. Mobbs, attended the annual conference of the N.F.U. in London a week later. Dismissing the assurances given by the Prime Minister to J.F. Wright as "the old confidence trick", Mobbs told the delegates that farmers were "heartily sick of this sort of talk" and were "demanding action" from both the N.F.U. and the government.[49] He urged the N.F.U. Council to endorse a protest rally at the Albert Hall, since a "large number" of East Anglian farmers were determined to demonstrate in London "by some means or other".[50] Due to the Union's impending talks with the Minister of Agriculture, however, the N.F.U. leadership considered such action to be inappropriate and refused to become involved. Once the Suffolk contingent had returned to Ipswich, a meeting of the County Executive was convened, which decided to press ahead immediately with the arrangements for a march in the capital on 1 February 1939. Over the next few days, special trains were hired from Ipswich, Colchester and Sudbury to take protesters to London, a procession route from Tower Hill was agreed with Scotland Yard, and the Central Hall at Westminster was booked for an end-of-march mass meeting.[51]

Mobbs admitted that, in desperation, some hard-pressed East Anglian farmers "had been reluctant to refuse help from the Fascists, who were naturally only too willing to throw in their lot with them".[52] Nevertheless, the Suffolk N.F.U.'s central role in organising the February demonstration denied the B.U.F. political space and

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47 E.A.D.T., 11 January 1939, p. 2.
48 Ibid.. See also Farmer and Stock-Breeder, 17 January 1939, p. 138.
49 E.A.D.T., 18 January 1939, p. 9; Action, 28 January 1939, p. 6.
50 Ibid..
51 Brown, East Anglia 1939, p. 82.
52 E.A.D.T., 18 January 1939, p. 9.

prevented the movement from obtaining much agricultural support during the 'barley crisis'. The existence of a County Branch of the N.F.U., which had been set up in 1919, ensured that Mosley's movement could not present itself as the only, or most viable, vehicle for agricultural protest in late 1938 and early 1939.[53] Led by well-regarded local farmers, many of whom had considerable experience of fighting for improved conditions on the land, the Suffolk N.F.U. represented the authentic voice of grass root farming opinion and provided an established channel for pursuing agricultural grievances. Thus, the County Branch's decision to take an active role in planning the demonstration significantly constrained the B.U.F.'s ability to harness rural discontent in the area. Lacking resources, support and a secure organisational structure in the county, the East Anglian Blackshirt movement could do little to challenge the Suffolk N.F.U.'s pre-eminent position in the protest movement. Despite more intensive agricultural campaigning during this period, Blackshirt recruitment in the county lagged far behind that of the Suffolk N.F.U., which reported a membership of 2,587 in January 1939.[54]

With the County Branch committed to more militant action than the N.F.U. Council would countenance, the B.U.F. might have had more impact if the Suffolk N.F.U. had ran an ineffective or lacklustre campaign. However, drawing on the successful tactics employed during the recent 'tithe war', Mobbs and his colleagues provided resourceful leadership and sought to maintain pressure on the government through lawful, publicity-seeking events. This strategy was based on the belief that the farmers could mobilise public support, gain positive media coverage, and change official attitudes only through peaceful, law-abiding and politically independent agitation, which concentrated exclusively on the agricultural issues. The pivotal role played by the County Branch gave the East Anglian protest movement a disciplined focus and prevented disaffection from spilling over into violence or disorder. It also

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[53] For a brief history of the Suffolk Branch of the N.F.U. see P.J.O. Trist, A Survey of the Agriculture of Suffolk (London: Royal Agricultural Society of England, 1971), pp. 329-332.
[54] E.A.D.T., 26 January 1939, p. 4.

supplied the organisational skills required to arrange the London march at short notice.[55]

The only way in which the B.U.F. could have capitalised fully on the growing rural discontent in the eastern counties in the late 1930s was by acting in alliance with the organisers of the demonstration. For two key reasons, however, the Suffolk N.F.U. firmly rejected any form of fascist involvement in the proposed march. Firstly, such a link would have fatally undermined the County Branch's politically non-partisan approach, which was designed to maximise sympathetic consideration of its case. Secondly, official connections with the B.U.F. were now even less attractive than they had been for the East Anglian tithepayers in 1933-1934. Since then, growing public disquiet over Blackshirt violence and anti-Semitism in areas such as the East End of London, and fascist aggression abroad had rendered any sort of formal association with Mosley untenable. Consequently, the Suffolk N.F.U. quickly distanced itself from the B.U.F. and emphasised the non-political nature of the planned demonstration. In January 1939, Neville Stanley, chairman of the Farmers' Protest Committee, confirmed in the local press that an offer of Blackshirt assistance regarding the London march had been turned down.[56] Later the same month, Mobbs also reported that those who were taking an "active part" in the protest arrangements had publicly dissociated themselves from the B.U.F..[57]

Government action on 29 January 1939, four days before the march was scheduled to take place, helped to dissipate rural discontent, thereby dealing the fascist agricultural campaign another critical blow. On that date, Chamberlain announced that Major Sir Reginald Hugh Dorman-Smith, who had been President of the N.F.U. in 1936-1937, was to replace W.S. Morrison as Minister of Agriculture. The appointment of a farmer to this post was greeted with enthusiasm by the East Anglian agricultural community, and the protest organisers rapidly turned their planned demonstration into

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55 Mobbs, 'Eighty Years on Suffolk Soil', Chapter VIII.
56 E.A.D.T., 13 January 1939, p. 5, 12 January 1939, p. 9.
57 Ibid., 18 January 1939, p. 9.

a rally of support for the new minister.[58] Dorman-Smith was invited to attend the Central Hall meeting, but he was able to decline without giving offence as a debate on agriculture was due to take place in the House of Commons on the same day.

On 1 February 1939, about 1,000 East Anglian farmers and their supporters, together with smaller contingents from the home counties, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, arrived in London.[59] After assembling at Tower Hill, they marched along Cannon Street, Queen Victoria Street and the Embankment to the Central Hall, Westminster. The procession, which was headed by a band and the march organisers, was described as "one of the quietest" ever witnessed in the capital.[60] Some of the participants carried sheaves of wheat, and others held banners and placards proclaiming 'Save Agriculture' and 'Justice for the Land'. Between 4-5,000, mostly from the farming community, attended the Central Hall meeting. A.G. Mobbs, one of the speakers at this event, proposed a resolution which urged the government to provide agriculture with "immediate help", welcomed the appointment of a farmer to the position of Minister of Agriculture as a sign that the authorities recognised "the seriousness of the present position", and pledged "wholehearted support" to Dorman-Smith in his "responsible and difficult task".[61] This was enthusiastically endorsed, and, later, a deputation presented the resolution to the Prime Minister at the House of Commons.

Although an official approach from the B.U.F. had been rejected by the Suffolk organisers, the Blackshirt movement nevertheless attempted to use the march and meeting as a platform for its agricultural policy. A number of East Anglian Mosleyites joined the demonstrators, ostensibly in a private capacity, but some fascists used the occasion to march along the route bearing pro-B.U.F. placards, selling Action and distributing Blackshirt agricultural leaflets.[62] Throughout the procession, an officer

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[58] Mobbs, 'Eighty Years on Suffolk Soil', p. 76; E.A.D.T., 1 February 1939, p. 7.
[59] This account of the 'Farmers' March' is based on contemporary press cuttings, mostly contained in the Mobbs Papers.
[60] Morning Advertiser, 2 February 1939. Press cutting in the Mobbs Papers.
[61] E.A.D.T., 2 February 1939, p. 9.
[62] Farmer's March in London. 1/2/39. Labour Party Photograph Library. National Museum of Labour

from Scotland Yard shadowed Mobbs to ensure that the farmers' leader was not harassed by Blackshirts who "wanted to claim credit for suggesting the March".[63] J. Jarrald, a Suffolk farmer's daughter, who participated in the demonstration, later recalled that fascist attempts to capitalise on the event had little effect: "...the Blackshirts were a nuisance when we got to Liverpool Street. They tried to latch on, didn't they. [They] caused quite a 'haroosh'. I don't know who told them but someone did...They latched on [as] we were walking along the Embankment because I can remember people on the march calling out to them, you know, telling them to 'B____ off!'".[64]

At the Central Hall, some of the speakers were frequently interrupted by men and women in the audience, who shouted out fascist slogans and tried to distribute literature. During the latter stages of the meeting, fascist leaflets were dropped from the gallery onto the people below. These disruptive Blackshirt tactics were "bitterly resented" by those present and prompted Neville Stanley to tell the noisy fascist contingent that "some of you may have political views we don't agree with. Well, keep them out of this".[65] In the evening, Blackshirts from East End and other London Districts handed out propaganda material on the platform at Liverpool Street station as the farmers boarded their train home.[66]

Fascist efforts to exploit the 'Farmers' March' had little significant impact, as the B.U.F. effectively admitted both before and after the event. In late January, the Blackshirt press asserted that Mosley had first suggested the idea of a march and bemoaned the fact that the farmers' demonstration was to be 'non-political': " ...we warn the farmers that something more is required if they are to shake the apathy of the

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History, Manchester; Ronald N. Creasy. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1996; Action, 11 February 1939, p. 9.

63 Mobbs, 'Eighty Years on Suffolk Soil', p. 77.

64 J. Jarrald and J. Cooper, Oral History Tape (O.H.T.) 586. Elmsett - Farming and General Reminiscences, 1990. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich. See also Jill Goodwin, O.H.T. 625. Women's Land Army Reminiscences, 1991. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

65 E.A.D.T., 2 February 1939, p. 9; Farmers Weekly, 3 February 1939, p. 17; Daily Telegraph, 2 February 1939. Press cutting in the Mobbs Papers.

66 Nottingham Journal, 2 February 1939. Press cutting in the Mobbs Papers; N.S.M., 18 February 1939.

government. They must take care that their spirit of revolt is not deflected by Tory pundits into mere ineffectual grumblings. It would be a pity indeed if all the high indignation aroused by the recent barley scandal should be smothered under the wet blanket of N.F.U. officialdom".[67]

Three days after the march, Action alleged that pro-Conservative elements in the N.F.U. and the farming press had tried to stop the procession from taking place, since the government was not only keen to avoid damaging publicity about its failure to restore agriculture but was also alarmed at the B.U.F.'s progress in the rural areas.[68] In the same issue, however, the movement grudgingly conceded that its recent propaganda campaign in the eastern counties had won few converts. Claiming that the farmers had been "gulled into dropping their present agitation" by the appointment of the "N.F.U. boss" Dorman-Smith, the Blackshirts warned that the new Minister of Agriculture would neither exclude foreign produce nor pay an economic price because the financial interests which controlled the Tory Party received the interest on their overseas loans in the form of cheap imports.[69] The B.U.F. argued that a "pretty trick" had been played on the farmers, since the N.F.U. leadership was, in turn, under the influence of Conservative Central Office.[70] The transient nature of the B.U.F.'s limited success in East Anglia during the 'barley crisis' was well illustrated by the fact that on 20 February 1939, just three months after Mosley had filled the Central Cinema in the town, an advertised B.U.F. meeting at the Lancaster Hotel clubroom in Fakenham was abandoned due to lack of interest. Viscountess Downe and Ann Brock Griggs, Chief Woman Organiser, were to have explained B.U.F. policy, but only the two speakers and a man attended.[71]

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67 Action, 28 January 1939, p. 10.
68 Ibid., 4 February 1939, p. 11.
69 Ibid., p. 1; 11 February 1939, p. 9.
70 Ibid..
71 E.D.P., 21 February 1939, p. 16; Norfolk Chronicle, 24 February 1939, p. 2.

3. The B.U.F. Peace Campaign in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex up to September 1939

Blackshirt foreign policy was an amalgam of deeply-held ideological beliefs and self-interested political calculation. At its core lay Mosley's conviction that by transforming the British Empire into a self-contained economic unit, Britain and her imperial possessions would be insulated from the "chaos of world struggle and collapse", which was allegedly inherent in the international financial system.[72] By removing the Empire from traditional trading rivalries, Mosley reasoned that Britain could concentrate on achieving imperial self-sufficiency, the struggle for overseas markets and raw materials would be reduced and the cause of peace thereby strengthened. The B.U.F. contended that the success of the British example would lead to the creation of other large corporate entities or "self-contained national organisations", which, in turn, would further dampen international economic tensions.[73] Under this new system, the "anarchistic struggle for markets", which had characterised "unorganised capitalism", would give way to a new era of rational cooperation.[74]

In essence, Mosley's proposals represented a principled rejection of the fundamental tenets of British foreign policy. Blackshirt thinking condemned involvement in continental alliance systems and the long-standing attachment to European balance-of-power politics on the grounds that neither protected Britain's vital imperial interests and both threatened to drag the country into disputes and conflicts which posed no danger to the Empire. Moreover, Mosley argued that the problem of ensuring British security and world peace was compounded by the malign influence of 'international socialism' and 'international finance', which, in their ideological drive to destroy fascism, had manoeuvred the old parties in Britain against Hitler and Mussolini's regimes. For the B.U.F., such dogmatic opposition to the Axis powers undermined Britain's position because it ran counter to the movement's view

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[72] 10 Points of Fascism (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.), p. 5.
[73] Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1932), p. 141.
[74] Ibid., p. 140.

that the scattered territories of the Empire could not be safeguarded effectively without cultivating good relations with Germany, Italy and Japan.[75]

Embracing the slogans 'Britain First' and 'Mind Britain's Business', Mosley consistently advocated that Britain should steer clear of all conflicts and commitments which did not affect her imperial interests. If a threat to Britain or the Empire materialised, however, the B.U.F. pledged that British forces would be fully deployed to repulse any encroachment. In such a situation, the protection of British interests took precedence over the B.U.F.'s desire for international peace. For this reason, Mosley also insisted on the need to enhance Britain's military capability, by upgrading the country's defences and exploiting the full potential of air power, to deter any would-be aggressors from attacking the Empire.[76]

Blackshirt policy also claimed to reflect the realities of international power politics by acknowledging the dominance of those 'great nations', whose advanced populations, material resources and moral standing fitted them for leadership in world affairs. Unless these states were able to satisfy their 'legitimate' demands for territory and raw materials, another war would be inevitable. The B.U.F. maintained that the 'dispossessed' among these pre-eminent nations should be encouraged to fulfil their imperial ambitions in ways, and parts of the world, which did not compromise Britain or her Empire. Consequently, Mosley urged that Germany should not only regain her pre-war colonies but also be given *carte blanche* in eastern Europe. Italy's imperial ambitions in north Africa should be accepted, and Japan's expansionist tendencies channelled into northern China, away from Britain's Far Eastern possessions. The resulting 'great power' autarchic blocs, together with the British Empire, would remove the likelihood of war by eliminating the 'international struggle' for markets and raw materials and form the basis of a new stable world order.[77]

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[75] Oswald Mosley, Tomorrow We Live (London: Abbey Supplies, 1938), Chapter Seven.
[76] Blackshirt, 5 July 1935, p. 4; Fascist Week, 26 January-1 February 1934, p. 5.
[77] Mosley, Tomorrow We Live, pp. 64-69.

Although the B.U.F. adhered to this foreign policy framework throughout the decade, several modifications or shifts in emphasis were introduced during the period. Firstly, before the Abyssinian crisis of 1935, the B.U.F. accepted that the League of Nations could become an important vehicle for peace if its constitution was amended to ensure that the largest member states wielded the greatest influence in decision-making.[78] Thereafter, Blackshirt propaganda portrayed the League as a decrepit organisation, which resisted reform, perpetuated the 'outmoded' balance of power system and fostered an alliance of "decaying democratic systems, with the bloodstained Soviet against the renaissant Fascist countries".[79] The B.U.F. now proposed that, in the future, European affairs would be regulated by a formal union of the four major fascist nations, comprising Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

Secondly, by the mid-1930s, Mosley's vision of the harmonious coexistence of independent, self-sufficient 'great power' blocs was overlaid with the argument that, owing to their complementary 'missions', Britain and Germany constituted two of the central pillars upholding international order. This refinement mirrored the Blackshirt leader's assertion that Germany's drive to create a consolidated economic system, embracing the Germanic peoples of Europe, and Britain's commitment to maintain and develop the Empire were mutually exclusive because neither affected the other nation's vital interests.[80]

Finally, the B.U.F.'s contention that war was caused principally by nations competing for markets, resources and investment outlets later assumed a distinctly anti-Semitic form. The perceived destabilising practices of "international finance" were increasingly linked to strident claims that the Jews were seeking to engineer a "mortal

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[78] Blackshirt, 7 June 1935, p. 1; Oswald Mosley, Blackshirt Policy (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1934), p. 59.
[79] Oswald Mosley, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked And Answered (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1936), Question 92.
[80] Oswald Mosley, 'The World Alternative', Fascist Quarterly (F.Q.), Vol. II, No. 3 (1936), pp. 377-395.

quarrel" between Britain and Germany in retaliation for the Nazis' summary treatment of the "Jewish masters of usury".[81]

Other important motives also reinforced the B.U.F.'s anti-war stance. The pacifistic and isolationist elements of the B.U.F. programme accorded with the general outlook of the numerous British ex-servicemen who were attracted to the movement because of its patriotic values, quasi-military ethos and passionate attachment to the cause of the 'betrayed' war generation. These Mosleyites, many of whom had experienced the horrors of combat at first hand during the Great War, were determined to prevent Britain becoming embroiled in another European conflict and shared a deeply-felt revulsion against war. These attitudes contrasted sharply with the bellicose sentiments often expressed by ex-service fascists on the continent.[82]

The B.U.F.'s peace platform was also conditioned by its desire to forge constructive relationships with the European fascist governments. At one level, this reflected Mosley's belief that the national variants of the 'modern movement' shared a common basic ideological affinity, which could be used to restructure the international system in the cause of peace. The installation of fascist regimes across Europe, pledged to the pursuit of autarchic economics, offered, in the B.U.F.'s estimation, the only solid guarantee against another continental war.[83] Blackshirt approval of appeasement also rested on the view, shared by many in Britain, that Germany had legitimate grievances concerning the punitive terms of the Versailles Treaty, particularly with regard to reparations, the loss of colonies, the burden of war guilt and the fragmentation of the German-speaking population in Europe.[84] Furthermore, from an early stage, the B.U.F. recognised that a war between the fascist regimes and Britain would destroy the movement's domestic political prospects and place patriotic Blackshirts in an invidious

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81 Mosley, Tomorrow We Live, p. 61.
82 Stephen M. Cullen, 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 22 (1987), pp. 128-131.
83 Fascism for the Million: The New Movement Simplified (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1936), pp. 66-67; R. Gordon-Canning, Mind Britain's Business: British Union Foreign Policy (London: Abbey Supplies, 1938).
84 Blackshirt, 13 March 1936, p. 1; Action, 19 March 1938, p. 1 and p. 11.

position. This fear underscored the movement's assertion that the opponents of fascism, notably 'international finance', would deliberately attempt to precipitate such a conflict to prevent the B.U.F. assuming power in Britain and to avert the onset of an impending world economic slump.[85]

From the autumn of 1935, when Italian troops invaded Abyssinia, the B.U.F.'s peace policy formed an important and ongoing part of the movement's political platform as Britain's relationship with the fascist nations came under increasing strain. During 1938 and 1939, the Blackshirts stepped up their anti-war campaign in response to the international crises which threatened the maintenance of peace. When Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938, the B.U.F. instructed its formations to make a "very special effort" the following weekend involving newspaper sales and leafleting duties, since only the movement could show the public "the fatal errors by which recent British Foreign Policy has led us to the brink of war" and "point the way to a permanent European peace based on the National Socialism of great nations".[86] Under the banner of 'Stop the War', the B.U.F. also held numerous peace meetings in east London and hundreds of Blackshirt newspaper sellers descended on the West End one evening in March to promote a 'Mind Britain's Business' response to the *Anschluss*.[87] Six months later, the imminent prospect of armed conflict with Germany over Czechoslovakia injected a new urgency into the movement's anti-war campaign. On 14 September 1938, N.H.Q. issued a circular calling on all Districts to demonstrate their commitment to peace through "Meetings, leaflet distribution, chalking, personal propaganda" and to "carry our message of sanity to the people".[88] Local Blackshirt initiatives were

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[85] W. Joyce, 'Collective Security', F.Q., Vol. I, No. 4 (1935), p. 422; 'Notes on the quarter', F.Q., Vol. II, No. 3 (1936), p. 340; Action, 16 December 1937, p. 8, 11 June 1938, p. 8.
[86] Circular to all Districts from B.D.E. Donovan, A.D.G. Administration, Department of Organisation, Administration. 16 March 1938. Saunders Papers A3. University of Sheffield Library.
[87] Action, 19 March 1938, p. 1, 26 March 1938, p. 3.
[88] Public Records Office, Home Office series (P.R.O. HO) 144/21281/95. 'National Campaign For Britain, Peace and People'. Circular from B.D.E. Donovan, A.D.G. Administration, Department of Organisation, Administration to all British Union formations. 14 September 1938.

supplemented by a number of high profile B.U.F. anti-war activities held in the West End, Whitehall and Downing Street during the Sudeten emergency.[89]

The signing of the Munich agreement on 30 September 1938 temporarily defused the atmosphere of crisis and briefly stalled the progress of the B.U.F.'s peace campaign.[90] However, the Nazi military occupation of the rump of Czechoslovakia in mid-March 1939 and the British guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece, which followed this act of aggression, gave the Blackshirt anti-war platform renewed impetus. The B.U.F. argued that such commitments undermined the cause of peace, benefited only Jews and financiers, and entangled Britain in disputes which did not affect her vital interests. In particular, the pledge to uphold the independence of Poland was denounced at every opportunity throughout the spring and summer of 1939. Blackshirt propaganda maintained that, due to the Polish guarantee, Britain was now obligated to defend a "sink of iniquity", which contained 3.5 million Jews, mistreated its German minority and was largely controlled by international finance.[91] Moreover, the B.U.F. asserted that the pact, which placed "the lives of a million Britons in the pocket of any drunken Polish corporal", could not be honoured without sustaining an unacceptably high casualty rate.[92]

On 16 April 1939, Mosley addressed a "great Peace Rally" at Limehouse to launch a "protracted campaign" to keep Britain out of foreign quarrels.[93] From then on, Blackshirt efforts to avert conflict continued until Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The B.U.F.'s 1939 May Day rally in London was organised around the theme of "For Peace And People" in protest against the "Government's mad policy of committing Britain to fight for all the little Balkan States in turn, in the

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[89] Action, 1 October 1938, p. 7; P.R.O. HO 144/21381/88-90. Jew-baiting. Metropolitan Police Report for September 1938. 10 October 1938.
[90] P.R.O. HO 144/21381/93-96. Jew-baiting. Metropolitan Police Report for October 1938. 10 November 1938; P.R.O. HO 144/21381/102-105. Jew-baiting. Metropolitan Police Report for November 1938. 9 December 1938.
[91] Action, 8 April 1939, p. 1
[92] Ibid.; 'Notes on the quarter', British Union Quarterly, Vol. III, No. 2 (1939), p. 8.
[93] Action, 15 April 1939, p. 10, 22 April 1939, p. 1.

interest of Finance alone".[94] Mosley's public meeting at the Exhibition Hall, Earls Court on 16 July 1939 represented the high point of the movement's anti-war campaign. Here, before an audience estimated by the police to number about 11,000, the B.U.F. leader condemned "the betrayal of the British people into war and financial slavery" and advocated the Blackshirt four point peace plan.[95] Fascist contingents from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were present at this well-publicised event.[96] In late August 1939, as international tension mounted, N.H.Q. instructed all Districts to intensify the peace campaign by making "maximum use" of all available Blackshirt speakers and by holding "snap meetings" and propaganda drives in residential areas.[97] The B.U.F. considered that every "means within the law must be taken to keep before the People our determination not to fight a war for Warsaw" and argued that the government "must not be allowed to try to avenge its crushing diplomatic defeats by sending the Youth of the Nation to the shambles".[98]

Between the spring of 1938 and September 1939, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Mosleyites used a variety of methods to promote the Blackshirt anti-war message. During this period, the movement's peace proposals were endorsed at open-air meetings held by numerous B.U.F. Districts in the region, including the Eye, Woodbridge, Lowestoft and Epping formations.[99] Ronald Creasy's regular B.U.F. feature in the North Suffolk Messenger denounced "this mad cry for war which would destroy civilisation and any security of life for ever".[100] Local fascists also wrote

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[94] Circular from U.A. Hick, Senior Administrator, British Union Headquarters, London Administration. 21 April 1939. Saunders Papers A4. According to the B.U.F., "thousands" participated in the May Day rally. See Action, 13 May 1939, pp. 1-2.

[95] P.R.O. HO144/21281/150-153. Special Branch Report on the Earls Court Meeting. 16 July 1939; Action, 22 July 1939, p. 1. The B.U.F. claimed that 30,000 attended this event. Board of Deputies observers put the figure at approximately 15,000. See Board of Deputies of British Jews (B.D.B.J.) C6/9/1/3. The Mosley Meeting At Earls Court. Digest Of Observers' Reports.

[96] When interviewed, several former East Anglian Blackshirts recalled attending the Earls Court meeting.

[97] Circular to all Districts from B.D.E. Donovan, Assistant Director-General, Department of Organisation, Administration. 23 August 1939. Saunders Papers A4.

[98] Ibid..

[99] Ronald N. Creasy. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1997; Arthur Swan. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991; Walthamstow, Leyton and Chingford Guardian (W.L.C.G.), 28 April 1939, p. 5, 1 September 1939, p. 1.

[100] N.S.M, 22 April 1939.

letters to the regional press in the late 1930s defending the 'Mind Britain's Business' platform.[101] On occasion, too, prominent Blackshirts in the area used local forums to publicise the British Union case. Thus, in January 1939, at a meeting of the Thetford Debating Society, convened to consider Chamberlain's foreign policy, the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for South-West Norfolk, Miss L.M. Reeve, advocated a policy of mediation and conciliation to ensure an international settlement.[102] Less orthodox activities were also pursued to raise public awareness of the B.U.F.'s anti-war message. In Suffolk, for example, working under cover of darkness during the early hours of 26 August 1939, unidentified Blackshirts littered the main streets of Stowmarket with B.U.F. leaflets and painted 'Mosley for Peace' slogans on several roads, the market place and a bridge.[103]

National B.U.F. figures also addressed audiences in the three counties during the last eighteen months of peace to reinforce District propaganda work. Mosley vigorously espoused the Blackshirt four point peace policy (which stressed British disinterest in eastern Europe, disarmament between Britain, France, Germany and Italy, return of the mandated territories, and development of the British Empire) at a number of meetings held in the region during 1938-1939.[104] Another N.H.Q. official, Alexander Raven Thomson, also made several visits to the area to defend the B.U.F.'s peace proposals. In May 1938, Raven Thomson explained the Blackshirt position on the Czechoslovakian crisis at a Chingford street meeting held under the auspices of the Epping District B.U.F..[105] Four months later, he deputised for Mosley at the Market Hill, Woodbridge. Once again taking Czechoslovakia as his subject, Raven Thomson referred to that "sausage shaped country inhabited by five different peoples speaking five different languages" and maintained that British interests were not affected by the

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[101] See for example E.A.D.T., 23 April 1938, p. 5; East Ham Echo (E.H.E.), 9 June 1939, p. 7, 1 September 1939, p. 4; W.L.C.G., 27 January 1939, p. 5.
[102] N.N.W.P., 21 January 1939, p. 10.
[103] E.A.D.T., 28 August 1938, p. 3.
[104] For example, Mosley advocated the B.U.F. anti-war policy at Ipswich, Walthamstow, Fakenham, Eye and Ilford in 1938-1939. See E.A.D.T., 9 May 1938, p. 7; Blackshirt, July 1938, p. 2; E.D.P., 22 November 1938, p. 7; N.S.J.D.E., 3 February 1939, p. 2; Ilford Recorder (I.R.), 30 March 1939, p. 8.
[105] W.L.C.G., 27 May 1938, p. 7.

current crisis.[106] Shortly afterwards, at the Clacton Debating Society, he proposed that "the interests of world peace demand a further revision to the Right of our foreign policy", but the motion was defeated by 76 votes to 23.[107]

Before the outbreak of war, B.U.F. activity in the region also promoted the anti-Semitism which formed an integral part of the movement's peace propaganda. Raven Thomson's meeting at Albert Avenue, Chingford, in August 1938 epitomised fascist attempts in the locality to saddle Jewry with the blame for the prevailing atmosphere of international crisis. The B.U.F.'s Director of Policy launched into a tirade against the Jews, accusing them of having "a great hatred against the German people" and of trying "to drag all the nations into a war of revenge".[108] Related anti-Jewish themes were pursued in the area as well. In January 1939, the B.U.F. press railed against the influx of Jewish refugees fleeing from persecution in Europe on the grounds that these 'aliens' diverted funds away from needy Britons, exacerbated the unemployment problem and 'stole' British jobs.[109] Local Mosleyites registered their antipathy towards the new arrivals in a more direct way. A group of Blackshirts and a number of jobless people "almost succeeded in wrecking" a meeting held at Leyton Town Hall in February 1939 to discuss the Borough's involvement in Earl Baldwin's Fund for refugees from Germany.[110] Those fascists who were present at the meeting kept up a "running fire of interruption", complaining that the assistance provided for foreigners was at the expense of the British unemployed.[111] Two months later, a similar meeting at Gresham Hall, Chingford was also disrupted by B.U.F. adherents.[112]

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106 Action, 1 October 1938, p. 17.
107 The Clacton Times and East Essex Gazette (C.T.E.E.G.), 19 November 1938, p. 10; Clacton News and East Essex Advertiser (C.N.E.E.A.), 19 November 1938, p. 1. Several members of the Clacton B.U.F. were present at this debate.
108 B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/3. Report re Blackshirt Meeting addressed by Raven Thomson, at Albert Avenue, Chingford, on 20th August, 1938. For another example see The Boro of West Ham, East Ham and Stratford Express (S.E.), 30 June 1939, p. 7.
109 Action, 7 January 1939, p. 1, 14 January 1939, p. 1, 21 January 1939, p. 3, p. 8 and p. 17.
110 S.E., 24 February 1939, p. 5.
111 Ibid.; Action, 25 February 1939, p. 7.
112 W.L.C.G., 28 April 1939, p. 1.

Historians of the B.U.F., whose work appeared before the mid-1970s, concluded that the movement had peaked with a membership of about 40,000 during the first half of 1934, when the Rothermere newspaper empire gave the Blackshirts favourable coverage. Thereafter, according to these earlier accounts, the B.U.F. experienced a period of progressive decline for the rest of the decade and could muster only 9,000 or so members by September 1939.[113] This broad consensus was broken in 1975, when Robert Skidelsky maintained that previous estimates had not fully reflected the impact of a number of factors, including the Blackshirts' mobilisation of anti-war sentiment via the 1939 Peace Campaign. Using this line of argument, Skidelsky suggested that, by 1939, the B.U.F.'s combined active and non-active membership stood at approximately 40,000, marking a return to the recruitment levels achieved during the Rothermere period.[114] He later lowered his revised estimate for 1939 to 20-25,000.[115]

Skidelsky's general conclusions were endorsed and refined in the mid-1980s by Gerry Webber, following careful analysis of recently released government papers relating to the B.U.F..[116] His research suggested that from the post-Rothermere low point of just 5,000 Blackshirts in October 1935, the membership gradually climbed to 22,500 by September 1939. Furthermore, Webber tentatively concluded that the improvement in the B.U.F.'s fortunes after Munich owed much to the movement's peace policy, which attracted "predominantly middle-class 'Tories' alienated from their 'natural' party by the creeping victory of the anti-appeasers".[117]

Impressionistic evidence relating to the impact of the B.U.F.'s peace policy in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex tends to support these revisionist arguments. A number of B.U.F. Districts in the area appeared to benefit from the dissemination of Blackshirt

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[113] Colin Cross, The Fascists in Britain (London: Barrie and Rockcliffe, 1961); R. Benewick, The Fascist Movement in Britain (London: Allen Lane, 1972).
[114] R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 332.
[115] R. Skidelsky, 'Great Britain' in S. J. Woolf (ed.), Fascism In Europe (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 275.
[116] G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 19 (1984), pp. 575-606.
[117] Ibid., p. 598.

anti-war propaganda. An ex-member of the Norwich Branch remembered that the number of Mosleyites in the County Borough rose steadily between 1936 and 1939.[118] At Eye in Suffolk, the former District Leader recollected that the Peace Campaign "increased and strengthened" the local B.U.F. formation.[119] The senior official at Leytonstone during 1939-1940 also later recalled that, although the Czechoslovakian crisis caused a number of local adherents to resign in protest, the movement's anti-war stance more than compensated for these losses by boosting the District B.U.F. membership from 1938.[120] Police and oral evidence indicates that similar developments also affected the progress of the East Ham B.U.F.. Special Branch reported that in September 1938 many of Mosley's "most ardent followers in areas, such as Bethnal Green, Limehouse and East Ham, became imbued with a feeling of antagonism towards Germany during the crisis week".[121] The disenchantment expressed at East Ham was confirmed by T.M., the local District Treasurer between 1938 and 1940, who remembered that several members of the Branch were unhappy with the B.U.F. leadership's foreign policy line because they saw it as slavishly endorsing Germany's actions.[122] Nonetheless, he maintained that Blackshirt anti-war activity in East Ham resulted in "an increase in membership during 1938", which was "well maintained" until the military call-up.[123] Pro-Mosley sources indicate that B.U.F. membership was also rising at West Ham and Walthamstow West towards the end of the 1930s.[124]

Elsewhere, however, the deepening international crisis and the Mosleyite response did not promote B.U.F. growth. At Epping, for example, although "some were galvanised by the B.U.F. Peace Campaign and joined", a roughly equivalent

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118 Eric Pleasants. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
119 Creasy. Completed questionnaire.
120 E.G.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1997.
121 P.R.O. HO 144/21281/98. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 14 October 1938.
122 T.M.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
123 T.M.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1997.
124 A.R. Beavan. Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M.) taped interview, 1988; A.R. Beavan. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1986; F.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993; F.T.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 17 August 1993; R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988; R.W.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985; Derrick Millington. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985.

number left the movement in 1938-1939.[125] Most of the latter departed either in protest against Hitler's actions over Czechoslovakia and Poland or because they felt Britain was drifting to an inevitable war. Consequently, the Epping District membership, totalling 70-80 active and non-active Blackshirts, remained largely static during 1938 and the first eight months of 1939.[126] The Lowestoft B.U.F. lost almost two-thirds of its membership in the aftermath of the Munich crisis, apparently because of a general feeling within the Branch that conflict with Germany was now unavoidable.[127] Fascist peace propaganda failed to enrol new recruits at the port to offset these losses. Several other Lowestoft Blackshirts resigned in the period after 1938.[128]

Webber's suggestion that the B.U.F. benefited from an influx of disaffected pro-appeasement middle class Conservatives from the end of 1938 is also partially substantiated by the pattern of Blackshirt recruitment in certain Districts in the region. In February 1939, the fascist press detected signs of a "swing-over of political opinion in the near future" at Epping because of a rift between Winston Churchill, the sitting M.P., and local Tory supporters.[129] Action claimed that the Conservative rank and file in the constituency were "intensely dissatisfied" with Churchill's attitude towards the National Government's foreign policy and reported that he had recently been censured by two local Tory Associations.[130] The last Epping District Leader confirmed that a number of disillusioned Conservatives either joined or supported the local movement in the late 1930s but felt that not all of them were won over by the B.U.F.'s anti-war line: "There were a few like that, yeah. It wasn't only the Peace Campaign though. Disaffected Tories came in because the government didn't govern although it had a

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125 L.B.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1997.
126 Ibid..
127 Swan. Taped interview.
128 Arthur Swan. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 2 February 1993.
129 Action, 25 February 1939, p. 13.
130 Ibid..

large majority. Even if they weren't members, they were alarmed by the apathy of the government".[131]

Moreover, former members recalled that, as the Norwich and Walthamstow West B.U.F. expanded in 1938-1939, both formations attracted a more middle class following.[132] Disenchanted Conservatives also entered the Blackshirt ranks at Eye because of Mosley's anti-war platform.[133] Other local B.U.F. Districts, however, did not appear to recruit alienated Tories in appreciable numbers. For example, the District Treasurer at East Ham (1938-1940) could remember only one former Tory becoming a member of his Branch after 1937.[134] Furthermore, at Leytonstone, although erstwhile Conservatives had joined the local formation in 1934, from 1938 the Peace Campaign mostly mobilised dissident left-wingers.[135] The Leytonstone District Leader (1939-1940) pointed out that the last two Blackshirts recruited in the area had previously belonged to the Young Communist League.[136]

Nevertheless, despite the modest gains reportedly made by the B.U.F. in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex as a result of its peace policy, official and popular responses during this period of mounting international tension from late 1938 made the creation of a sizeable Blackshirt anti-war constituency highly problematic. Three major obstacles stood in the way of a further fascist advance across the region. Firstly, government measures to meet the crisis had a debilitating effect on the B.U.F.. The introduction of the Military Training Act in May 1939, which established peacetime conscription, and the impact of the National Service (Armed Forces) Act four months later, drained the local movement of its activist core, as the District Leader at Leytonstone (1939-1940) recollected: "...those Branch officials who were Reservists of one sort or another began to be called up and the organisational gaps had to be plugged by inexperienced members. Nationally, by the outbreak of war, the services of several

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131 L.B.. Telephone interview.
132 Pleasants. Interview; R.W.. Completed questionnaire.
133 Creasy. Completed questionnaire.
134 T.M.. Completed questionnaire.
135 E.G.. Completed questionnaire.
136 Ibid..

thousand of the most active and enthusiastic members were no longer available".[137] A number of Eye Blackshirts enlisted during this period, but the District was able to sustain these losses without abandoning its political work.[138] Several of the most committed West Ham Mosleyites went into the armed services at this stage and lost contact with the local movement.[139] The call-up also affected the East Ham membership, and, at Epping, B.U.F. activists either joined the Territorial Army units attached to the Essex Regiment or entered other branches of the military.[140] About half the Blackshirts at Walthamstow West were also stated to be Territorials.[141] Once hostilities had commenced, the Norwich District Leader returned to his "old job" in the R.A.F., and the District Treasurer, after joining the army, obtained a Cadet Commission.[142]

Secondly, before and after September 1939, the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign was also hampered by the persistent refusal of some local authorities to let halls to the Blackshirts. The Labour-controlled council at Walthamstow consistently opposed B.U.F. applications to hire municipal property for meetings. In December 1938, this body declined to supply the B.U.F. with a list of vacant dates for the Baths Hall "for fear of possible consequences", and, two months later, a suggestion by the leader of the Opposition on the council to rescind the decision denying the Blackshirts use of the venue was ruled "out of order" by the Mayor.[143] After a further approach in early 1940, the B.U.F. was informed that "at the moment the Council are not prepared to let

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137 E.G.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 25 August 1997.
138 Ronald N. Creasy. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 27 August 1997. According to George Hoggarth, the Eye B.U.F. District Treasurer, the formation still had 21 members in May 1940. See Home Office Advisory Committee (HOAC) Report. George Frederick Hoggarth. 17 August 1940. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office.
139 F.T.. Taped interview; F.T.. Letter. F.T. was called up in October 1939 and assigned to the 6th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment.
140 T.M.. Completed questionnaire; D.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991. D.T. joined the Essex Regiment in August 1939.
141 R.W.. F.O.M taped interview.
142 Public Records Office, Treasury Solicitor's Department (P.R.O. TS) 27/493. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6, Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.
143 W.L.C.G., 6 January 1939, p. 11, 3 March 1939, p. 9.

the halls".[144] The Labour local authority at East Ham proved to be no more accommodating. In mid-1939, H.J. Howard, the East Ham District Leader, twice sought permission to hold a Blackshirt peace meeting in Plashet Park, but, on both occasions, the request was turned down.[145]

Finally, deteriorating Anglo-German relations served to erode the B.U.F.'s political credibility in East Anglia. For the vast majority of the population in the area, German military action against Czechoslovakia and Poland reinforced the perception that the Blackshirt peace policy was, in reality, nothing more than pro-Nazi propaganda. Several ex-B.U.F. interviewees conceded that the connection, forged in the public mind during the later 1930s, between Mosley's movement and Hitler's foreign policy aims was immensely damaging and hampered fascist growth in the eastern counties. In August 1939, a small group of Blackshirts enjoying a drink at a hotel in Eye were hustled out of the premises by a crowd of farmworkers and soldiers.[146] Eric Pleasants, then a Blackshirt at Norwich, had few illusions about the state of local feeling towards the B.U.F.:

> By then [1938-1939] most Norwich folk saw us [the District B.U.F.], I suppose, as Hitler's stooges because we were fascists and the Nazis were fascists. We wanted peace with them, and we excused what they did to the Czechs and Poland. No wonder local folk were suspicious! Hitler made us Blackshirts look like bloody puppets, and we went along with it![147]

Adverse internal developments also contributed to the B.U.F.'s lack of political legitimacy. As war approached, many East Anglian Mosleyites decided that it would be prudent either to sever or loosen their links with the B.U.F. in order to distance themselves from an organisation which was widely regarded as pro-Nazi. A number of stalwarts retained their membership but became non-active, and others chose to drift away at this point. The exodus at Lowestoft after the Munich crisis stemmed from a

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144 W.L.C.G., 8 March 1940, p. 10.
145 E.H.E., 9 June 1939, p. 7, 14 July 1939, p. 7.
146 HOAC Report. George Frederick Hoggarth. 17 August 1940.
147 Pleasants. Interview.

general belief within the Branch that fascist affiliations in the prevailing international climate were untenable.[148] A Forest Gate activist also recalled that the West Ham District membership, which had increased in 1938 and 1939, "seemed to tail off when there was going to be trouble with Germany".[149] Eric Pleasants eventually left the Norwich B.U.F. in mid-1939 because, by that stage, he felt that the movement was simply a Nazi mouthpiece. He also remembered that other Blackshirts cut their ties with the local formation shortly before the war.[150]

Problems within the Norfolk B.U.F. impeded local Blackshirt efforts to increase support and pursue the anti-war campaign. After leaving the movement in July 1937, the former Area Organiser for the East Anglian B.U.F., John Smeaton-Stuart, joined the National Conservative Association at Thorpe St. Andrew, near Norwich, fifteen months later because he considered that the Tories had regained their patriotism. He also secured several sales positions from the autumn of 1937, eventually becoming a commercial representative for Trinidad Leaseholds , a petroleum company. In July 1939, he was one of four Thorpe St. Andrew Ratepayers' Association candidates elected to the Blofield and Flegg Rural District Council. According to Smeaton-Stuart, his departure induced a number of Norfolk Blackshirts and supporters to sever their links with the movement.[151] In retaliation, his replacement, Charles H. Hammond, the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for Norwich, reportedly instigated a divisive two year campaign of vilification against Smeaton-Stuart in an attempt to undermine the latter's personal standing with the surviving membership and to damage his local business reputation.[152] In June 1939, solicitors acting for the ex-East Anglian Organiser sent a letter to his successor demanding that all attempts to malign their

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148 Swan. Taped interview.
149 F.T.. Taped interview.
150 Pleasants. Interview.
151 P.R.O. HO 283/64/64-65. John Smeaton-Stuart, H.M. Prison, Liverpool. Letter to the Home Office Advisory Committee. 7 June 1940; P.R.O. HO 283/64/34-38. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6 Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart; E.D.P., 1 August 1939, p. 5.
152 P.R.O. HO 283/64/42. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6 Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.

client should cease immediately, and steps should be taken to rectify any harm done.[153] Smeaton-Stuart subsequently recalled that Hammond's uncompromising methods caused a certain amount of antagonism, particularly within the Norwich District B.U.F.:

> Members of the Organisation [B.U.F.] in Norwich, who were personal friends of mine, came to see me and told me of a most disgraceful thing which happened, that this official of the organisation [Hammond] had come to East Anglia and had called meetings of members and had said to them that he realised that Smeaton-Stuart's influence still lived in East Anglia, and that the Organisation could not grow as long as that influence lasted, and he wanted them to realise that there was no just cause for that influence to last, because Smeaton-Stuart was this, that and the other thing, which was in fact libel and slander, and they who were by then my personal friends objected to those statements and came and reported it to me, and I openly wrote to the Organisation protesting, and instructed my lawyers to take action if necessary, as it was obviously going to affect my business.[154]

Hammond later also clashed with Desmond H. Rose, one of the Norwich Blackshirts who remained in contact with Smeaton-Stuart after 1937. In early 1939, at the age of eighteen, Rose was made District Treasurer for the local formation and, along with others, tried unsuccessfully to persuade Smeaton-Stuart to seek reappointment, since he was "the finest advocate of B.U. Policy in East Anglia".[155] At some point during May or June of that year, Hammond, by then the Norwich B.U.F. District Leader, suspended Rose over "a question of personal policy".[156] The former

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[153] P.R.O. HO 283/64/57. Hill and Perks Solicitors, 36, Prince of Wales Road, Norwich. Letter to Charles Hammond, 17, Blackfriars Road, King's Lynn, Norfolk. 28 June 1939.
[154] P.R.O. TS 27/493. In the High Court of Justice King's Bench Division. Before Mr Justice Tucker. Stuart v. Anderson and Another. Royal Courts of Justice, Wednesday, 25th June 1941. Evidence First Day.
[155] P.R.O. TS 27/493. Statement of Case Against John Smeaton-Stuart. 20 August 1940; P.R.O. HO 283/59/156-157. G. P. Churchill, Secretary of the Home Office Advisory Committee. Letter to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office. 9 January 1941. Rose was born on 21 April 1921 and, after attending Cambridge House School, he had a succession of jobs. Initially attracted by the Blackshirt uniform, Rose joined the B.U.F. at the age of fifteen. See P.R.O. HO 283/59.
[156] P.R.O. HO 283/59/165-167. Statement of Case Against Desmond Harvey Rose. 28 November 1940.

District Treasurer appealed to N.H.Q. against this decision, but B.D.E. Donovan, the B.U.F.'s Assistant Director-General (Administration), did not reply.[157]

4. Blackshirt Activity in the Three Counties during the 'Phoney War', 1939-1940

The Nazi invasion of Poland commenced on 1 September 1939. On that day, Mosley issued a message to all B.U.F. members instructing them "to do nothing to injure our country, or to help any other Power".[158] Despite denouncing the imminent war as a "quarrel of Jewish finance", which did not threaten Britain's vital interests, the B.U.F.'s founder told Blackshirts in the armed forces and civil defence to "obey their orders, and...the rules of their Service".[159] Those members who were able to continue with B.U.F. anti-war propaganda work were asked "to take every opportunity within your power to awaken the people and to demand peace".[160] At the same time, a circular sent from National Headquarters to all formations rejected war for "Jewish Finance" and called upon Blackshirts to get "Out for Britain with meetings - leaflets - sales of ACTION - Demonstrate for Peace".[161]

The response of B.U.F. Districts in the three counties to these exhortations from the leadership about the ongoing importance of the movement's Peace Campaign was far from uniform. At least one local formation decided to abandon propaganda work once war had been declared. From September 1939, contrary to the directives issued by N.H.Q., the Epping B.U.F. suspended all political activities because, as the District Leader (1938-1940) later explained, "the crisis had come".[162] The remaining local activists gave up their official duties and waited to be called up.[163] Other Branches were clearly in no position to press ahead with anti-war agitation once

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157 Ibid..
158 O. Mosley, 'Mosley's Message To All British Union Members'. 1 September 1940. Saunders Papers A4.
159 Ibid..
160 Ibid..
161 'Keep Britain Out'. Circular from B.D.E. Donovan, Assistant Director-General (A), Department of Organisation, Administration to all formations. 1 September 1939. Saunders Papers A4.
162 L.B.. Telephone interview.
163 Ibid..

hostilities had commenced. By the autumn of 1939, the Norwich B.U.F. had run out of funds and was about to fold. Most of the District's male Mosleyites had either left the area or enlisted, leaving only three or four 'active' Blackshirts in the County Borough.[164] At this point, Desmond Rose returned to the local formation after being asked by those remaining to help them dispose of Branch property, because the Norwich B.U.F. was in the process of closing down. Rose also distributed a few copies of Action, since he believed he had a moral responsibility to subscribers who had paid in advance.[165] The Romford District and the Grays and Tilbury B.U.F. both appeared to be equally moribund.[166]

Elsewhere, Blackshirt activity continued into 1940. At Leytonstone, the resignation of the District Leader in September 1939, after both his mother and grandmother had committed suicide, did not unduly disrupt the dissemination of fascist propaganda as his successor, E.G., a former Epping B.U.F. Unit Leader, made promotion of the Peace Campaign the chief priority.[167] From late 1939, local Blackshirt activists, operating from Branch premises at 480, High Road, Leytonstone, conducted twice-weekly street meetings and delivered anti-war leaflets door-to-door.[168] Furthermore, the local press reported in January 1940 that the Leytonstone B.U.F. was hoping to distribute 5,000 pamphlets throughout the constituency within the next three months.[169] However, E.G.'s resignation from the executive post for business reasons in March 1940 meant that, from then on, organised Blackshirt political activity in the district was sharply curtailed.[170] The anti-war

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[164] P.R.O. TS 27/493. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6 Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.
[165] P.R.O. HO 283/59/156-157. G.P. Churchill, Secretary of the Home Office Advisory Committee. Letter to the Under Secretary of State at the Home Office. 9 January 1941.
[166] Action, 26 October 1939, p. 7, 21 December 1939, p. 7.
[167] L. Wise, 'The East London Shopkeeper' in L. Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts: The Inside Story of The British Union of Fascists 1932-1940 (London: Sanctuary Press, 1986), p. 6. According to this account, the father of the Leytonstone District Leader had been killed during the First World War and neither woman could face the prospect of further family losses in a new conflict. See also Action, 5 October 1939, p. 7.
[168] E.G.. Letter; W.L.C.G., 22 December 1939, p. 1.
[169] W.L.C.G., 2 February 1940, p. 3.
[170] E.G.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1997. Despite the Leytonstone District Leader's

platform was also endorsed in the West Leyton Division from late 1939 at B.U.F. public gatherings held next to the Baker's Arms public house in the High Road.[171]

Walthamstow was also subjected to B.U.F. peace propaganda after the declaration of war. Regular street meetings were held in the area by Branch and outside speakers at various pitches, including Pretoria Avenue and Westbury Road.[172] Other forms of fascist anti-war protest were pursued in the locality as well. One of the Blackshirts involved, R.W., a former Propaganda Officer belonging to the Walthamstow West District, later recalled his own role in this political campaign:

> Well, I got a six months' deferment because of my father's business and that sort of thing. He was doing certain things, you know, and, owing to his bad health, I got a deferment... As a matter of fact we were more active in those six months while the war was on than we were before...I painted at least 30 to 40...slogans on walls where people could see them, in paint ... 'Mosley For Peace' and 'Stop The War' and different slogans like that with a circle and flash.[173]

Other formations continued to promote the Blackshirt Peace campaign after September 1939. During the 'phoney war' period, the East Ham District attempted to publicise the Mosleyite message through meetings at open-air venues, such as Kempton Road, street newspaper sales and door-to-door canvassing. Social events were also arranged to raise funds for the local Peace Campaign.[174] Similar propaganda activities took place at Ilford and West Ham until May 1940.[175] The Eye District B.U.F. continued to promote the Blackshirt peace policy as well. Under Ronald Creasy's

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departure, B.U.F. meetings were held in the area after March 1940. See Action, 11 April 1940, p. 8, 2 May 1940, p. 8.

[171] Action, 7 December 1939, p. 8, 14 December 1939, p. 8, 25 April 1940, p. 8, 2 May 1940, p. 8. See also Action, 9 November 1939, p. 8, 16 November 1939, p. 8, 11 April 1940, p. 7. B.U.F. activists also held "Labour Exchange meetings" at Leyton. See Action, 30 November 1939, p. 8.

[172] W.L.C.G., 24 May 1940, p. 4; Action, 26 October 1939, p. 8, 21 March 1940, p. 8. See also Action, 5 October 1939, p. 8, 19 October 1939, p. 8, 11 April 1940, p. 8, 18 April 1940, p. 7, 23 May 1940, p. 8.

[173] R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview. B.U.F. activists also held lunch hour literature sales outside factory premises in Walthamstow. See Action, 30 November 1939, p. 8.

[174] T.M.. Completed questionnaire; Action, 16 November 1939, p. 8, 11 April 1940, p. 8, 2 May 1940, p. 8, 23 May 1940, p. 8.

[175] T.M.. Completed questionnaire; Action, 2 November 1939, p. 8, 9 November 1939, p. 8, 16 November 1939, p. 8, 30 November 1939, p. 7, 8 February 1940, p. 7, 18 April 1940, p. 7, 25 April 1940, p. 8, 2 May 1940, p. 8.

uncompromising leadership, the local formation pursued a range of propaganda activities in Eye and other places, such as Stowmarket and Diss, to highlight the movement's anti-war stance.[176] Meetings, literature sales, leafleting and slogan painting were the principal methods employed by Eye Mosleyites in the period up to May 1940 "to point out to the public the dire consequences of war against our European counterparts".[177] In March 1940, Creasy also advertised Mosley's pamphlet The British Peace in the local press.[178]

Fascist activity was also evident at Lowestoft following the outbreak of hostilities. Blackshirt circulars, which were delivered to houses in the town on 25 January 1940, gave the local District Leader's name and address as a contact for anyone interested.[179] Furthermore, information passed to the Home Office by the Conservative and Unionist Central Office in May 1940 alleged that B.U.F. leaflets were being distributed in parts of the town and that this propaganda operation was apparently being organised by the senior local Blackshirt, George Surtees.[180]

Other conventional methods were employed to disseminate fascist anti-war propaganda. In October 1939, the B.U.F. emphasised that, as part of the continuing 'Peace Drive', Districts should concentrate on maximising the circulation of Action by increasing sales activities and extending their distribution networks. Evacuated Blackshirts, who had been unable to contact a local formation, were encouraged to establish their own "sales-nucleus".[181] The correspondence columns of the regional press also provided an obvious outlet which enabled B.U.F. members or sympathisers to express their opinions without revealing their identities. Letters explicitly or implicitly endorsing Mosley's position continued to appear in local newspapers after war had been declared. For example, several correspondents, shielding themselves

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176 Ronald N. Creasy. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991; N.S.J.D.E., 12 April 1940, p. 5, 26 April 1940, p. 5, 3 May 1940, p. 5; Action, 25 April 1940, p. 8.
177 Creasy. Completed questionnaire.
178 N.S.J.D.E., 1 March 1940, p. 8.
179 P.R.O. HO 45/23683 Subfile 54. Statement of Case Against George Frederick Surtees. 26 July 1940.
180 P.R.O. HO 45/23683/840488. Eastern Counties Fascist Activity. Week ending 11th May 1940.
181 Action, 5 October 1939, p. 1.

under pseudonyms, such as 'P.J.', 'B.U.' 'Empire First' and 'Pacis Amatrix', wrote to The Braintree and Witham Times in late 1939 and early 1940 either to support the B.U.F. stance on peace or advance similar ideas.[182] Other local Blackshirts, including Oliver Hawksley, Brian Smith, William E. Fitt and Hugh J. Howard, were less coy when writing to the regional press during the phoney war period.[183]

Occasionally, other organisations provided a forum for the promotion of the B.U.F.'s policy. In December 1939, George Surtees, the Lowestoft District Leader, arranged for a Major Harris to deliver a pro-fascist lecture at a meeting of the local Rotary Club.[184] At the invitation of the Ipswich Branch of the Peace Pledge Union, Charles Hammond, formerly the Norwich District Leader, delivered an address in February 1940 at the Friends House, Ipswich on the causes and possible consequences of the war. He also outlined the Blackshirts' proposals to prevent conflict.[185]

Since this type of wartime propaganda opportunity was rarely offered, the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign in the three counties relied more heavily on Mosleyite street meetings, but these did not always pass off without incident. In May 1940, seventeen year old Walter Nichols, Assistant District Leader of the_Walthamstow West B.U.F., was sent to prison for one month for using insulting words likely to cause a breach of the peace at a Blackshirt meeting at Pretoria Avenue, Walthamstow. Nichols, who was addressing this open-air gathering, told his audience that they were fighting "for capitalists" and asked "are you going to let your lovely sons go out and shed their blood on the fields of Flanders for this dirty, stinking, rotten form of Government ?"[186]

Between September 1939 and May 1940, B.U.F. claims that the war against Germany had been engineered by international Jewish financial interests were

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[182] The Braintree and Witham Times, 19 October 1939, p. 2, 28 December 1939, p. 6, 4 January 1940, p. 7, 18 January 1940, p. 7, 25 January 1940, p. 6, 7 March 1940, p. 6.
[183] See E.D.P., 25 November 1939, p. 9, 29 November 1939, p. 9, 27 January 1940, p. 9; W.L.C.G., 8 March 1940, p. 10, 22 March 1940, p. 7; S.E., 15 December 1939, p. 11.
[184] P.R.O. HO 45/23683 Subfile 54. Statement of Case Against George Frederick Surtees. 26 July 1940.
[185] Action, 7 March 1940, p. 2.
[186] S.E., 24 May 1940, p. 9. See also W.L.C.G., 24 May 1940, p. 4.

accompanied by a host of other anti-Semitic allegations.[187] Blackshirt wartime propaganda sought to stigmatise the Jews as profiteers, speculators and regulation-breakers, who were determined to make money while Gentiles were sent to the front.[188] Another fascist charge was that many Jews were shirking their responsibilities by purposely evading military service and opting for positions in the A.R.P. and the auxiliary police instead.[189] Furthermore, according to the B.U.F., the entry of Jewish refugees into the labour market threatened soldiers' jobs and served as a potential method of depressing wage rates.[190] The Blackshirt solution was to "CONSCRIPT REFUJEWS TO FIGHT IN THEIR OWN WAR".[191]

Much of the street-level anti-Semitism which accompanied the B.U.F.'s vilification of the Jews during the phoney war was concentrated in the movement's east and north-east London heartland.[192] However, instances of anti-Jewish activity could also be observed in neighbouring Essex districts. Anti-Semitic themes permeated the B.U.F.'s Silvertown by-election campaign in February 1940 (discussed later). In the run-in to polling day, a Blackshirt propaganda sheet, entitled 'The Silvertown Dawn', was distributed in the constituency. This alerted local residents to the danger of foreign refugees 'stealing' jobs in West Ham and, more apocalyptically, warned that war would ruin western civilisation and leave it at the mercy of "the barbaric hordes of Judaic Communism".[193] B.U.F. activists, using indelible white paint, also covered parts of the division with anti-Semitic slogans, such as "Jew War", "Moran Could Stop The Jewish War" and "A Lovely Jewish War".[194]

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[187] For a useful general survey of organised British anti-Semitism and fascism between 1939 and 1945 see T. Kushner, The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society during the Second World War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), Chapter One.
[188] B.D.B.J. C6/2/1/6. The Jewish Defence Committee. A Survey Of Its Work From Nov. 1938; Action, 23 September 1939, p. 4, 21 December 1939, p. 4, 29 February 1940, p. 6.
[189] Action, 4 January 1940, p. 2.
[190] Ibid., 30 November 1939, p. 1, 4 January 1940, p. 2, 28 March 1940, p. 4.
[191] Ibid., 28 March 1940, p. 4.
[192] See T.P. Linehan, East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40 (London: Frank Cass, 1996), Chapter Five.
[193] Jewish Chronicle, 23 February 1940. Press cutting in P.R.O. HO 45/24895/14.
[194] Mass Observation Archive (M-O A): FR 39 'Silvertown By Election'. 29 February 1940. University of Sussex.

Frederick A. Young, the B.U.F. District Leader at Walthamstow West (1939-1940), specialised in abusive anti-Jewish platform oratory in the early months of the war. The 40 year old fish curer delivered open-air addresses in the Borough and parts of east and north-east London during this period and frequently denounced the Jews in highly offensive language.[195] Eventually, in February 1940, Young was given a one month prison sentence for using insulting words at a B.U.F. public meeting at Ridley Road, Dalston. On this occasion, Young maintained that the Jews were "all tucked away in nice soft A.R.P. jobs" and referred to the Jewish community in Britain as "filthy Oriental vultures who have crawled into this country and are now living on our backs".[196] It would appear that he later resumed his duties as a B.U.F. speaker in the area.[197]

Blackshirt wartime meetings and literature sales outside industrial premises in Walthamstow and Labour Exchanges in Leyton were probably also designed to exploit the perceived growth in anti-Jewish feeling among sections of the working class after September 1939.[198] The Board of Deputies noted with concern that wartime conditions had enabled anti-Semitism to gain a "certain foothold" in the trade unions, and another Jewish source reported that fascist activity within the trade union movement had "largely increased" in the first four weeks of hostilities.[199] In particular, the inconvenience caused by the evacuation, the official blackout, wartime shortages and bureaucratic procedures, made many workers more receptive to fascist propaganda which blamed the Jews for the conflict.[200]

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195 Action, 12 October 1939, p. 8, 9 November 1939, p. 8; B.D.B.J. C6/5/1/1. Report. 28 October, 1939; B.D.B.J. C6/5/1/1. Report on B.U.F. meeting at Ridley Road, Dalston, on Sunday, 5 November 1939; B.D.B.J. C6/5/1/1. Report on B.U.F. meeting at Ridley Road. From the Secretary of London Area Council. Sunday, 12 November, 1939.

196 Hackney Gazette and North London Advertiser, 14 February 1940, p. 1; W.L.C.G., 23 February 1940, p. 2.

197 See Action, 11 April 1940, p. 8, 18 April 1940, p. 7.

198 See for example Action, 9 November 1939, p. 8, 30 November 1939, p. 8.

199 B.D.B.J. C6/2/1/6. The Jewish Defence Committee. A Survey Of Its Work from November 1938; B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/3. Memorandum By Mr. Jacobs Of The J.P.C.. 3 October 1939.

200 Ibid.; B.D.B.J. C6/1/1/2. Jewish Defence Committee Minutes. 3 October 1939; B.D.B.J. C6/1/1/2. Jewish Defence Committee Minutes. 8 November 1939.

Although a number of Districts across the three counties continued with the Peace Campaign once war had been declared, the B.U.F. faced a range of additional restrictions after September 1939, which further undermined both the effectiveness of the Blackshirt anti-war platform and the political credibility of the movement.

Conscription robbed many local formations of their most active members and disrupted propaganda work. In January 1940, in an effort to overcome this problem, the B.U.F. announced it was launching a Women's Peace Campaign and appealed for female members to come forward "to take up the burden of the work which the men are forced temporarily to lay down".[201] It was hoped that they would "shoulder the sternest tasks of District organisation and propaganda" and "mobilise the women of the country for Peace".[202] However, although a number of female Blackshirts in the region took a prominent activist role in the Peace Campaign, including the Leyton anti-Semite, Elsie S.C. Orrin, and the Eye District Treasurer's sister, Cecilia Hoggarth, their contribution could do little to offset the deleterious effects of the call-up.[203]

Encouraged by Mosley, attempts were also made to strengthen the movement by directing anti-war propaganda at industrial workers.[204] In November 1939, Blackshirt activists commenced "factory gate meetings" at Hooker Road, Walthamstow and were also reported to be holding "lunch hour sales" outside industrial premises in the Borough.[205] At Leyton, Mosleyite speakers utilised Labour Exchange meetings to propagate the B.U.F.'s peace platform.[206] The Lowestoft B.U.F.'s wartime activities also concentrated on working class districts at the port.[207] This strategy apparently had some success in attracting left-wing elements to the

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201 Action, 18 January 1940, p. 8. See also P.R.O. HO 45/24895/2-6. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 1 February 1940; M. Durham, Women and Fascism (London: Routledge, 1998), Chapter Three.

202 Ibid.. The Blackshirt leadership urged female members, and others unaffected by the call-up, to participate actively in an intensified spring and summer campaign in 1940. See Action, 28 March 1940 p. 8.

203 Action, 14 December 1939, p. 8; Mrs. O.W.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1993.

204 P.R.O. HO 45/24895/2-6. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 1 February 1940.

205 Action, 9 November 1939, p. 8, 30 November 1939, p. 8.

206 Action, 30 November 1939, p. 8.

207 P.R.O. HO 45/23683 Subfile 54. HOAC Report. George Frederick Surtees. 21 August 1940.

movement in places, such as Leytonstone, but, once again, the efforts of a few remaining activists could not compensate for the decrease in the local membership after September 1939 brought about by conscription and resignations.[208]

These organisational deficiencies were compounded by N.H.Q.'s declining ability to provide the wider movement with propaganda materials after the outbreak of war, due to financial and supply problems. In turn, these difficulties placed greater emphasis on local initiative to sustain the Peace Campaign at a time when many formations in the three counties lacked the resources to discharge this task effectively. On 25 August 1939, the Assistant Director-General of the B.U.F., B.D.E. Donovan, issued a circular to all Branches which stated that, due to the "urgent necessity" to conserve central funds, National Headquarters could not keep Districts supplied with free leaflets.[209] The Blackshirt leadership "urgently requested" that, from now on, these were to be printed locally where possible, and Branches were instructed to acquire a duplicator so they would be able to produce copies of locally designed leaflets in response to changing circumstances and the possibility of an election being called.[210] In a subsequent circular of 13 September 1939, Donovan pointed out that if "probable future difficulties of transport" were encountered, National Headquarters would only be able to issue drafts or samples, via regional centres, to the Districts for duplication.[211] Furthermore, local Branches were encouraged to devise leaflets in line with official B.U.F. propaganda "on their own individual responsibility" and to build up reserves of duplicating paper, ink, and envelopes so that this "emergency distribution scheme" could function successfully even if faced with supply shortages.[212]

These difficulties continued to hamper the movement during the early months of 1940. In January 1940, B.U.F. Branches were informed that initial supplies of

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[208] E.G.. Completed questionnaire.
[209] Circular from B.D.E. Donovan, Assistant Director-General, Department of Organisation, Administration. 25 August 1939. Saunders Papers A4.
[210] Ibid..
[211] Circular from B.D.E. Donovan, Assistant Director-General (A), Department of Organisation, Administration. 13 September 1939. Saunders Papers A4.
[212] Ibid..

leaflets and posters for the 'British Peace' Campaign had been "cut down considerably" because of "enormous printing costs".[213] District Leaders were also asked to help the organisation financially by printing copies of the leaflet locally and by persuading members to send donations to the Peace Fund "in order that we may make a gigantic effort in February for the 'BRITISH PEACE'".[214] On 30 April 1940, the B.U.F.'s Sanctuary Press announced that the supply of propaganda posters would be "curtailed".[215] Local formations were encouraged to produce their own 'contents-bill' or 'slogan poster' on the understanding that Sanctuary Press would accept no responsibility for any ensuing legal action.[216]

After the outbreak of hostilities, government restrictions and the authorities' response to the B.U.F.'s more covert activities deprived the Blackshirts of several potential channels of political influence. The official blackout, which started on 1 September 1939, meant that the B.U.F. was obliged to rely primarily on weekend afternoon meetings in an attempt to attract an audience. The onset of war coincided with the closing of its traditional outdoor propaganda season, which lasted from April to September when the largest audiences could be attracted. The winter months inevitably meant smaller crowds.[217] This restriction, coupled with the ongoing difficulty of hiring halls, prompted the B.U.F. to develop clandestine publicity methods, involving slogan painting and the placing of adhesive propaganda labels or 'stickybacks' on property, which could be carried on under the cover of darkness to advance the anti-war policy. These new techniques were used across the region to promote the Blackshirt Peace Campaign, raising official concern that the B.U.F. was crossing the boundary between legitimate civil protest and 'fifth column' activity.

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213 'British Peace Campaign'. Circular to District Leaders from Ernest G. Clarke, Propaganda Administrator, British Union. 29 January 1940. Saunders Papers A4.
214 Ibid..
215 Memorandum from James L. Shepherd, Business Manager, Sanctuary Press. 30 April 1940. Saunders Papers A4. The B.U.F. was also affected by the reduced availability and increased cost of newsprint during this period. By May 1940 Sanctuary Press was no longer able to accept returns of Action.
216 Ibid.. Districts were told to ensure that "nothing libellous, slanderous or offensive" appeared on such posters.
217 Action, 28 March 1940, p. 8.

The Assistant District Leader at King's Lynn, Ivan F. Carlile, and another member of the same formation, Donald E. Ferlisi, were found to be in possession of 'stickybacks' when they were arrested under Defence Regulation 18B (1A) in mid-1940.[218] By that stage, T.M., the East Ham District Treasurer, was "still putting sticky propaganda things all over the place, like some fool".[219] Slogan painting formed an integral part of the B.U.F. anti-war campaign at Eye, and, in April 1940, a correspondent in the local press also noted that numerous fascist messages had been daubed in paint on walls in Walthamstow.[220] Occasionally, the perpetrators were caught and prosecuted. William Bird, a 45 year old unemployed decorator, who was a member of the B.U.F., appeared at Stratford police court in April 1940 after police had observed him painting "It's A Jews' War. Mosley For Peace" on a fence at Hainault Road, Leyton. A resident of Ramsay Road, Forest Gate, Bird was charged with writing on a fence without the consent of the owner and also with causing wilful damage to the property. Bird denied the charges but was fined 40 shillings plus twenty shillings costs or one month's imprisonment in default.[221]

Official anxiety about the B.U.F.'s more covert activities increased in September 1939 following a Special Branch report which noted that the Blackshirt leadership was unofficially encouraging members to become Air Raid Wardens, Special Constables and Nursing Reservists in order to publicise the B.U.F.'s "defeatist and pro-German" anti-war propaganda within the civil defence services.[222] Investigations by the Board of Deputies at the beginning of the war also revealed that Blackshirts attached to civil defence units were making "full use of the facilities these jobs give

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218 P.R.O. HO 45/25754/863027/3. Fascist Appeals To The Home Office Advisory Committee. Memorandum by E.B. Stamp. 22 August 1940. Cases in which Advisory Committee Recommend release but MI5 Do Not Concur; HOAC Report. Donald Elijah Ferlisi. 22 October 1940. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office. Carlile was a 26 year old Catholic nurseryman with a disabled wife and two children. He joined the B.U.F. in 1936 and denied using the 'stickyback' labels. Ferlisi, a 29 year old Anglo-Italian, worked as a bricklayer and became a Blackshirt in 1936-1937. He claimed that he had been asked to look after a quantity of 'stickybacks' by the King's Lynn District Leader, Alfred Ilett, and agreed to do so.

219 T.M.. Taped interview.

220 Creasy. Taped interview; W.L.C.G., 12 April 1940, p. 3

221 W.L.C.G., 12 April 1940, p. 2. See also E.H.E., 8 December 1939, p. 1.

222 P.R.O. HO 144/21249/16-20. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 18 September 1939.

them to spread their doctrines" and preaching anti-Semitism during quiet periods on duty.[223] A number of Norfolk Blackshirts belonged to the county's A.R.P. services and at least two prominent Essex fascists, Francis Osborn, the former District Leader at East Ham, and John Garnett, the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for Harwich, held civil defence positions.[224] However, it is evident that the authorities were removing Mosleyites from these posts in 1940. By July, Sir Bartle Frere, chairman of the Norfolk County Council's A.R.P. Committee, reported that there were now no fascists in the wardens' service.[225] F.A.J. Osborn's appointment as a full time A.R.P. Warden in East Ham was also terminated.[226]

In fact, the process of 'weeding out' local Mosleyites from potentially sensitive positions had actually begun before the war started. Shortly after the Munich crisis, the District Treasurer at Lowestoft, Arthur Swan, was instructed by the Home Office to resign from the local Observer Corp. Before complying, Swan informed the B.U.F.' leader of this official action and received a sympathetic reply from Mosley, stating that this was "an instance among many of the injustices heaped upon us and must be borne with fortitude in the present climate of opinion".[227]

The various internal and external constraints which marginalised the Blackshirts after September 1939 were powerfully reinforced by a hardening of public opinion against the B.U.F.. Now that Britain and Germany were at war, and the prospect of a Nazi invasion became increasingly likely, most people regarded Mosley's fascists as little more than Hitler's apologists and potential 'fifth columnists'. Thus, the state of public opinion in the national emergency of the phoney war period drastically curtailed the political space available for the Blackshirts' 'patriotic' protest against British involvement in the conflict. By 1940, there was evidence of growing popular hostility

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[223] B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/3. Survey of the Situation. c. October 1939.
[224] P.R.O. HO 144/21429/16-20. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 18 September 1939. Garnett was in the Thames section of the Auxiliary Fire Service.
[225] L.N.C.P., 9 July 1940, p. 7.
[226] S.E., 28 June 1940, p. 4; B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/3. Untitled Report. 27 June 1940.
[227] Oswald Mosley. Quoted in Arthur Swan, Memoir (Untitled unpublished, n.d.), p. 3; Swan. Taped interview. Swan was a founder member of the Lowestoft Observer Corp which was established in 1935.

to the B.U.F.'s anti-war propaganda. Blackshirt sales drives were abandoned at Leytonstone because of the antagonism they aroused in the Borough.[228] The Eye B.U.F.'s peace efforts provoked strong criticism in the East Anglian press during April and May 1940. Clearly referring to the Blackshirts, one correspondent asserted that those responsible for defacing walls and windows in the district with signs and "treasonable" leaflets should be punished.[229] Local resentment was also expressed in more sinister ways. During the later stages of the phoney war, George Hoggarth, the Eye District Treasurer, received an anonymous letter which stated darkly "1st Bombs on Eye, the 5th Column will die".[230] Indeed, the extent to which the B.U.F. and its continued political activities aroused deep public suspicion by late May 1940 was revealed by a Mass-Observation report concerning popular attitudes in East Suffolk, London and Lancashire to Mosley's internment.[231] The investigators found that the detention of the Blackshirt leader was "overwhelmingly" endorsed and commented that "very seldom have observers found such a high degree of approval for anything".[232]

In these distinctly unfavourable circumstances, Blackshirt propaganda exerted a negligible appeal, as the 1940 Silvertown by-election demonstrated. After September 1939, the B.U.F. reversed its pre-war electoral strategy by announcing that it would now field candidates in parliamentary by-elections in order to give the British electorate an opportunity to vote for peace.[233] It was hoped that participation in such contests would provide the movement with valuable press publicity for its anti-war campaign, give the Blackshirts access to indoor venues under the control of hostile (mainly Labour) local authorities, and capitalise on the wartime pact amongst the major political parties not to stand for seats held by opponents which became vacant. The B.U.F.'s first parliamentary by-election contest took place in February 1940 when

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228 E.G.. Letter.
229 N.S.J.D.E., 12 April 1940, p. 5. Another correspondent referred to the local B.U.F. as the 'fifth column'. See N.S.J.D.E., 3 May 1940, p. 5, 26 April 1940, p. 5.
230 Mrs. O.W.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 6 August 1991.
231 M-O A: FR 135 'Reactions To Internment Of Mosley'. 24 May 1940.
232 Ibid..
233 Action, 15 February 1940, p. 1.

Thomas Moran was put forward as the Mosleyite candidate for the West Ham constituency of Silvertown. However, Blackshirt intervention in this traditional Labour stronghold proved a fiasco. Possessing neither previous experience of parliamentary elections nor District organisation in the division, the B.U.F. had to mount a hastily-arranged campaign from central committee rooms located in the Upton constituency under conditions which made it difficult to answer credibly the anti-fascist charge that a vote for British Union was a vote for Hitler.[234] Dogged by these handicaps, Moran received only 151 votes, a figure completely eclipsed by the Labour candidate's winning total of 14,343. The Communists' nominee, Harry Pollitt, added insult to injury by securing 966 votes, more than six times the Blackshirt tally.[235]

In an attempt to put the best possible gloss on this electoral humiliation, the B.U.F. stressed that it had obtained 151 votes "AFTER ONLY TEN DAYS CAMPAIGN IN VIRGIN TERRITORY".[236] Furthermore, as Mosley revealed the following month, a B.U.F. District was in the process of formation at Silvertown due to the "many adherents gained during the election campaign". [237] Nonetheless, the movement's abysmal by-election performance in a constituency bordering the East End clearly exposed the fragile nature of fascist support in the area. Subsequently, the Blackshirts contested by-elections at North East Leeds (March) and Middleton and Prestwich (May), both safe Conservative seats. Again, the B.U.F. candidates made no impact, obtaining in each case under three per cent of the votes cast and losing their deposits.

Moreover, after September 1939, the membership of the regional B.U.F. dwindled since the trickle of new recruits could not compensate for the loss of conscripted Mosleyites and those who thought it wise to end their association with the

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234 Action, 22 February 1940, p. 3 and p. 8, 29 February 1940, p. 1; S.E., 16 February 1940, p. 1 and p. 11, 23 February 1940, p. 1, p. 2 and p. 19.
235 S.E., 1 March 1940, p. 1.
236 'Silvertown By-Election Result'. Circular from British Union National Headquarters, 1, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, Westminster, S.W.1. to all Districts. 23 February 1940. Saunders Papers A4.
237 P.R.O. HO 45/24895/27-28. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 27 March 1940.

movement. Several District officials later recounted that Branch numbers fell away during the phoney war.[238] The result of the Silvertown by-election in February 1940 also indicated that the B.U.F. Peace Campaign had little impact in the area once war had been declared. By May 1940, few of the remaining Blackshirts in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were undertaking open propaganda work. In order to mark May Day, N.H.Q. issued instructions for all Districts to mount an "intensive week end campaign" culminating in "an outdoor meeting on Sunday May 5th".[239] Local formations were asked to send in accounts of their events on the evening of 5 May "so that in Action of that week a complete picture of nation wide activity may be given" and were told "Do not regard your work on that day as done until it has been reported".[240] The urgings of the leadership appeared to meet with a poor response from Districts in the region, since subsequent B.U.F. press coverage of "British Union May Day" contained only brief references to a "Combined rally" at Blackthorne Road, Dagenham and unspecified Blackshirt activity at Eye.[241]

5. Internment under Defence Regulation 18B

In mid-1940, the British authorities used emergency legislation to crush Mosley's movement because the Blackshirts were perceived to pose a threat to national security during wartime. Ultimately, therefore, the fate of the B.U.F. was decided by another vital contingent factor in the Griffin-Copsey model, namely the nature of the state's response to the fascist movement. On 23-24 May 1940, Mosley and 29 other prominent Blackshirt officials were arrested by the authorities under Defence Regulation 18B (1A). At the same time, Special Branch officers raided the B.U.F.'s N.H.Q. and inspected the files and records held there. These initial detentions were

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238 Various ex-Blackshirt officials mentioned this when interviewed by the author.
239 'May Day...Sunday 5th May 1940'. Circular from B.D.E. Donovan, Assistant Director-General (A), Department of Organisation, Administration to District Leaders. 11 April 1940. Saunders Papers A4.
240 Ibid..
241 Action, 9 May 1940, p. 8. According to the B.U.F., Blackshirt 'May Day' meetings were due to take place at East Ham, Ilford, Silvertown, Stratford, West Leyton, East Leyton and Walthamstow. See Action, 2 May 1940, p. 8.

followed by a wider round-up in June and July 1940, which effectively destroyed the movement's organisational base by apprehending approximately 750 B.U.F. members and supporters. In late June 1940, the executive also assumed the power to ban the B.U.F. under Defence Regulation 18B (AA), and, on 10 July 1940, the movement was duly proscribed.[242]

Defence Regulation 18B (DR 18B) formed part of the British authorities' response to the deteriorating international situation immediately prior to the outbreak of war. On 24 August 1939, the government hastily steered the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act through parliament in one day. This legislation enabled the executive to make defence regulations by Orders in Council to safeguard national security. Eight days later, armed with these extensive powers, the government promulgated DR 18B which permitted the Home Secretary to detain "any person" in order to prevent them from "acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety, or the defence of the realm".[243] Under DR 18B, detainees were denied those basic civil rights afforded by the Habeas Corpus Acts but could appeal against detention orders to an Advisory Committee appointed by the Home Secretary. At its first meeting on 21 September 1939, the Advisory Committee decided that detainees would have to conduct their appeals in person without their legal representatives being present at the hearing.[244]

Fears that the executive's newly-acquired powers could result in arbitrary action to erode civil liberties led to Liberal protests in the Commons, which were supported by many Labour M.P.s. The strength of parliamentary opposition compelled the government to amend DR 18B on 23 November 1939. In its revised form, the regulation stipulated that, before making a detention order, the Home Secretary had to

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[242] On the history of Defence Regulation 18B, see A.W. Brian Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), R. Thurlow, Fascism In Britain: A History 1918-1985 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Chapter Nine; R. Thurlow, The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), Chapter Six, and F.H. Hinsley and C.A.G. Simkins, British Intelligence in the Second World War. Volume Four. Security and Counter-Intelligence (London: H.M.S.O., 1990).

[243] Defence Regulation 18B (1 September 1939). Quoted in Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, Appendix I.

[244] Thurlow, Fascism In Britain, p. 191.

have "reasonable cause to believe" that a person was of "hostile origin or associations" or had been "recently concerned in acts prejudicial" to national security.[245]

The early history of DR 18B was shaped by the Home Office's desire to preserve as many civil liberties as wartime conditions would allow without compromising the integrity of the state. Viewed primarily as a 'last resort' measure to counter domestic subversion, DR 18B was used sparingly throughout the phoney war. The Home Secretary made 136 detention orders in the period up to 30 April 1940, by which time only 58 people, including approximately five with Blackshirt connections, were still in custody.[246] During the first months of the conflict, there were no plans to instigate a large scale round-up of aliens or British fascists. With regard to the latter, the authorities had no evidence to show that the B.U.F. was involved in subversive activity, and it was apparent that Mosley's pro-German Peace Campaign attracted little public support. However, the events of April and May 1940 were to transform government attitudes and lead to the internment of hundreds of British fascists.

Several developments influenced the authorities' decision to strike against domestic fascism. The rapid Nazi military drive across Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg in April-May 1940, together with the German offensive against France, brought the phoney war to a close. Furthermore, Quisling's collaborationist 'coup' in the wake of Hitler's assault on Norway and diplomatic reports of extensive Nazi infiltration before the attack on Holland sparked a press-fed fifth column panic in Britain, which stigmatised aliens, British fascists and fellow travellers as the 'enemy within'.[247] The prospect of an imminent German invasion increased government concern that ideological affinity and political self-interest might induce Mosley to conclude a negotiated peace settlement with the Nazi leadership if

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245 Defence Regulation 18B (23 November 1939). Quoted in Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, Appendix I.
246 Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, p. 78; Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 447.
247 The impact of the fifth column panic is discussed in P. and L. Gillman, 'Collar The Lot!' How Britain Interned And Expelled Its Wartime Refugees (London: Quartet Books, 1980) and R. Stent, A Bespattered Page? The Internment of His Majesty's 'most loyal enemy aliens' (London: Andre Deutsch, 1980).

the British authorities capitulated. A series of clandestine meetings, involving key figures from British anti-Semitic and fascist anti-war organisations, which were held between October 1939 and May 1940, sharpened official suspicion. Mosley attended a number of these gatherings, along with other prominent devotees of the right-wing fringe, including Admiral Sir Barry Domvile, founder of the Link, and Archibald H. Maule Ramsay M.P., who had established the Right Club. Action against the B.U.F. was also prompted by the government's need to provide both scapegoats and the appearance of dynamism in order boost national morale, which had been severely shaken by the speed and extent of the German advance in the spring of 1940. In addition, the authorities wished to preserve public order by shielding the Blackshirts from growing popular hostility.[248]

The Tyler Kent affair sealed the fate of the B.U.F.. On 20 May 1940, the Security Service raided the flat of Tyler G. Kent, a 29 year old code and cipher clerk employed at the U.S. Embassy in London, and found copies of 1,500 classified documents, including secret correspondence conducted between President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during the phoney war period. The membership ledger of the Right Club was also discovered on the premises. Before his arrest, Kent had revealed copies of the Churchill-Roosevelt telegrams to Anna Wolkoff, an anti-Semitic and anti-war member of the Right Club, who worked as Maule Ramsay's political secretary. Kent's links with Wolkoff ensured that a number of these sensitive cables were subsequently passed to the M.P.. This breach of security had direct repercussions for the B.U.F., since Mosley's tenuous connection with Maule Ramsay was now used by the authorities as one of the reasons to justify internment across the British fascist fringe.[249]

When the War Cabinet met on 22 May 1940, it was decided that the supposed contact between Mosley and Maule Ramsay, and the potential scope for fifth column

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248 Thurlow, Fascism In Britain, pp. 178-194.
249 The Tyler Kent affair is discussed in detail in Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, Chapter Eight. See also Thurlow, The Secret State, pp. 237-243.

activity afforded by the grave military situation, required an immediate and drastic response. On the same day, DR 18B was amended by the inclusion of supplementary paragraph (1A) promulgated by Order in Council. DR 18B (1A) permitted the internment without trial of members of organisations which were subject to foreign influence or control or whose leaders had past or present associations with the leaders of enemy governments or who sympathised with the governmental system of enemy powers. This important amendment enabled the Home Secretary to achieve the authorities' principal aim of decimating the B.U.F. in the summer of 1940 by ordering the detention of Blackshirt personnel. A fascist could now be interned without the authorities having to demonstrate that subversive activity had either been planned or carried out.[250]

The implementation of DR 18B (1A) effectively destroyed what remained of B.U.F. organisation in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Charles H. Hammond, formerly District Leader at Norwich and the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for the County Borough, was detained in Manchester on 24 May 1940.[251] From early June, several other senior Norfolk Blackshirts were also arrested under DR 18B (1A). Oliver Hawksley, a former local District Leader in north Norfolk, was taken from his home at Cliff Road, Sheringham on 4 June 1940 shouting "Heil Mosley" by plain clothed police and a uniformed officer. Hawksley's residence was then searched.[252] Brian Smith, the wealthy Sheringham Blackshirt, was similarly incarcerated under a detention order during the summer of 1940.[253] The B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate and District Leader for the King's Lynn Division, Alfred Ilett, was also taken into custody at this juncture.[254] Another King's Lynn detainee was Ivan F. Carlile,

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250 Thurlow, Fascism In Britain, pp. 194-198; Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, pp. 159-162.
251 E.D.P., 25 May 1940, p. 5.
252 HOAC Report. Oliver Hawksley. 7 November 1940. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office; Norwich Mercury, 8 June 1940, p. 2.
253 HOAC Report. Brian Smith. 20 August 1940. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office; Richard Reynell Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley' (Unpublished unabridged manuscript, 1958-1968), p. 1012; P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', p. 2.
254 L.N.C.P., 11 June 1940, p. 2; E.D.P., 5 June 1940, p. 5.

who served the local formation as an Assistant District Leader.[255] Desmond H. Rose, the unofficial acting District Treasurer for the Norwich B.U.F., was picked up by the authorities on 6 July 1940 following a report from the local constabulary.[256] The Norwich City police first became aware of Rose in late May 1940, when an informant denounced him as a "red hot" fascist, who was an ardent admirer of Hitler and Germany.[257] They also ascertained that he had recently been dismissed from his job at the textile firm of Messrs. Hinde and Hardy because "he was a bad time-keeper; went to work without a gas mask and disseminated anti-British propaganda in the works".[258] Five days before his arrest, a police search of Rose's home found a large quantity of B.U.F. and German literature on various topics.[259]

The 18B round-up in mid-1940 accounted for virtually all the senior Mosleyites in Suffolk.[260] The Blackshirt County Inspector, William Edric Sherston, who was also District Leader for the Woodbridge B.U.F. and the movement's prospective parliamentary candidate for the same constituency, was detained on 16 July 1940.[261] Sherston had served as a Second Lieutenant in the British Army since the start of the war, and, although there was no evidence to suggest that he had used this position to promote Mosleyite views, he remained a Blackshirt enthusiast and maintained a number of B.U.F. contacts.[262] On the same day, the authorities also took his mother, Dorothy Eden Sherston, the Women's District Leader for the Woodbridge Division, into custody.[263] In early June 1940, the Eye District Leader, Ronald Creasy, was arrested

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[255] P.R.O. HO45/25754/863027/3. Fascist Appeals To The Home Office Advisory Committee. Memorandum by E.B. Stamp. 22 August 1940. Cases in which Advisory Committee Recommend release but MI5 Do Not Concur.
[256] P.R.O. HO 283/59/55. Home Office Advisory Committee. Letter to Desmond H. Rose. 15 December 1942.
[257] P.R.O. HO 283/59/165. Statement of Case against Desmond Harvey Rose. 28 November 1940.
[258] P.R.O. HO 283/59/16. Home Office Advisory Committee Minute. 1 February 1943.
[259] P.R.O. HO 283/59/165-167. Statement of Case against Desmond Harvey Rose. 28 November 1940.
[260] The only identified Suffolk official not detained in 1940 was Rita Creasy, Women's District Leader of the Eye B.U.F.. Ronald N. Creasy. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1995.
[261] P.R.O. TS 27/491; HOAC Supplementary Report. William Edric Sherston. 15 June 1942. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office.
[262] Ibid..
[263] Creasy. Taped interview, 1995; Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, p. 309.

at his home by two police officers.[264] Before departing, he was allowed to pick up some tobacco for his pipe but was refused permission to put his personal, financial and business affairs in order.[265] When Creasy arrived at the local police station, he found that George Hoggarth, the Eye District Treasurer, was already held in the cells under a DR 18B (1A) order.[266] Creasy and Hoggarth's B.U.F. counterparts at Bury St. Edmunds, Lawrence W. Harding and Raymond Smith, suffered the same fate. Both men were picked up at the beginning of June 1940 and "taken to a place of detention".[267]

At Lowestoft, Arthur Swan, the local District Treasurer, was apprehended on 3 June 1940 by two plain clothed policemen armed with revolvers as he visited clients on his insurance agency round. He regarded both officers as friends and had been drinking with one of them the night before.[268] George Surtees, the Lowestoft B.U.F. District Leader, was also arrested at this time.[269] Looking back, Swan considered that the Blackshirt detentions of 1940 had been inevitable, although not necessarily for the most obvious reasons:

> I knew this was going to happen...When I got married [in 1938], I said to my wife "You know this is what's going to happen". So we just waited for it to happen and it did. Dunkirk took place, the country's in a state of panic...and they had to look as though they were doing something about it. We were the only sitting ducks there which they could pick off. So they made a bee-line for us, and the public was satisfied something was being done. That's the view I take. On the other hand... as the war developed and Dunkirk was the disaster it was, it is quite possible that a number of [B.U.F.] members could have been killed off by vigilantes...So, you see, it may be that we were spared, lots of us, spared that attack in the heat of that terrible time...One doesn't know...But, anyway,

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264 E.A.D.T., 6 June 1940, p. 5.
265 Creasy. Taped interview, 1995.
266 Ibid.; E.A.D.T., 6 June 1940, p. 5; HOAC Report. George Frederick Hoggarth. 17 August 1940.
267 HOAC Report. Raymond Adrian Smith. 15 August 1940. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office; Bury Free Press, 8 June 1940, p. 5. See also E.A.D.T., 6 June 1940, p. 5.
268 Lowestoft Journal, 8 June 1940, p. 2; Swan. Taped interview.
269 HO 45/23683. George Frederick Surtees.

the country was satisfied, and we were in.[270]

Swan's house was searched by the police, who took away his official records pertaining to the B.U.F. and the Oulton Broad Motor Boat Club (O.B.M.B.C.).[271] When interviewed by the police on 3 June 1940, Swan was questioned about allegations that local B.U.F. activists belonging to the O.B.M.B.C. were smuggling sensitive information to Germany in their boats when competing in races at Sternberger, near Munich.[272] Swan was suspected of supplying the Nazis with information about the local Observer Corp and the visits it had made to the R.A.F. base at Lower Heyford in Suffolk for calibration exercises.[273] In Swan's view, these rumours were being spread by left-wing trade unionists employed at a local ship-building yard.[274]

Surtees aroused official suspicion for a number of reasons. In December 1939, he had shown subversive printed material to "two reliable informants" and, five months later, gave two bank employees leaflets which advertised the New British Broadcasting Station.[275] His various German connections gave further cause for concern. A regular traveller to Germany in the late 1930s, Surtees also corresponded with Germans and, in July 1939, played host to a Hitler Youth group visiting England. In addition, his home contained a quantity of Nazi literature, flags and swastikas. Moreover, Surtees' collection of sensitive publications relating to the region and his association with a local railway guard fuelled speculation that he was compiling information which would help the Nazis in the event of an invasion.[276]

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[270] Swan. Taped interview.
[271] Swan, Memoir, p. 4. Swan was Secretary and Treasurer of the Oulton Broad Motor Boat Club from 1935 to 1940.
[272] Ibid..
[273] Ibid..
[274] Ibid..
[275] P.R.O. HO 45/23683. Statement of Case Against George Frederick Surtees. 26 July 1940. The New British Broadcasting Station leaflet was also distributed in Lowestoft.
[276] Ibid. According to Arthur Swan, local rumours circulated that Surtees, a long-standing member of the Norwich Aero Club, had taken aerial photographs of East Anglian airfields and passed them to the Nazis. Swan also stated that, under interrogation, the Lowestoft District Leader was accused of taking his son's pigeons over to Germany in racing boats so that they could fly back with messages from the Nazi authorities. Both Surtees and Swan vigorously protested their innocence. Swan, Memoir, p. 4; Swan. Taped interview.

Within Essex, the government's use of DR 18B (1A) during the summer of 1940 also led to the seizure of several Blackshirts who occupied prominent positions in the local B.U.F.. F.R. East, the Witham-based County Propaganda Officer, was one of the key Mosleyites in the region interned by the authorities at this time.[277] The former Epping District Leader, Frederic Ball, who served the Essex B.U.F. from spring 1938 as County Transport Organiser, was arrested by the police on 29 July 1940 at the Surrey bank where he then worked.[278] Ball's detention coincided with that of his closest friend and 'landlord', Walter D. Wragg, a married Woodford resident in his late thirties, who was the B.U.F. Regional Inspector for Essex.[279] Wragg earned a living working locally as a travelling salesman for a paint company.[280] Francis A.J. Osborn, the B.U.F.'s District Inspector for the ninth London Area, which contained most of the Blackshirt formations in south-west Essex, was also taken into custody.[281] Another detainee was Miss Louise A. King, the Blackshirt prospective parliamentary candidate for the Ilford Division and the B.U.F.'s Woman Canvass Organiser for Essex.[282]

A number of other local Essex officials were detained as well. DR 18B (1A) accounted for a string of serving and recent District Leaders, including C. West (Silvertown), Hugh J. Howard (East Ham), and Leonard S. Fenn (West Leyton).[283] The Blackshirt in charge of the West Ham Branch, Arthur Beavan, evaded detention "for a considerable period" by going on the run, but, eventually, he was also interned.[284] E.G., who had resigned as District leader of the Leytonstone B.U.F. in

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277 HOAC Supplementary Report. Frederick Robert East. 8 September 1941. This document was consulted on privileged access at the Home Office; F. Ball. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991. East applied to join the Home Guard before being detained on 17 June 1940.
278 Ball. Interview; P.R.O. HO 45/23767. Frederic Andre Ball.
279 Ibid..
280 Ball. Interview.
281 E.H.E., 28 June 1940, p. 1.
282 P.R.O. HO 45/25714. Schedule of people to be picked up; Heather Donovan, unpublished memoir of her internment under DR 18B (1A). King's address was given as 1, Pine Avenue, Ipswich.
283 C. Watts, 'It Has Happened Here: The experiences of a Political Prisoner in British Prisons and Concentration Camps during the Fifth Column panic of 1940/41' (Unpublished memoir, 1948), p. 73; T.M.. Taped interview; E.G.. Taped interview. See also F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'. University of Sheffield Library.
284 P.R.O. HO 45/25752/863022/30. New Scotland Yard List of Isle of Man 18B Detainees who "are thought to be likely to, and capable of, stirring up trouble against the Authorities". 26 September 1941.

March 1940 for business reasons, did not escape the attention of the authorities either. He was arrested on 30 July 1940 at his Forest Gate shop and taken to Plaistow police station.[285] Similarly, the former West Leyton District Leader, Ernie Forge, then serving as a Corporal in the Welsh Regiment, was also placed in detention under a DR 18B (1A) order.[286] The B.U.F. official in charge at Epping, L.B., was arrested in June 1940 following a political argument at his Bethnal Green workplace, in which he defended the King of Belgium against press accusations of betrayal. His opponent in this exchange subsequently informed the local police that L.B. was a 'fifth columnist', and this, rather than his Mosleyite connections, led to L.B.'s internment.[287] In addition, the Epping B.U.F.'s last two District Treasurers, Thomas Swan, a 45 year old insurance assessor from Woodford, and Thomas Barneveld, a laundry clerk in his early twenties, were also detained.[288]

Rank and file Blackshirts, and B.U.F. sympathisers, also fell victim to the 18B dragnet in the three counties. Several ordinary members or supporters of the King's Lynn B.U.F. were picked up at the beginning of June 1940, including Albert Edward Gore and George William Gore, two brothers who lived in the town and worked as cinematograph transport contractors.[289] Donald Ferlisi, a 29 year old King's Lynn Blackshirt, who worked as a bricklayer, was another detainee.[290] At the nearby village of Middleton, two more members of the District formation, sub-postmaster Arthur Stannard and local shopkeeper George Wilkins, were taken into custody.[291] W. Butler, a Norfolk shopkeeper, who joined the B.U.F. as a non-active member because of the

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285 E.G.. Taped interview.
286 F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'; information provided by F.O.M..
287 L.B.. Telephone interview.
288 Ibid.; E.G.. Taped interview; P.R.O. HO 45/23688/840647. Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at the Berystede Hotel, Ascot, on Monday, December 16th 1940. Thomas Harris Barneveld. At the time of his arrest in mid-June 1940, Barneveld was serving as an Aircraftsman in the Medical Statistical Office of the R.A.F. Station at Ruislip.
289 P.R.O. HO 45/23681. Albert Edward Gore; N.N.W.P., 8 June 1940, p. 4; F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'. Albert Gore had been a member of the King's Lynn District B.U.F. and George Gore a supporter.
290 HOAC Report. Donald Elijah Ferlisi. 22 October 1940.
291 N.N.W.P., 8 June 1940, p. 4; F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'.

Blackshirts' policy for the small trader, was also interned.[292] Another county case involved Albert Potter, a veteran of the Boer and First World Wars, who had spent time in the colonies.[293] After marrying a London secretary many years his junior, Potter bought a smallholding near Swaffham in Norfolk and opened a transport cafe. The latter, which was bedecked with Blackshirt posters and photographs, openly advertised the couple's membership of the B.U.F.. Both husband and wife were interned under DR 18B (1A) and separated from their infant son. In their absence, local "young 'patriots'" vandalised the cafe and the smallholding.[294]

Walter E. Birch, a builder from Norwich, was detained under DR 18B (1A) on 31 May 1940, by which time he was no longer a member of the local District B.U.F..[295] His wife, Josephine, was also arrested at the same time.[296] Another East Anglian interned under an 18B (1A) detention order was 64 year old George Sawyer, an associate of the Lowestoft B.U.F. District Leader, George Surtees. Sawyer, the owner of a local electric light business, lived at Wrentham in Suffolk and worked as a motor trader. His arrest took place on 4 June 1940.[297]

In Essex, the authorities also apprehended a small number of rank and file members. At least four individuals in this category belonged to the Epping B.U.F., including the south Woodford Mosleyite, Kenneth T. Dutfield, Martha Swan, the wife

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[292] P.R.O: HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 2.

[293] Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', pp. 1013-1014; 'Memo r.e. The British Union' by Oswald Hickson of Oswald Hickson Collier, 6, Surrey Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.. Correspondence and Papers of Richard Rapier Stokes (1897-1957), Box 13, File 47. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

[294] Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', p. 1013. According to Bellamy, Potter's health deteriorated during his detention, and he was taken from Ascot to a military hospital at Aldershot. Potter was subsequently released but died shortly afterwards.

[295] F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'; Suffer Little Children, (The 18B Publicity Council, 15 Woburn Square, W.C.1., n.d.).

[296] Ibid.. In accordance with regulations which prohibited the presence of children aged over one year old in prison, the Birchs' fifteen month old son was placed in a public institution. He was eventually returned to his mother almost a year later. Still in detention, Mrs Birch gave birth to a daughter on 27 January 1941, but this child died of whooping cough at the Port Erin Camp, Isle of Man, on 15 November 1941. See also Henry St. George, In Search of Justice (The 18B Publicity Council, 15 Woburn Square, W.C., n.d.), Case No. 11.

[297] Swan. Taped interview; P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 2.

of the former local District Treasurer, and Jeffrey Custance.[298] A fourth Epping District detainee was 21 year old Donald S. Chambers, a trumpeter in the B.U.F.'s London Drum Corps, who also held a Speaker's Warrant for the movement. Chambers lived at Grove Hill, south Woodford prior to joining the R.A.F. at the start of the Second World War. He was arrested at Uxbridge R.A.F. Depot by Special Branch officers in June 1940.[299] Rose Ford, of 166, Pall Mall, Leigh-on-Sea, and Frederick M.K. Lyall, a 21 year old architect's assistant from Thundersley attached to the Southend District B.U.F., were two more local Blackshirts who fell foul of DR 18B (1A)[300]

Several prominent Blackshirts in the area were either questioned or briefly held by the authorities but managed to avoid internment. According to the 'official' history of the B.U.F., public reaction to the evacuation at Dunkirk fuelled rumours that the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for the South-West Norfolk division, Miss L.M. Reeve, was a Nazi agent. Subsequently, she was taken into custody by soldiers but then released "after the usual search and interrogation".[301] When Lord Merton's Norfolk estate was taken over as part of a military training scheme, Reeve was required to leave her home, which was situated within the restricted zone. After taking over a new farm outside the designated area, she was informed that this property was also to be requisitioned for military purposes. Unable to bear the strain of local animosity and two evictions, Reeve committed suicide in one of her outbuildings in October 1950.[302]

The novelist and writer Henry Williamson was another well-known Norfolk Blackshirt who slipped through the 18B net after a brush with the authorities. Williamson's local B.U.F. activities and highly publicised pro-Mosley views ensured

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298 Kenneth T. Dutfield. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985. Dutfield was detained in January 1941; L.B.. Telephone interview; F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'.
299 L.B.. Telephone interview; information provided by F.O.M..
300 P.R.O. HO 45/25714. Schedule of people to be picked up; F.O.M., 'The Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List'; The Essex Newsman and Maldon Express, 20 January 1940, p. 1.
301 Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', p. 1008.
302 Ibid., p. 1009; documented information provided by F.O.M..

that he was treated with considerable suspicion by the villagers at Stiffkey where he farmed. His diary entry for 12 May 1940 observed that "the local rag and bone merchant" had approached one of the author's farm employees for "information or 'evidence' to have me put in prison".[303] Later in the month, he received a hostile reception at a meeting of the Stiffkey British Legion.[304] Local rumours circulated that the concrete roads Williamson had put down on his farm were there to facilitate a German invasion and a light he had installed to illuminate a stairway on his property was merely a way of sending messages to the Nazis. Williamson hardly dampened such speculation by painting the B.U.F.'s flash-in-a-circle symbol on his cottage wall.[305] Eventually, on Friday 14 June 1940, he was detained by the police: "Today at 2.45 p.m. four plain clothed detectives, armed, came to the house and arrested me under the Defence Act, Section 18B. They took me to Wells whilst others searched through the cottages, the granary, and all my boxes. I was locked in a little white-washed cell..."[306]

Williamson remained in custody at Wells police station until Monday 17 June, when he was taken by car to Norwich police station "where the Chief Constable, Capt. van Neck, said I was to be released, as nothing found against me".[307] Apparently, Williamson had been briefly incarcerated while police investigated a number of allegations made against him.

Similar cases also occurred in Essex. In May 1940, the District Treasurer at East Ham (1938-1940), T.M., was visited at his home by two members of the Special Branch, who interviewed him about his fascist beliefs. One of the officers returned the next day and persuaded T.M. to sign a prepared document renouncing his B.U.F. views. Thereafter, the East Ham Mosleyite had no further contact with the authorities.[308] P.F., a speaker for the Epping B.U.F. and a former District Leader for

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303 Henry Williamson. Quoted in A. Williamson, Henry Williamson: Tarka and the Last Romantic (Stroud: Allan Sutton Publishing, 1995), p. 233.
304 Ibid., p. 232.
305 Ibid., p. 233.
306 Ibid..
307 Ibid..
308 T.M.. Taped interview.

Walthamstow West, was dealt with in much the same vein. Following a Special Branch search of his Chingford residence, he was instructed to report every Monday to the local police station. A month later, however, this enforced weekly check-in was officially terminated, and the police informed P.F. that their investigation was now closed.[309]

A variety of factors help to explain why the 18B round-up of B.U.F. personnel and supporters in the three counties proceeded in such an inconsistent manner. Firstly, anomalies were always likely to occur because, as discussed earlier, much of the East Anglian movement was in a state of flux in 1939-1940. The B.U.F.'s temporary renewal of high-profile agricultural agitation in the region, the response to the Blackshirt Peace Campaign, coupled with reaction to the deteriorating international situation, and the impact of the military call-up, ensured that many local Mosleyite formations were locked into a process of constant change during this period. Consequently, the task of identifying and locating key B.U.F. officials and activists in the area became more difficult, which, in turn, widened the scope for indiscriminate action. Moreover, the atmosphere of alarm and suspicion generated by the Nazis' military advance across western Europe and the prospect of imminent invasion merely compounded the problem. A tragic illustration of the prevailing 'fifth column' mentality in mid-1940 was the suicide of Walter Arthur Eves, a general labourer residing at Maldon in Essex. Eves took his own life at the end of May 1940 because he was afraid that a rumour he had helped to spread concerning the supposed Blackshirt connections of two well-known local men would result in the loss of his job and legal action being taken against him.[310]

Secondly, government intelligence relating to the B.U.F.'s membership, particularly in the provinces, was far from comprehensive, and this deficiency prevented the authorities from compiling an accurate and current record of East Anglian Mosleyites. Certainly, the MI5 lists of B.U.F. officials and active Blackshirts

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309 P.F.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.
310 E.A.D.T., 7 June 1940, p. 5.

contained inaccuracies and omissions. Ironically, these security service sources were corroborated by the relevant Chief Constables in May 1940 in order to ensure that there was "no danger" of detention recommendations being based on "out of date" information.[311] The Norfolk list, for example, approved by Captain S. van Neck, the Chief Constable of Norwich, included John Smeaton-Stuart as a "Leading Official" of the county B.U.F., even though he had left the movement in July 1937 and had since rejoined the Conservative Party.[312] Consequently, despite having broken with Mosley almost three years before, the former East Anglian Organiser was arrested on 4 June 1940 and then interned.[313] Special Branch was obliged to rely partly on information about the B.U.F.'s membership provided by the Board of Deputies in September 1939.[314] However, although the Board claimed that the list of Blackshirts passed on named many individuals who were "quite unknown to the authorities", this record was also neither up-to-date nor complete.[315]

Just over 500 of the 753 people detained under DR 18B (1A) were apprehended on the recommendation of the local Chief Constable concerned.[316] A proportion of these police requests appeared to be both arbitrary and indiscriminate, even though the Home Office issued a circular to Chief Constables in June 1940 urging restraint.[317] This document stressed that there was "no intention" of ordering a general round-up of B.U.F. members and pointed out that detention under DR 18B (1A) was

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311 P.R.O. TS 27/493. Major General Sir Vernon Kell, Box No. 500, Parliament Street B. O., London, S.W.1. Letter to the Home Secretary. 31 May 1940.
312 Ibid..
313 P.R.O. TS 27/493. Captain S. van Neck, Chief Constable, Chief Constable's Office, County Constabulary, Norwich. Letter to the Under-Secretary of State, Home Office. 11 June 1940.
314 B.D.B.J. C6/9/2/1. S. Saloman, 'Now It Can Be Told'. According to Saloman's account, 'Captain X', a 'mole' inside Mosley's movement, provided the Board of Deputies with a full Blackshirt membership list and regular information on B.U.F. activities. The agent was described as an Irish ex-officer with strong Sinn Fein sympathies. A.W. Brian Simpson contests Saloman's version, claiming that the informant left the B.U.F. in 1937 and the Board did not possess a comprehensive record of Blackshirt members. However, Simpson does not refer to any sources in support of his argument. See Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, p. 191, footnote 117.
315 Ibid..
316 Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, pp. 190-191. 216 of the 753 DR 18B (1A) detention orders were requested by MI5, 20-30 came from Special Branch in conjunction with MI5, and the remainder were issued on the Chief Constables' recommendations.
317 P.R.O. MEPO 21/6433. Home Office circular to Chief Constables. 14 June 1940. Quoted in Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious, p. 191.

reserved for "active leaders" and those Blackshirts who might be engaged in "specially mischievous activities".[318] In reality, these policy guidelines were not uniformly adhered to by local constabularies, and, ultimately, the fate of some B.U.F. members and Mosleyite sympathisers hinged on the attitude of the senior police officer involved. Such inconsistency may partly explain why the Wrentham motor trader George Sawyer was detained and Malcolm Humphery of Lowestoft avoided being taken into custody. Both men were B.U.F. sympathisers on personal terms with George Surtees, the Lowestoft District Leader, and both had participated in low-level Blackshirt activity, such as attending local propaganda events and selling copies of Action. Yet, whereas Sawyer was picked up by the Lowestoft police in June 1940, Humphery, who was also part of the Blackshirt coterie in the Oulton Broad Motor Boat Club, was merely questioned by local officers after the collapse of the Low Countries and told to desist from associating with Surtees and others.[319]

Thirdly, enlistment in the services, although no guarantee against detention, seems to have safeguarded certain Blackshirts from the area. The District Leader and District Treasurer at Norwich both joined up at the beginning of the war and were not arrested.[320] John Garnett, the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for the Harwich Division, was in the Merchant Navy by 1940 and was also apparently ignored by the authorities even though he had held senior positions at N.H.Q..[321] Another former Essex District official, R.W., was similarly overlooked despite his active role in the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign during the 'phoney war' period, and the fact that, thereafter, he made no secret of his Mosleyite affiliations when serving as a gunner in the Royal Artillery.[322] Looking back, he fully expected to be part of the 18B round-up:

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318 Ibid..
319 Swan. Taped interview; P.R.O. TS 27/493. In the High Court of Justice King's Bench Division. Before Mr. Justice Tucker. Stuart v. Anderson and Another. Royal Courts of Justice, Wednesday, 25 June 1941. Evidence First Day; P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 2.
320 P.R.O. TS 27/493. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6, Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.
321 Information provided by F.O.M..
322 R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview; R.W.. Completed questionnaire. R.W. served in the Royal Artillery

> I was Propaganda Officer for Walthamstow [West] for a while. I was a Blackshirt since 1935...I'd just come back from Germany. I was carrying Tomorrow We Live in my kit bag. Everybody knew it. All the officers knew it...I'm allowed to go scot-free. Why? Is it because I'm so open and not being cagey, or what? Or do they think I'm a raving lunatic? Whatever it was, I certainly didn't get picked up and I'm still asking the same question today. What justice! I've never seen anything so ridiculous in my life. I think they must have got a big...list, a pin and just stuck it in and said "We'll have that one". And that was it.[323]

Fourthly, the extraordinary omission of Dorothy, Viscountess Downe, the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for North Norfolk, raises the distinct possibility that connections with the British Establishment could also afford a measure of protection. It is inconceivable that the authorities were unaware of her strong, publicly-stated attachment to the Mosleyite cause. Downe had been a Blackshirt activist since 1937, and her work for the B.U.F. locally attracted considerable interest in the Norfolk press. As a result, she became the most prominent Mosleyite in the county. Her apparent immunity from interrogation and arrest subsequently prompted one M.P. to make allegations of discrimination in the House of Commons.[324] In July 1940, Downe told the Daily Express that Britain should continue the war, but also stated that she remained a fascist.[325]

Specific cases, involving the arrest of former and current rank and file B.U.F. members, indicate some of the criteria used by the authorities during the DR 18B operation. Walter Birch, the ex-Norwich Blackshirt, and his wife Josephine were arrested because the latter, although possessing British nationality by marriage, was German-born.[326] Martha Swan's German background also appeared to be the reason

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15th Scottish Division from 1940 to 1946.

323 R. W.. F.O.M. taped interview.

324 Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol. 367, 1940: 839. The M.P. for Ipswich, Richard Stokes, referred to Downe as a "notorious Fascist" who "happens also to be a relation of a high member of the peerage".

325 Viscountess Downe. Quoted in L.N.C.P., 23 July 1940, p. 12.

326 Suffer Little Children (The 18B Publicity Council, 15 Woburn Square, W.C.1., n.d.). Josephine Birch was detained for being of "hostile origin" and Walter Birch for "hostile association".

why she and her husband, the former Epping B.U.F. District Treasurer, Thomas Swan, were placed in detention.[327] Another interned Epping Blackshirt, Kenneth T. Dutfield, probably came to the attention of the authorities on account of the long letters he wrote to the local press in the late 1930s extolling the Nazi regime.[328] Advertising pro-fascist political views at such an unfavourable time may also have sealed the fate of Frederick M.K. Lyall, who appeared before a Conscientious Objectors Tribunal at Southwark in January 1940. At this hearing, the Southend District member confirmed his formal links with the B.U.F. and maintained that Britain should negotiate peace terms with Hitler to preserve the Empire. Lyall's application was refused, and he was placed on the Military Service register.[329] One of the most bizarre and apparently arbitrary detentions concerned W. Butler, the Norfolk shopkeeper and non-active Blackshirt, who was interested only in the B.U.F.'s policy for the small trader.[330] Butler bore a physical resemblance to Goering and, according to Richard Stokes, then M.P. for Ipswich, "the chief reason for his arrest seems to be that old ladies in his neighbourhood every time they walked into his shop shouted 'Heil Hermann!.'"[331]

These inconsistencies and anomalies help to explain the uneven pattern of arrests. At present, there is no evidence to suggest that any other B.U.F. official or member in the three counties was detained. This left several Districts, including Romford and Walthamstow West, apparently unscathed. Conversely, for reasons which are not entirely clear, the King's Lynn and Epping formations appeared to be the principal local victims of the DR 18B round-up. Eight members or supporters, including one woman, were detained at King's Lynn and a similar number of

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327 L.B.. Telephone interview; information provided by F.O.M..
328 See W.L.C.G., 29 July 1938, p. 5, 12 August 1938, p. 12, 16 September 1938, p. 11. The authorities regarded Dutfield as a very intelligent Nazi supporter who "would do anything against the interests of this country". See P.R.O. HO 45/25752/863022/30. New Scotland Yard List of Isle of Man 18B Detainees who "are thought to be likely to, and capable of, stirring up trouble against the Authorities". 26 September 1941.
329 The Essex Newsman and Maldon Express, 20 January 1940, p. 1.
330 P.R.O. HO45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 2.
331 Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol. 367, 1940: 839.

Mosleyites were arrested at Epping.[332] In comparison, only five Blackshirts currently or previously attached to the Bethnal Green North East B.U.F., the largest District in the country, were incarcerated.[333]

The government's use of DR 18B against the B.U.F. and other organisations was based partly on the assumption that a pro-Nazi 'Fifth Column' was operating in Britain, but little evidence of domestic fascist subversion was uncovered. The authorities were unable to demonstrate that the Blackshirt leadership had ever initiated, or indulged in, unlawful acts. Moreover, the movement's official statements in 1939-1940 discouraged members from breaking the law and stressed the B.U.F.'s loyalty to the Crown. Similarly, although the promotion of the B.U.F.'s anti-war platform by local Blackshirt speakers and activists did not always stay within the law, neither the Peace Campaign itself nor the excesses and illegality associated with it constituted fifth column activity. Indeed, by November 1940, Churchill revealed that he regarded the existence of an internal threat with "increasing scepticism", and, in the second volume of his history of the Second World War, he maintained that no fifth column existed in Britain.[334] Churchill's assessment has been endorsed more recently by several detailed academic studies, which conclude that "the whole idea of a fascist fifth column was a figment of the imagination - a ludicrous fantasy".[335] It is now clear that, when responding to international and domestic events during the crisis of mid-1940, the government greatly exaggerated the potential for such activity and resorted to drastic 'safety first' measures against suspect groups to remove any possibility of a breach in national security and to bolster civilian morale. In the process,

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[332] P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 3. At Epping, L.B., Thomas Swan, Martha Swan, Thomas Barneveld, Kenneth T. Dutfield, Jeffrey Custance and Donald Chambers were detained. Two others attached to the Epping Branch, Frederic Ball and Walter Wragg, were also interned.

[333] Linehan, East London for Mosley, p.181. In this connection it is interesting to note that eight members of the Lincoln B.U.F. were detained under DR 18B (1A); information provided by F.O.M..

[334] Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol. 365, 1940: 1248; Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War Volume II: Their Finest Hour (London: Cassell, 1955), p. 246.

[335] Thurlow, Fascism In Britain, p. 198. See also Simpson, In The Highest Degree Odious and N. Longmate, If Britain Had Fallen (London: Hutchinson, 1972).

many entirely innocent Blackshirts were unjustly detained and stigmatised as unpatriotic liabilities. The shadow of DR 18B also obscured the honourable contribution loyal Mosleyites made to the British war effort.

Nonetheless, although the vast majority of British fascists put their country first, a small number of Blackshirts from the region did indulge in illegal and subversive activity during the war. At least two former members of the local movement, Eric Pleasants and Roy Walter Purdy, committed treason. After leaving the Norwich B.U.F. in 1939, Pleasants, a pacifist, initially intended to register as a conscientious objector but eventually became a farm labourer in Jersey in May 1940 under a Peace Pledge Union Scheme to provide the Channel Islands with agricultural workers.[336] Once the Nazis had occupied the Channel Islands in July 1940, he survived for a time by going on the run and looting properties abandoned by evacuees. However, Pleasants' involvement in a three-man attempt to escape by boat to England led to his capture in late 1940. The German military authorities imprisoned the ex-Norfolk Blackshirt for six months at Dijon before sending him to the civilian internment camp at Kreuzberg. Eventually, in March 1944, he was accorded formal prisoner-of-war status and transferred to Marlag/Milag, where he joined the British Free Corps (B.F.C.). This drastic course of action was not impelled by ideological motives but was driven instead by Pleasants' determination to avoid combat of any kind and to see out the war years as comfortably as possible:

> I thought that joining [the B.F.C.] would get me out of a jam...I mean, I reckoned we'd never be made to fight, not against our own boys at least. We were good propaganda for the Germans and I figured that had got to be worth more food, better conditions and a few women! You never got that in the camp. All that rubbish about a National Socialist crusade against Bolshevism, I mean, it meant nothing to me.[337]

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336 Pleasants. Interview; E. Chapman, I Killed To Live: The Story of Eric Pleasants (London: Cassell, 1957).
337 Pleasants. Interview.

Within the B.F.C., Pleasants' main duty was to organise physical training sessions for his fellow recruits. He was also selected to box for the S.S.. In February 1945, the former Mosleyite bigamously married Annaliese Nietschner, who worked as secretary to the B.F.C.'s liaison officer, SS-Obersturmfuhrer Dr. Walther Kuhlich. As the Red Army closed in on Berlin, the newly-weds escaped through the city's underground tunnels and sewerage network, eventually reaching Annaliese's parents' home near Dresden, where they went into hiding for several months. Afterwards, Pleasants earned a modest income entertaining the Soviet forces stationed there with a strongman act. In 1947, he and Annaliese were taken into custody by the Russians and charged with espionage. After their arrest, the couple lost contact and were never to be reunited. Sentenced to 25 years hard labour by a Soviet military tribunal, Pleasants served a total of seven years at the Workuta and Inta camps in the Russian Arctic before being sent back to England in July 1954.[338] On his return, the British authorities did not institute legal proceedings against him because of his wartime association with the B.F.C..

The region's other known renegade was Roy Walter Purdy, a resident of 24, Westrow Drive, Barking, who, apparently, belonged to the B.U.F. between 1932 and 1935.[339] According to Purdy's own account, this included an eighteen month period in 1934-1935 as a member of the Ilford District. On 18 December 1945, the 27 year old former Essex Mosleyite was sentenced to death for high treason after being convicted of making pro-Nazi radio broadcasts and producing propaganda material for the Germans during his time as a prisoner-of-war in Germany. Prior to his capture by the Nazis in June 1940, Purdy had served as a naval engineering officer on board H.M. Armed Cruiser Van Dyck. MI5 also reported that, once in German custody, Purdy met with William Joyce and may have joined the S.S.. An appeal against the death penalty was dismissed on 23 January 1946, but Purdy was later reprieved, and his sentence

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338 Times, 9 July 1954, p. 8, 10 July 1954, p. 5, 12 July 1954, p. 4.
339 P.R.O. HO 45/25798. MI5 Report Re: Roy Walter Purdy, alias Robert Wallace. 4 October 1945; P.R.O. HO 45/25798. Statement of Sub-Lieutenant (E) Walter Purdy. 29 May 1945; Daily Herald, 22 December 1945. Press cutting in B.D.B.J. C6/9/3/2. Walter Purdy.

commuted to life imprisonment. After his release in December 1954, he apparently settled in Germany.[340]

Several lesser cases of illegal or questionable wartime activity also involved current or former Blackshirts from the area. Charles Max Sakritz, a 30 year old Anglo-German living at 4, Margery Park Road, Forest Gate was one local fascist who fell foul of the Defence Regulations. Described as possessing "very strong pro-German sympathies", Sakritz, a home-based jobbing tailor by trade, had joined the B.U.F. for a brief period in 1939.[341] At the end of April 1940, he was sentenced to one month's hard labour and fined ten pounds for defacing a government poster headed 'Don't Help The Enemy', which had been attached to an empty commercial property in Upton Lane, West Ham.[342]

On 4 June 1940, Claude Francis Goddard Chead, a 45 year old Mosleyite who ran a drapery business in Mundesley, Norfolk, appeared before a special sitting of the Cromer Police Court. He was charged with being found the day before in possession of "a diary admitted to be in his own manuscript recording measures for the defence of certain places, contrary to the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939, Regulation 3".[343] Goddard Chead was remanded in custody for over a month until the Home Office had completed its inquiries into the matter.[344] Eventually, on 8 July 1940, the charge was dropped, and Goddard Chead, after being released from prison, was barred from the protected area in question and required to report each day at the police station nearest to his new place of residence.[345]

Later in July 1940, Phyllis Mary Bateman, a 30 year old Post Office accounts clerk residing at Old Road, Clacton, was sentenced to three months imprisonment for

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340 A. Weale, Renegades: Hitler's Englishmen (London: Warner Books, 1995), p. 195.
341 Daily Herald, 30 April 1940, p. 5; S.E., 26 April 1940, p. 15, 3 May 1940, p. 11.
342 Ibid.. Sakritz, a British-born subject, was the son of a British mother and German father. He was raised in Germany between the ages of 7 and 22. After his arrest, police found fascist publications, anti-Semitic literature, pro-Nazi cartoons and cardboard swastikas covered in silver paper at his residence.
343 E.D.P., 5 June 1940, p. 5.
344 Ibid., 18 June 1940, p. 5, 2 July 1940, p. 3.
345 Ibid., 9 July 1940, p. 2.

attempting to cause disaffection amongst armed service personnel likely to lead to a breach of duty.[346] Considered to be a follower of Oswald Mosley and Bernard Shaw, Bateman had engaged three soldiers in conversation at Clacton earlier in the summer on the subject of the war. During this discussion, she expressed her admiration for the B.U.F.'s peace policy and questioned the wisdom of continuing the military conflict with Germany. In September 1940, Essex Quarter Sessions Appeal Court upheld Bateman's conviction but varied the sentence to a fine of twenty pounds with fifteen guineas costs.[347]

In June 1941, Elsie Orrin, the anti-Semitic Leyton Blackshirt, was sentenced to five years penal servitude at Hertfordshire Assizes for "endeavouring to cause among certain persons in His Majesty's services disaffection likely to lead to breaches of their duty".[348] Orrin was incarcerated following allegations that, during a conversation with two soldiers at a public house in Little Easton, Hertfordshire, she claimed that the British government was corrupt and controlled by Jewish financiers, described Hitler as "a good ruler, a better man than Mr. Churchill" and told the servicemen that they should remove the present administration.[349]

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346 Colchester Gazette, 24 July 1940, p. 1.
347 Ibid., 18 September 1940, p. 6.
348 Unidentified report, 25 June 1941. Press cutting in B.D.B.J. C6/9/3/2. Elsie Orrin.
349 Ibid..

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE EAST ANGLIAN B.U.F. 1933-1940

1. Introduction

Having examined the organisational and political development of the B.U.F. in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex between 1933 and 1940, it is now necessary to investigate the local movement's support base. This chapter uses a wide range of written and oral sources to provide an extensive and detailed analysis of Mosley's following in the three counties. In the first section, Blackshirt recruitment levels are assessed in the light of Webber's suggestion that the East Anglian B.U.F. was in terminal decline after 1934. Subsequent sections consider the sociology of local fascism based on a regional sample of 230 members and other adherents.

2. Levels of Blackshirt Recruitment in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex 1934-1938

The extent and nature of Blackshirt membership during the 1930s constitute two of the most intriguing issues in the history of the B.U.F.. Several of the movement's officials provided contemporary or retrospective estimates of the B.U.F.'s strength. Mosley rarely discussed such matters, but, in November 1936, he informed the German magazine *Lokelanzeiger* that the organisation had 500,000 members.[1] In later life, the ex-Blackshirt leader remained reticent, confining himself to the observation that the "rise of our movement continued throughout the full seven years until 1939 with only temporary fluctuations".[2] Looking back from the vantage point of the early 1960s, two former National Headquarters (N.H.Q.) officials, Robert Forgan and A.K. Chesterton, offered more modest totals. Forgan recalled membership peaking at c.40,000 in 1934 and maintained that, in the October of that year, the B.U.F. possessed an activist core of 5-10,000.[3] By 1938, according to Chesterton, 100,000

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1 Manchester Guardian, 23 November 1936, p. 12.
2 Oswald Mosley, My Life (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970), p. 311.
3 Colin Cross, The Fascists in Britain (London: Barrie and Rockcliffe, 1961), p. 131; R. Benewick, The Fascist Movement In Britain (London: Allen Lane, 1972), p. 110.

had passed through the organisation, and the membership then stood at 3,000 active and 15,000 inactive adherents.[4] More recently, these lower estimates have been broadly endorsed by an ex-B.U.F. Cadet Leader from Essex, who was based for a time at N.H.Q.:

> I know more than most people because, while I was working in the Youth Movement, I was a sort of H.Q. official. Although I had a full-time job, I used to go to H.Q. in the evening, and I was able to use the office of the editor of the paper as my office. As a result of that, I think I've got a better idea than most people of what the membership was. I consider the figure ...of 50,000 in 1934 to be absolutely accurate...I think that throughout its existence it had about 9,000 active members, not the same people all the time...I think it had about 10,000 non-active members, again people moving backwards and forwards between the two. I think it had a number of secret members - I couldn't guess how many ... for obvious reasons - but there was a substantial number of secret members.[5]

Outside the fascist ranks too, a diverse range of opinions circulated concerning the level of Blackshirt recruitment. In February 1934, the T.U.C. thought it "unlikely" that the number of paid-up Mosleyites totalled 40,000.[6] Six months later, the Labour Party considered that the B.U.F.'s membership had never exceeded 20,000 and contended that "at the present time it is probably much less".[7] During the same year, parliamentary estimates put Mosley's support at the 200-250,000 mark.[8] Speculation in the national press in 1934 also produced a clutch of unsubstantiated figures. The News Chronicle contended that 17,700 belonged to the movement, the Daily Herald spoke of 35,000 Blackshirts, and the Observer gave limited credence to the B.U.F.'s 'optimistic' claim that the movement had 500,000 recruits.[9] The Evening News went

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[4] Ibid..
[5] E.G.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
[6] T.U.C. General Council Research Department, 'Fascism in Great Britain' (21 February 1934), p. 10. MSS 292/743/3. Modern Records Centre (M.R.C.), University of Warwick.
[7] National Council of Labour and the Co-operative Union, Statement on Fascism at Home and Abroad (London: National Council of Labour and the Co-operative Union, August 1934), p. 15.
[8] Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), Vol. 289, 1934: 1770, Vol. 290, 1934: 2032.
[9] Cross, The Fascists in Britain, p. 131; Observer, 21 January 1934, p. 17. The Observer, whilst noting that many experienced political commentators did not accept that there were 500,000 Blackshirts, conceded that the B.U.F.'s membership was "large - far larger than many people believe".

much further, arguing that, within a period of eighteen months, the B.U.F. had grown "from a handful to an organisation millions strong".[10] Another contemporary assessment suggested that the B.U.F. had attracted 17,500 members and an additional 100,000 more loosely attached sympathisers.[11] Writing in 1935, the left-wing commentator, W.A. Rudlin, noted that the B.U.F. appeared to be "gaining ground ... very slowly" and probably had a membership of "not much more than 100,000".[12]

This plethora of contemporary and eye-witness reports concerning Blackshirt numbers exhibited two striking features. Firstly, there was no general agreement on the extent of B.U.F. recruitment during the 1930s. Secondly, as none of these accounts based their conclusions on extensive empirical evidence, they remained exercises in conjecture.

Colin Cross, author of the first 'objective' history of British fascism, which was published in 1961, put forward an impressionistic interpretation of the B.U.F.'s development.[13] In his view, the movement was unable to sustain the level of support achieved in the period up to July 1934. After Rothermere had abandoned Mosley's cause, Cross argued, the B.U.F. went into irreversible decline as the membership ebbed away during the rest of the decade. From 1938, the rate of departure apparently gathered pace, leaving the organisation with just 1,000 or so active Blackshirts by 1940. Following Cross, Robert Benewick's later study also concluded that the B.U.F. achieved its maximum support under Rothermere's patronage, before being locked into a downward spiral after 1934.[14]

This broad consensus on the pattern of Blackshirt recruitment was broken in 1975 when Robert Skidelsky challenged the view that the B.U.F. entered a period of terminal decline after 1934.[15] Using a ratio of one active to three non-active

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10 Evening News, 26 May 1934, p. 4.
11 J. Strachey, 'Fascism in Great Britain', New Republic, LXXVIII, 2 May 1934, p. 331. Strachey's figures were allegedly based on information and internal documents sold by ex-Blackshirts.
12 W.A. Rudlin, The Growth of Fascism in Great Britain (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 123.
13 Cross, The Fascists in Britain, pp. 130-132.
14 Benewick, The Fascist Movement In Britain, p. 110.
15 R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), pp. 331-332.

Blackshirts, Skidelsky estimated that Mosley's movement briefly attracted a national membership of 40,000 between January and July 1934, partly due to Rothermere's favourable newspaper coverage.[16] This level of support collapsed dramatically following the press lord's withdrawal and the hostile public reaction to the violence which marred the Olympia meeting. Contrary to Cross and Benewick though, Skidelsky contended that, after 1934, the movement, far from being a spent force, was able to recover and may have had 40,000 members once again by 1939. Skidelsky's revisionist interpretation was based on two developments apparently neglected by earlier studies, namely the success of the B.U.F. in east London from 1935 to 1938 and the mobilisation of anti-war sentiment during the 1939 Blackshirt Peace Campaign. Six years later, Skidelsky scaled down his membership estimate for 1939 to 20-25,000.[17]

In 1984, Gerry Webber was able to take advantage of recently released government and Special Branch reports from the 1930s to produce the most sophisticated and comprehensive account of B.U.F. recruitment patterns to date.[18] Basing his analysis on the assumption that the ratio of active to non-active members was 1:1.5, Webber also concluded that the Blackshirt movement was regaining its strength after 1935, although his findings indicated a less pronounced recovery than Skidelsky originally suggested.[19] Webber estimated that during the first half of 1934 the B.U.F. membership swelled from 15-20,000 to 40-50,000 before contracting sharply to a low point of 5,000 by October 1935. From then on, Blackshirt numbers steadily increased, reaching 10,000 by March 1936, 15,500 by November 1936, 16,500 by December 1938, and 22,500 by c.September 1939. In a subsequent study, Richard Thurlow praised this more rigorous and nuanced account of Blackshirt recruitment but

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[16] Skidelsky's ratio of 3:1, drawing on statements made by Robert Forgan, assumes that the B.U.F. peaked at 40,000 members, and by October 1934 had between 5,000 and 10,000 activists.
[17] R. Skidelsky, 'Great Britain' in S.J. Woolf (ed.), Fascism in Europe (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 275.
[18] G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 19 (1984), pp. 575-606.
[19] Webber derived his 1:1.5 ratio from an MI5 Report of November 1936 which revealed that the B.U.F. then had 6,500 active and 9,000 passive members. See Public Records Office, Home Office series (P.R.O. HO) 144/21062/403-407. The Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom, Excluding Northern Ireland. Report No. 9. Developments from August 1936 to November 1936.

considered that Webber's national membership figures required a "small downward revision".[20]

T.P. Linehan's pioneering research into the B.U.F. in east London and south-west Essex also relied on government and Special Branch reports which were declassified in the 1980s to sketch out the broad contours of the shifting Blackshirt membership base in London as a whole and the East End in particular between 1935 and 1939.[21] Using Webber's active-non-active ratio of 1:1.5 and Special Branch data which reported that London Branches accounted for half the national membership, Linehan was able to chart the B.U.F.'s progress in the capital. According to his calculations, Blackshirt membership in London totalled 2,750 in late 1935, 5,000 in early 1936, and 8,125 towards the end of the year. After slipping back slightly to 7,250 by late 1937, the upward momentum was renewed as support climbed first to 9,000 and then 11,250 in c.1939. Linehan extended his analysis by deriving illustrative figures for the East End based on the "impressionistic assumption" that, between late 1935 and 1938, 70-80 per cent of the capital's Blackshirts were attached to east London formations.[22]

TABLE 1
MEMBERSHIP OF THE B.U.F. IN THE EAST END, LATE 1935 - LATE 1938
(Calculated on the basis of approximately 70-80 per cent of the London membership)

Approximate date	Active	Non-active	Combined
Late 1935			1,925-2,200
Early 1936	1,400-1,600	2,100-2,400	3,500-4,000
Mid to late 1936	2,275-2,600	3,413-3,900	5,688-6,500
Late 1937	2,100-2,400	3,045-3,480	5,075-5,800
Late 1938			6,300-7,200

(Adapted from T.P. Linehan, East London for Mosley, London: Frank Cass, 1996, Table 2, p. 198)

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[20] R. Thurlow, Fascism In Britain: A History, 1918-1985 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 124.
[21] T. P. Linehan, East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40 (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 197-199.
[22] Ibid., p. 199.

For a number of reasons, any attempt to provide corresponding totals for East Anglia is fraught with difficulty. The N.H.Q. national membership registers, which were based on Branch returns, have never been released. These records were almost certainly confiscated by the Security Services in May 1940 and, even if still in existence, probably relate exclusively to Division 1 or active members.[23] Consequently, this material would offer little insight into the movement's numerically more important non-active membership. Moreover, it is evident that many District officials in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex either concealed or destroyed their Branch membership registers in order to prevent such sensitive documents from falling into the hands of the authorities during the DR 18B round-up.[24] Few of these valuable sources have since come to light. Investigations into the B.U.F. conducted by the Labour Party and the Board of Deputies of British Jews in the 1930s also reveal little about the overall development of the East Anglian movement.[25]

Furthermore, the contemporary Home Office and Special Branch records currently available to the historian do not contain much detailed information about the progress of the B.U.F. in the eastern counties from 1935.[26] Indeed, having consulted these official sources, Webber concluded that the East Anglian B.U.F. attracted a peak membership of approximately 2,500 during the Rothermere interlude, but then "initial interest waned rapidly and probably permanently after 1934".[27] However, information gleaned from declassified government and police files, the contemporary regional press, Labour Party sources, B.U.F. newspapers and interviews with ex-Blackshirts, not only facilitates the calculation of tentative membership figures for the region between 1934

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[23] On this point see Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 332.
[24] Several ex-Blackshirt interviewees mentioned this in conversation with the author. During the phoney war period, the Eye B.U.F. District Leader buried his Branch records in a field, the East Ham District Treasurer destroyed the Blackshirt register in his possession, and the Epping District Leader gave a number of local membership cards to a non-active Mosleyite for safekeeping.
[25] Replies to Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire of 12 June 1934. LP/FAS/34; Board of Deputies of British Jews (B.D.B.J.) C6 series.
[26] Only a small amount of information relating to the B.U.F. in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex is to be found in the P.R.O. HO 45, 144 and 283 series.
[27] Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', p. 583. See also p. 589 and p. 599.

and 1938 but also suggests that Webber's picture of the inexorable decline of the B.U.F. in eastern England from 1935 needs to be revised.

The formative stage of the B.U.F.'s development in East Anglia was characterised by a period of expansion.[28] Boosted, temporarily, by the Daily Mail's pro-Blackshirt campaign, Mosley's early agricultural speeches in the area, the B.U.F.'s intervention in the East Anglian 'tithe war', and the efforts of local fascist pioneers, such as Douglas Gunson and Lieutenant-Colonel H.E. Crocker, the movement enjoyed several months of sustained, if geographically patchy, growth in eastern England until mid-1934. By then, numerous Branches had been established throughout Norfolk, Suffolk and provincial Essex, including sizeable formations at King's Lynn, Norwich, Brightlingsea and Maldon.

During the latter part of 1934 and for most of 1935, the Blackshirt presence in the area was drastically curtailed as Rothermere withdrew the support of his press empire, economic conditions gradually improved, and the impact of fascist anti-tithe agitation faded. Arriving in East Anglia in 1935 to take over as the senior Blackshirt official in Norfolk, John Smeaton-Stuart discovered that B.U.F. organisation in the region had been reduced to "marks on a map".[29] Internal problems caused the King's Lynn B.U.F. to collapse towards the end of 1934, and there was little in the way of Blackshirt activity at Norwich for the first eight months of the following year. Several other Norfolk formations, such as those at Hunstanton, Attleborough, North Walsham and Diss, also appeared to languish after the initial surge of 1933-1934. A similar pattern could be observed in Suffolk, where early groupings at Ipswich, Beccles and Bury St. Edmunds seemed to lose impetus as well. Furthermore, in a survey of the B.U.F. between March and October 1935, the authorities reported that the Essex movement then possessed just 168 members and was "generally on the decline".[30]

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[28] See Chapters Two-Six for a detailed discussion of the B.U.F.'s organisational development and political progress in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex between 1933 and 1940.
[29] P.R.O. HO 283/64/33. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6, Burlington Gardens, W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.
[30] P.R.O. HO 45/25385/47. The Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom, Excluding Northern

From this low point in late 1935, it seems plausible to suggest that the B.U.F. staged a modest recovery in parts of eastern England up to the end of 1938 or the beginning of 1939. The start of this process coincided with the general upturn in the movement's fortunes, which accompanied the B.U.F.'s 'Mind Britain's Business' campaign over the Abyssinian crisis.[31] Fascist efforts to mobilise support in the South-West Norfolk constituency during 1935 culminated in the formation of an East Dereham Branch in the autumn and led to local press reports that the B.U.F. presence in the west of the county in particular was "stronger than generally supposed".[32] Mosley's address at Norwich market place before a crowd of 10,000 on 27 October 1935 was claimed to be the largest provincial meeting the Blackshirt leader had so far held and was hailed as signalling the "beginning of the breakthrough".[33]

Smeaton-Stuart's endeavours in 1936-1937, first as National Organising Officer for Norfolk and then as Area Organiser for East Anglia, consolidated this apparent upswing by galvanising the regional movement and bringing in new recruits.[34] Moreover, it would be reasonable to assume that the publicity surrounding Viscountess Downe's conversion to the B.U.F. in 1937 and her subsequent political work for the Mosleyite cause in the locality also improved the Blackshirts' position in north Norfolk. Certainly, there was speculation within Conservative circles that her adoption as the B.U.F. prospective parliamentary candidate for the North Norfolk division could secure up to 3,000 votes for the fascists at the next election.[35] In addition, the Norwich and King's Lynn Districts resumed propaganda activities on a regular basis from late 1935 or early 1936.

Ireland. Report No. VI. Developments from March 1935 to October 1935.

31 Richard Reynell Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley' (Unpublished unabridged manuscript, 1958-1968), Chapter 25.

32 Eastern Daily Press (E.D.P.), 24 October 1935, p. 8.

33 Richard Reynell Bellamy. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1985. Mosley made this remark to Bellamy at the Norwich meeting.

34 P.R.O. HO 283/64/31-46. Home Office Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against Orders of Internment. Notes of a meeting held at 6, Burlington Gardens W.1. on Tuesday 10th September 1940. John Smeaton-Stuart.

35 Norfolk News and Weekly Press (N.N.W.P.), 27 November 1937, p. 4.

Webber's tentative notion of a progressive B.U.F. decline in East Anglia after 1934 is also difficult to reconcile with the fact that the two largest and most active Suffolk formations were not established until c.1936. Led by committed, affluent and locally-influential Blackshirts, the Eye and Woodbridge Districts continued to propagate the fascist message throughout the subsequent period. In this context, it is also worth noting that Ronald Creasy, District Leader at Eye, was elected to the Eye town council in November 1938 as a B.U.F. candidate.[36] Furthermore, from its inception in 1935 until the Munich crisis, the Lowestoft B.U.F. was able to retain its membership intact.[37]

Fascism did not die out in provincial Essex after 1934 either, despite an evident general downturn in the local movement's fortunes. Although almost certainly reliant on smaller numbers than before, several county formations, including the Maldon, Harwich, Colchester and Southend Districts, continued to hold meetings and other propaganda events in the later 1930s. In addition, from 1935, Blackshirt groups of indeterminate size and longevity were established in other outlying Essex areas such as Saffron Walden, Thundersley, and Grays to disseminate the Mosleyite message.[38]

Impressionistic evidence relating to the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign and Blackshirt involvement in the East Anglian agricultural agitation of 1938-1939, indicates that the eastern counties movement probably benefited from another small influx of support towards the end of the decade.[39] Former Blackshirts recalled that the Eye and Norwich formations attracted new members at this stage because of the B.U.F.'s anti-war policy. Fascist attempts to recruit discontented elements of the East Anglian farming community between late 1938 and early 1939 also appeared to have a limited measure of success. Mosley's agricultural speeches in Norfolk and Suffolk during this period were well attended and favourably received. In December 1938, the first Suffolk Agricultural Dinner of the British Union, held at Ipswich and arranged

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36 Norfolk and Suffolk Journal and Diss Express (N.S.J.D.E.), 4 November 1938, p. 4.
37 Arthur Swan. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
38 See Chapter Five.
39 See Chapter Six.

locally, was attended by 200 farmers and associated businessmen.[40] During the same month, the B.U.F. claimed that the membership of the Woodbridge District had doubled in two weeks.[41]

This broad interpretation is supported by references to the size of individual District memberships contained in declassified government files, Labour Party sources, local newspapers and the recollections of former Blackshirts and anti-fascists. However, several important points need to be borne in mind when using this evidence to assess recruitment and support at Branch level in the three counties. Firstly, the obvious difficulty of quantifying the non-active and 'secret' membership accurately makes it virtually impossible to gauge the extent of Blackshirt recruitment in the area with any real precision. Consequently, the most prudent approach is to regard the figures derived from these sources as illustrative estimates of fascist strength in particular localities. Since each District usually relied on a small number of activists to carry out political work for the movement, only a fraction of the total local membership was 'visible' in the sense of being publicly associated with the B.U.F.. The vāst majority of Blackshirts in the area preferred the relative anonymity of non-active status in order to safeguard their businesses, protect their families, avoid social ostracism, and prevent victimisation by hostile employers and political opponents.[42]

Furthermore, a number of traders, business owners and other prominent people in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, who, for similar reasons, were reluctant to advertise their Mosleyite allegiances, became 'secret members'. Their identities were not normally revealed to the wider District membership. The King's Lynn B.U.F. claimed that much hidden backing existed within the local business community, and, at Leytonstone, the ex-District Leader (1939-1940) recalled that most of those who fell into the clandestine category at his Branch "were shopkeepers who were frightened to

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[40] Woodbridge Recorder and Wickham Market Gazette (W.R.W.M.G.), 15 December 1938, p. 4; East Anglian Daily Times (E.A.D.T.), 13 December 1938, p. 12.
[41] Action, 17 December 1938, p. 11.
[42] Most of the ex-Blackshirts interviewed by the author mentioned this particular feature of the local membership.

be openly associated with us".[43] Covert adherents, mostly with commercial backgrounds, also accounted for nearly one quarter of the Epping membership during the late 1930s, although the former District Leader (1938-1940) had reservations about this type of support: "You see, you never really know how you stand with that kind of support. You never know whether they're backing both horses, do you? I never knew quite. I mean, I wouldn't have expected them to put their commercial position in jeopardy, but, on the other hand, you just wonder how really sincere they are".[44]

Secondly, the problem of assessing fascist membership in the area is further compounded by a change in the B.U.F.'s recruitment strategy after January 1938. Previously, the movement had attempted to enrol sympathisers as non-active members, but now the policy was "to leave them free to join if they wish and to concentrate upon using them as nuclei within their own particular sphere of influence".[45] These new Blackshirt 'penetration' tactics were designed to create "strong bodies of support" inside various trade and professional organisations.[46]

Thirdly, some District Leaders in the region did not attempt to maximise their numbers, preferring a smaller core of more ideologically committed fascists to a large paper membership. At Eye, for example, Ronald Creasy accepted only a proportion of those who applied to become Blackshirts:

> I would not allow 'joining up'...I accepted support. Now that's a very different and important matter. Men joining up is a matter of quantity. Support is a matter of quality. Two entirely different things...Many were turned away, far more than I accepted. They had to come to see me for an interview to be accepted because I made it clear to them from the beginning that it was a great privilege, and I could only accept them if they answered my questions satisfactorily.[47]

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[43] Lynn News and County Press (L.N.C.P.), 8 November 1938, p. 2; E.G.. Taped interview.
[44] L.B.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991. According to L.B., fifteen secret members belonged to the Epping District B.U.F. in the late 1930s.
[45] P.R.O. HO 144/21281/8-9. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 20 January 1938.
[46] Ibid..
[47] Ronald N. Creasy. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

Fourthly, when interviewed, several Mosleyites emphasised that a narrow preoccupation with registered District memberships makes no allowance for the material assistance and level of support given to the East Anglian B.U.F. by sympathisers who never actually joined the organisation. Apparently, a number of pro-Mosley industrialists residing in the county towns of Suffolk made financial donations to the local movement but did not enrol for business reasons.[48] Even in those Districts with minimal formal support, there was often evidence of a broader acceptance of the Blackshirt programme. At Lowestoft, for instance, the B.U.F. formation attracted just seventeen members between 1935 and 1938 but also delivered Action to approximately 50 regular subscribers in the area.[49]

Official sources reported that by May 1934, the Norwich B.U.F. had approximately 40 members.[50] This figure was broadly endorsed by the former prominent East Anglian Mosleyite, Richard Bellamy, who later estimated the Branch to be 60-70 strong during its formative period.[51] A local left-wing opponent also subsequently recalled that there were about 70 Blackshirts in the County Borough in c.1934.[52] By early 1936, however, much of this early support had melted away, apparently leaving the Norwich B.U.F. with six active members.[53] Thereafter, according to an ex-Norwich Blackshirt, the District gradually recovered over the next three years and, by the beginning of 1939, could boast a "three figure membership".[54]

Fascist fortunes at King's Lynn mirrored this trend. An initial phase of rapid expansion was followed by disorganisation and collapse in late 1934 and early 1935. Fragmentary evidence indicates that, from then on, the King's Lynn B.U.F. was also able to re-establish a local membership base. In November 1938, Philip Vare, a Blackshirt motor engineer, contested the King's Lynn municipal elections as a B.U.F.

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48 Ronald N. Creasy. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1995.
49 Swan. Taped interview.
50 P.R.O. HO 144/20141/315. The Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom, Excluding Northern Ireland. Report No. I. Developments up to the end of May 1934.
51 Bellamy. Taped interview.
52 Wallace Pointer. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1994.
53 P.R.O. HO 144/20147/386. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 23 March 1936.
54 Eric Pleasants. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

candidate for the Middle ward and obtained 107 votes.[55] Furthermore, after his arrest in 1940, John Smeaton-Stuart informed Earl Winterton M.P. that the police possessed a list of 153 registered B.U.F. members belonging to the King's Lynn District.[56]

Ronald Creasy remembered that the local B.U.F. formation "steadily advanced" and reached "its peak...at the time of the declaration of war".[57] Although he declined to give any precise details on the grounds of confidentiality, Creasy recalled that local sympathisers outnumbered actual members by three to one and asserted that these two categories combined ran into four figures during the late 1930s.[58] His election, as an avowed Blackshirt, to the Eye town council in November 1938 with a tally of 179 votes provides limited support for this extraordinary claim.[59] Creasy's close social and political links with William and Dorothy Sherston led him to conclude that the Woodbridge District B.U.F. made similar progress.[60]

Branch development at Lowestoft was far more modest and could not be sustained in the same way. According to the District Treasurer, Arthur Swan, between 1935 and the autumn of 1938, there were seventeen B.U.F. members at the port, five of whom were active. In the weeks following the Munich crisis, approximately eleven Blackshirts resigned from the Branch and others drifted away during the first eight months of 1939. By the beginning of the war, only Swan and Surtees remained as members of the Lowestoft B.U.F..[61]

Blackshirt growth was also discernible in provincial Essex during 1933-1934. In November 1933, a columnist in the Colchester Gazette reported that 150-200 copies of Blackshirt were being sold each week at Maldon, where fascism was said to be

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55 L.N.C.P., 8 November 1938, p. 11.
56 P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8. J.R. Smeaton-Stuart, 'Report on the Functioning of Regulation 18B of the Defence Regulations (1939)', Appendix B, p. 3. This report was sent to Earl Winterton in December 1940.
57 Creasy. Taped interview, 1991.
58 Ronald N. Creasy. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1992; Ronald N. Creasy. Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M.) taped interview, n.d..
59 E.D.P., 2 November 1938, p. 14.
60 Creasy. Taped interview, 1995.
61 Swan. Taped interview; Arthur Swan. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1993.

"very strong".[62] Six months later, the same columnist understood that the Colchester B.U.F. had about 30 members.[63] Labour Party sources estimated that, by mid-1934, the Brightlingsea, Clacton and Rayleigh Branches had approximately 150, 70 and 33 recruits respectively.[64] Although the B.U.F. was able to maintain an organisational presence in these localities after 1934, no evidence has so far been uncovered which can shed light on the corresponding District membership totals later in the decade.

Recruitment patterns in other Essex B.U.F. formations can be traced in greater detail using information provided by former county Blackshirts. At Leytonstone, the ex-District Leader (1939-1940) recalled that the local Branch, assisted by the Rothermere press campaign, initially attracted almost 300 recruits. According to the same source, in the autumn of 1934, many of these early converts drifted away and, by 1936, the Leytonstone B.U.F. possessed twenty active and 40 non-active adherents. Thereafter, the District membership increased to approximately 80 in 1938-1939 before dropping to half this figure by the spring of 1940.[65] The rate and extent of Blackshirt growth at Ilford and Epping was broadly comparable. A former Assistant District Leader of the Ilford B.U.F. remembered that, after an early phase of rapid expansion in 1934, which culminated in a registered membership of 200, the Branch experienced a large post-Rothermere exodus before mounting a partial recovery from 1936. By 1938-1939, the District membership was thought to be 50-100 strong.[66] The oral testimonies of two ex-Blackshirt officials from Chingford indicate that, in numerical terms, the B.U.F. in the Epping division also peaked in 1934, when approximately 250 recruits entered the local movement. This level of formal support could not be sustained for more than a few months, but, after a period of contraction, the Epping

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[62] Colchester Gazette, 29 November 1933, p. 6. The columnist's report was based on information provided by a friend who had joined the Maldon B.U.F.. This recruit regarded Mosley's organisation as "a movement to watch".
[63] Ibid., 16 May 1934, p. 8.
[64] Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire. Reply of Harwich Divisional Labour Party. LP/FAS/34/497; Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire. Reply of South-East Essex Divisional Labour Party. LP/FAS/34/113. 26 of the 33 Blackshirts at Rayleigh were stated to be under 21 years of age.
[65] E.G.. Taped interview; E.G.. Completed questionnaires for Andrew Mitchell, 1993 and 1997; E.G.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1998.
[66] V.N.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1992.

District managed to establish a smaller, more stable membership of 70-80 Blackshirts towards the end of the decade.[67]

Although the B.U.F.'s early strength at Southend, Walthamstow, East Ham and West Ham cannot be gauged from the sources available, impressionistic evidence affords an insight into fascist recruitment in these localities in the later 1930s. A former Southend Blackshirt (1936-1938) recalled that the District formation had an activist core of 30 Mosleyites between 1936 and 1938, a total which would have been "at least doubled" by the inclusion of the non-active membership.[68] In April 1937, a Southend Times journalist, posing as a casual enquirer, visited the B.U.F. District Headquarters in London Road and ascertained that there were 120 active local Blackshirts, most of whom were young men in their early to mid-twenties.[69] Mosleyite accounts also stress that enrolments at Walthamstow West began to pick up during the late 1930s. From a modest base of 34 members at the beginning of P.F.'s brief stewardship in 1937, the District made steady, if unspectacular, progress in the period up to September 1939, by which time there were 60 active and 90 non-active Blackshirts attached to the Branch.[70] At East Ham, the former District Treasurer (1938-1940) recalled that the local B.U.F. membership hovered around the 60-70 mark between 1937 and 1939. Up to one-fifth of these adherents were said to be active in the Borough.[71] Other ex-Blackshirt interviewees revealed that, following the internal reorganisation of 1935, the West Ham District attracted an extensive non-active membership and gradually recruited 70 activists into its ranks.[72]

The interpretation outlined above suggests that, instead of collapsing permanently after 1934, the B.U.F. in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex staged a modest

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67 Frederic Andre Ball. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991; L.B.. Taped interview.
68 M.G.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 30 March 1993; M.G.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988.
69 Southend Times (S.T.), 7 April 1937, p. 8. This was an unconfirmed figure.
70 P.F.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993; Derrick Millington. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985; R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988; R.W.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985.
71 T.M.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
72 A.R. Beavan. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1986; F.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.

recovery from the mid-1930s, in line with Webber's account of general recruitment trends. Webber's assumption that there were 2,500 Blackshirts in East Anglia in mid-1934 does not seem unreasonable, bearing in mind the Branch figures offered by contemporary sources and ex-Blackshirts for this early period. Furthermore, information obtained from the B.U.F. press, the 1934 Labour Party survey and government reports indicate that, at this stage, approximately 70 per cent of East Anglian Blackshirt recruits were concentrated in the three counties.[73] The available evidence also suggests that, from 1935 to 1938, B.U.F. membership in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex fell and then rose again at approximately the national rate. These conclusions facilitate the calculation of useful membership figures for the three counties between 1934 and 1938, providing two important limitations are recognised. Firstly, the totals derived illustrate the broad levels of formal support given to the regional B.U.F. during this period and do not purport to represent the exact numbers involved. Secondly, these estimates do not include metropolitan Essex.[74]

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[73] Blackshirt, 1933-1934; Report on replies to Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire of 12 June 1934. LP/FAS/34/1; P.R.O. HO 144/20140/103-119. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 1 May 1934; P.R.O. HO 144/20141/294-322. Report on the Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom, Excluding Northern Ireland. Report No. I. Developments up to the end of May 1934. This estimate is based on the number of B.U.F. Branches and level of Blackshirt activity reported in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. It would appear that, throughout the period up to 1939-1940, the bulk of the eastern England membership was concentrated in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.

[74] If the figures for metropolitan Essex are included, the number of B.U.F. members in the three counties exceeded 2,000 in mid-1934 and approached the 1,000 mark in late 1938.

TABLE 2
ESTIMATED MEMBERSHIP OF THE B.U.F. IN NORFOLK, SUFFOLK AND ESSEX, 1934-1938

	Active Members	Non-active members	Total
Mid-1934	438	1312	1750
Late 1935	70	105	175
Early 1936	140	210	350
Late 1936	217	326	543
Late 1938	231	347	578

(The above calculations for active and non-active membership use Skidelsky's active: non-active ratio of 1:3 for 1934 to take into account the temporary impact of factors such as Rothermere's press support and B.U.F. involvement in the East Anglian tithe war. All other years are based on Webber's ratio of 1:1.5.)

Academic researchers have also speculated that between one fifth and one third of the national Blackshirt membership was female.[75] Information provided by former Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Blackshirts on the level of female involvement in the local movement tends to endorse these general estimates. Most ex-B.U.F. interviewees recalled that women constituted between ten and 30 per cent of the District memberships in the region. At Walthamstow West in 1937, one in ten local recruits were women, and, from 1937 to 1939, the East Ham B.U.F. possessed, at best, ten female adherents out of a total of 60-70 members.[76] During the mid- to late 1930s, women also accounted for approximately twenty per cent of the fascists belonging to the Southend and Epping B.U.F. formations.[77] Over the same period, up to one-third of the Mosleyites at Eye and West Ham, and about one-quarter of Norwich Blackshirts, were said to be female.[78] Other Districts in the area did not conform to the suggested national pattern of recruitment. Throughout its existence, the Leytonstone

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[75] R. Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, caption to photograph of women fascists in Liverpool, opposite p. 142; Stephen M. Cullen, 'Four Women For Mosley: Women In The British Union Of Fascists, 1932-1940' Oral History, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 52; Martin Durham, Women and Fascism (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 49.
[76] P.F.. Taped interview; T.M.. Taped interview. P.F. recalled that four of the 40 Blackshirts at Walthamstow West in 1937 were women.
[77] M.G.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1991; Ball. Interview; L.B.. Taped interview.
[78] Creasy. Taped interview, 1991; Beavan. Taped interview; F.T.. Taped interview; Pleasants. Interview.

B.U.F. contained only slightly more men than women. By mid-1934, there were 120 women Blackshirts attached to the Branch, but by the end of the year this figure had dwindled to between 40 and 50.[79] In contrast, from its inception in 1935, the Lowestoft B.U.F. remained an all-male affair.[80]

3. Who Were the Blackshirts? The Social Composition of the East Anglian B.U.F.

British Union ideology rejected the concept of class as divisive and, instead, called on all 'decent' and 'patriotic' Britons, irrespective of their social position, to forge a national consensus under fascism in order to eliminate class conflict and remedy the country's economic ills.[81] Hence, the B.U.F. uniform was meant to epitomise the 'classless' ethos of an organisation which claimed to rely on the 'finest' men and women from all walks of British life. Yet, in spite of the propaganda which extolled the B.U.F. as the authentic embodiment of the national will, Mosley and other senior Blackshirts offered contrasting views as to which sections of society responded positively to the fascist message.

At various times, Mosley maintained that different groups, including dejected Tories, disaffected socialists and ex-servicemen, played an important role.[82] Arguably, though, the Blackshirt leader's clearest impressions of the B.U.F.'s bedrock support were contained in his memoirs, which noted that most of those who joined the organisation "were poor, some even being on the dole".[83] His description of the Birmingham Ladywood Labour Party in 1924 also pointed to the proletarian character of the B.U.F.:

> Our own organisation had a paying membership of some two hundred, but when we started the canvass only three elderly

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79 E.G.. Taped interview.
80 Swan. Taped interview.
81 See for example Oswald Mosley, Fascism: 100 Questions Asked And Answered (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1936), Question 8; 10 Points of Fascism (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.).
82 Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain, (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1932), p. 17; Oswald Mosley, Blackshirt Policy (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1934), p. 15.
83 Mosley, My Life, p. 290.

> women and two young men would accompany us. They were fine people, typical of the English workers, and closely resembling the other pioneers later attached to our new Movement before and after the Second World War. They were all manual workers...[84]

Other high-profile Mosleyites maintained that the B.U.F. was not dominated by working class adherents. In 1936, Alexander Raven Thomson stressed the movement's non-manual origins by claiming that fascism drew its "main strength and inspiration" from the farmers, shopkeepers and businessmen of the British 'yeoman' class.[85] The former East Anglian Blackshirt and B.U.F. National Inspector, Richard Reynell Bellamy, later recalled that many ex-servicemen, war veterans, young males, landowners, farmers, small businessmen and shopkeepers were drawn to the movement.[86] His underlying conclusion was that: "All sorts and conditions of men and women joined".[87] Bellamy's depiction of the B.U.F. as a 'catch-all' organisation has been endorsed more recently in the published autobiography of John Charnley, a prominent northern Blackshirt.[88]

Contemporary non- and anti-fascist accounts of the movement's social composition exhibited a similar lack of consensus. Some assessments emphasised the non-manual nature of the Blackshirts' constituency. An M.P., who attended the B.U.F.'s Albert Hall meeting in April 1934, reported that the uniformed Blackshirts present at the event were "obviously the products of the shop, the office, the bank and the 'black-coated' unemployed", whereas the audience "consisted of minor businessmen, returned exiles from Empire outposts, disgruntled Conservative women and a good proportion of rather hard-faced beribboned ex-service men".[89] After completing a rather patchy 'survey' of the B.U.F. in the summer of 1934, the Labour Party singled out ex-officers, small traders, middle-class people and fickle youngsters as those most likely to enrol. Interestingly, the same report mentioned that fascist

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84 Ibid., p. 176.
85 Action, 21 May 1936, p. 7.
86 Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', Chapters Fifteen and Nineteen.
87 Ibid., p. 314.
88 J. Charnley, Blackshirts and Roses (London: Brockingday Publications, 1990), p. 77.
89 R. Bernays, 'Fascism and the Answer', The Spectator, 27 April 1934, pp. 652-653.

efforts to nurture 'blue collar' sympathisers had produced negligible results.[90] During the same year, the T.U.C. noted that small traders, former military officers and professionals were rallying to the B.U.F.'s banner, together with "Toughs" and elements of the "street corner" unemployed.[91] For the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.), the B.U.F. existed to protect the interests of beleaguered finance-capital and recruited accordingly: "Fascism is the tool of CAPITAL. Every Blackshirt campaign in a British city starts with a luncheon and speech to the 'Business Men', and all the local labour-sweaters and slave-drivers guzzle and listen to the tale of how Fascism will destroy 'the uprising of the working class' and save their profit".[92]

Conversely, other commentators claimed that much of Mosley's support came from the working class. Phil Piratin, the Stepney Communist activist, did not share the C.P.G.B.'s complacent view that most manual workers were immune to the B.U.F.'s message. He later recalled that in east London "ordinary working-class folk", including trade union members, those in low-paid jobs and unemployed people, became Blackshirts.[93] Piratin's observations endorsed those of the left-wing academic, Harold Laski, who suggested in 1934 that the B.U.F. derived its numerical strength primarily from the working class.[94]

In an unusual 1937 pamphlet, Lionel Birch dispensed with a class analysis of the B.U.F.'s membership in favour of four essential Blackshirt 'types'. The first three - the self-confident, well-groomed ex-officer, the short, coarse-featured pugilist and the public school or university 'hearty' - adopted a semi-defiant posture and regarded themselves as the "custodians of the manly tradition".[95] However, Birch argued that

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[90] National Council of Labour and the Co-operative Union, Statement on Fascism at Home and Abroad, pp. 15-16.
[91] T.U.C. General Council Research Department, 'Fascism in Great Britain' (21 February 1934), p. 9.
[92] J.L. Douglas, Spotlight On Fascism (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1934), p. 6. See also 10 Points Against Fascism (London: Young Communist League, 1934). For more detailed Communist expositions on the nature of fascism in the British context see R.P. Dutt, Fascism and Social Revolution (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934); J. Strachey, The Menace of Fascism (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933).
[93] Phil Piratin, Our Flag Stays Red (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), p. 18.
[94] S. Rawnsley, 'Fascism and Fascists in Britain in the 1930s: A Case Study of Fascism in the North of England in a Period of Change' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Bradford, 1981), p. 223.
[95] L. Birch, Why They Join The Fascists (London: People's Press, 1937), p. 9.

the "smart, healthy-looking and orderly" fascists of the fourth category, who often sold B.U.F. newspapers alone in London and the provincial towns, were sincere, altruistic and quietly courageous.[96]

Shortly after the Second World War, the left-wing journalist, Frederick Mullally, published a short study on Fascism Inside England, which also highlighted the disparate nature of Mosley's support in the 1930s:

> They flocked to him in their thousands - the frustrated, embittered little anti-semites, the soured intellectuals of the Right, the renegade Left-wing misfits, the flag-wagging middle-class matrons, the feather-headed, ham-fisted types of university and public school moron, the political Catholics, the ex-N.C.O.s and officers of the detention camp calibre - they rushed to don the black shirt, to sport the fascist 'flash'...[97]

Owing to the difficulty of locating empirical evidence on the social composition of the B.U.F., most post-war writers and academic researchers investigating the British Union have relied heavily on either impressionistic accounts or the social characteristics of extremely small numbers of ex-Blackshirt respondents to identify those groups most susceptible to Mosleyite fascism in the 1930s. Consequently, much of the existing scholarly research into the B.U.F.'s social base, although illuminating, rests on informed guesswork and statistically insignificant samples drawn from the former membership. In the first 'serious' study of the movement, published in 1961, Colin Cross used the reminiscences of former B.U.F. leaders, including Mosley, Robert Forgan and A.K. Chesterton, and information gleaned from Blackshirt literature and other sources, to construct an impressionistic profile of the dedicated ordinary member.[98] According to Cross, the typical Blackshirt loyalist was a lower middle class male, who, conscious of his non-manual status, looked to the B.U.F. to protect him from "the capitalism he resented and the socialism he feared".[99]

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96 Ibid..
97 F. Mullally, Fascism Inside England (London: Claud Morris Books, 1946), p. 25.
98 Cross, The Fascists in Britain, p. 70.
99 Ibid..

Five years later, W.F. Mandle published an interesting article, which dealt exclusively with the upper echelons of the organisation.[100] By combing British Union newspapers, service lists and the non-fascist press, he was able to probe the backgrounds of 103 major B.U.F. personalities, although several key figures were omitted and no female Blackshirts were included. On the basis of this work, Mandle defined the "composite fascist leader of 1935" as a widely-travelled, public school-educated middle-class man in his late 30s, who, after serving as an officer in the First World War, had struggled to find his niche in the post-1918 period.[101]

In The Fascist Movement in Britain, Robert Benewick had little to say about the B.U.F.'s wider membership.[102] After supplying pen portraits of a number of well-known Blackshirts and summarising the distinguishing traits of the 'charmed circle' gathered around Mosley, Benewick declared that probably the most credible record pertaining to the rank and file was the report of the Advisory Committee on persons detained under Defence Regulation 18B, which had been sent to the Home Secretary in 1940. This indicated that the B.U.F. had attracted peripheral support across all class and age bands, and led Benewick to conclude: "... given the small numbers recruited and the rapid turnover, it seems in order to assume (short of more substantial data) a high degree of social and economic marginality distinct from the middle class bias of the leadership".[103]

Our knowledge of the bare outlines of the B.U.F.'s constituency was enhanced in 1975 by a shrewd "impressionistic survey" of the movement in Skidelsky's study of the Blackshirt leader.[104] Skidelsky synthesised the findings of Cross, Mandle and Benewick with material extracted from newspapers, pamphlets and trade journals of the 1930s to illustrate the heterogeneity of fascist support:

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100 W.F. Mandle, 'The Leadership of the British Union of Fascists', The Australian Journal of Politics and History, Vol. XII (December 1966), pp. 360-383.
101 Ibid., p. 369.
102 Benewick, The Fascist Movement in Britain, p. 129.
103 Ibid..
104 Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 317.

> Who joined? There were university graduates and ex-public schoolboys; unemployed pugilists and unemployable professional men with useless classical educations. The 'serious' ranged all the way from ex-communists to crackpot and obsessional anti-semites. With the exception of the young of all classes, the early B.U.F. was heavily middle-class. Its following in the industrial areas was middle-class. It picked up support in London and the southern coastal towns. Its headquarters in Chelsea seemed to symbolise its place in the political spectrum.[105]

Mosley's biographer added that fascism enticed the young, ex-soldiers, despondent professionals, athletic people, northern textile workers, farmers, agricultural workers and members of the petit bourgeoisie, such as shopkeepers and small traders. Service sector workers, such as barmaids, waiters, shop assistants and cinema usherettes, were likewise targeted because these occupations were weakly unionised, encouraged deferential attitudes and often had foreigners as employers or job rivals.[106] Apart from brief references to two regional studies, David Lewis's subsequent discussion of the membership in his 1987 general account of the B.U.F. merely reiterated themes already pursued by Skidelsky. His overall judgement was that the movement was essentially petit bourgeois with a small fringe of proletarian and middle class adherents.[107]

Stephen Cullen obtained interviews with, or completed questionnaires/memoir material from, 43 surviving ex-Blackshirts (39 men and four women) as part of a research project on the B.U.F., which was undertaken in the mid-1980s.[108] Most of these had been fascist activists, serving the B.U.F. in northern England, the Midlands, East Anglia, the East End of London and the southern counties. The respondents were analysed in terms of their family and political history, age, education, occupation, religion, B.U.F. career and their lives during and after the Second World War. Using

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105 Ibid..
106 Ibid., Chapter Sixteen.
107 D.S. Lewis, Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 71-75.
108 Stephen M. Cullen, 'The British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940: Ideology, Membership and Meetings' (Unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987), Chapter Three.

information provided by this small 'national' sample, Cullen put forward an impressionistic profile of the committed Blackshirt:

> He would be a young man, not long turned 20 when he joined the BUF, a lapsed Anglican from a Conservative shop-owning family who had some education beyond his 14th birthday, probably at the local Grammar School, leading eventually to a clerical job. Soon after joining he would have become an active member, eventually being rewarded by a post, such as District Treasurer or District Leader, within the Branch. He would be a fairly well educated and ideologically committed member of the movement; indeed his belief in 'Mosleyite' politics and policies would continue after the war when he would most probably join Union Movement. During the war itself he had a good chance of being detained without trial for his political beliefs, or if still under 30 and at liberty he would have in all likelihood volunteered for military service. Today the once-young Blackshirt would still be a fascist at heart, proud of his past association with the Mosley movement.[109]

During the 1980s, the release of selected Home Office files on the B.U.F. enabled Gerry Webber and Richard Thurlow to supplement existing sources and studies with government and police reports compiled in the 1930s.[110] This new material, which contained additional fragmentary evidence on the social background of the Blackshirt rank and file, led both Webber and Thurlow to conclude that support for the B.U.F. not only fluctuated numerically but also shifted socially and geographically throughout the decade.

As the organisation expanded until mid-1934, Mosley cultivated a broad, mainly middle class coalition, which included ex-servicemen, disgruntled professionals, public school types, farmers, some small traders and alienated Tories, who were unhappy with the government's Indian policy. These Mosleyites tended to come from London (outside the East End), the south east, rural East Anglia, the Midlands and Yorkshire. The B.U.F. also tapped the unemployed in Manchester and Liverpool.[111]

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[109] Ibid., pp. 53-54.
[110] See Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', pp. 575-606; Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, pp. 122-127.
[111] Ibid..

After Olympia and the Rothermere interlude, membership shrank drastically and the various sectional campaigns placed the organisation on a more working class footing. Textile and shipping policies mobilised working class northerners in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Liverpool for a time. Propaganda directed at small traders and businesses promising protection against larger competitors and 'proletarianisation' gained petit bourgeois converts in northern England and the East End. Between 1935 and 1938, the B.U.F.'s attitude to Jewry rallied sizeable east London support from working class, self employed and petit bourgeois groups, as well as from youths and anti-Semites. Mosley's greatest political success came in this locality, which could boast over 2,000 activists and extensive latent fascist strength.[112]

In 1938-1939, numerous Blackshirts in Bethnal Green, Limehouse and East Ham rejected the movement's pro-German line on patriotic grounds, but, this partial decline in the East End was more than offset by the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign, which won an older, more bourgeois and right-wing following. Government intelligence noted that fascist support in 1939-1940 came chiefly from the upper and middle classes. The organisation became a sanctuary for many appeasers, disheartened Conservatives and anti-war protesters, stimulating fresh growth in London (outside the East End) and across southern England.[113]

Regional and local studies of the organisation have varied enormously in quality, not least on the question of Blackshirt support. Shorter works looking at the impact of fascism in Yorkshire, Aberdeen, Sussex, Glamorgan, Scotland, north-east England and Oxford have offered some useful insights into the B.U.F.'s provincial recruits.[114] However, due to a number of factors, including the lack of important

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[112] Ibid..
[113] Ibid..
[114] 'The British Union of Fascists in Yorkshire 1934-40' (Trevelyan Scholarship Project, 1960); L. Kibblewhite and A. Rigby, Fascism in Aberdeen: Street Politics in the 1930s (Aberdeen: Aberdeen People's Press, 1978); C. J. F. Morley, 'Fascist Promise and the Capitalist Alternative: An analysis of Sussex coast fascism between the wars' (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, university unspecified, 1982. Copy held at the Wiener Library, London); Stephen M. Cullen, 'Another Nationalism: The British Union of Fascists in Glamorgan 1932-40', The Welsh History Review, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1994), pp. 101-114; Stephen M. Cullen, 'The British Union of Fascists in Scotland', Proceedings of the Association of Scottish Historical Studies (Edinburgh: 1994), pp. 116-123; N. Todd, In Excited

sources and the narrow approach adopted when consulting the material available, none of these accounts was able to analyse Mosley's local following in any detail.[115]

John Brewer and Stuart Rawnsley's regional histories of the B.U.F. were more incisive, partly because both scholars based their conclusions about Blackshirt support on small samples of the former local membership.[116] In his study of the B.U.F. in the west Midlands, Brewer used qualitative data from interviews with fifteen ex-Blackshirts (three of whom had no fascist links with that part of England) to comment tentatively on those who became 'Mosley's men'. Brewer's work suggested that the B.U.F. tended to attract youthful adherents and members of the working and middle classes who were employed in occupations outside the heavily unionised and big business sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, the author conceded that, owing to the slender evidence upon which his findings were based, this research "should be treated as a prolegomenon rather than a final statement..."[117]

The oral testimonies of ten former local Blackshirts also formed an indispensable part of Stuart Rawnsley's perceptive account of some of the features of the B.U.F.'s membership in northern England. Once again though, this informative contribution was "essentially impressionistic", since the limited sources available apparently precluded a quantitative analysis.[118] Mindful of both the small number of

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Times: The People Against The Blackshirts (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bewick Press/Tyne and Wear Anti-Fascist Association, 1995); D. Renton, Red Shirts And Black: Fascists And Anti-Fascists in Oxford in the 1930s (Oxford: Ruskin College Library Occasional Publication, No. 5, 1996). David Turner's work on the B.U.F. in Kent says virtually nothing about the local Blackshirt membership and fails to consult a number of key sources, including the fascist press. See D. Turner, Fascism and anti-Fascism in the Medway Towns 1927-1940 (Rochester: Kent Anti-Fascist Action Committee, 1993).

[115] For example, the earlier studies appeared before selected government and police documents relating to the B.U.F. were released during the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, Todd and Turner appeared to be unaware that former local Blackshirts have produced accounts of B.U.F. activity in north-east England and Kent. Furthermore, none of the studies listed above used the Blackshirt and provincial press to assemble a B.U.F. membership sample for the area under investigation.

[116] J.D. Brewer, Mosley's Men: The British Union of Fascists in the West Midlands (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1984); S.J. Rawnsley, 'Fascism and Fascists in Britain in the 1930s'. See also S.J. Rawnsley, 'The Membership of the British Union of Fascists' in K. Lunn and R. Thurlow (eds.), British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 150-165.

[117] Brewer, Mosley's Men, p. 5.

[118] Rawnsley, 'Fascism and Fascists in Britain in the 1930s', p. 233.

ex-B.U.F. interviewees involved in the project and the shortcomings of the documentary evidence inspected, Rawnsley cautiously stressed the heterogeneous nature of fascist support in the region during the 1930s. His central conclusion was that the Blackshirt movement "attracted all sorts of people".[119]

More recently, T.P. Linehan's sophisticated examination of the B.U.F.'s membership in east London and south-west Essex abandoned the purely qualitative approach of earlier studies.[120] By carefully combing and cross-checking located private B.U.F. documents, the fascist press, other Mosleyite publications, local newspapers, Home Office and Special Branch files, sources held by the Board of Deputies, and the oral testimonies of former Blackshirts from the area, Linehan was able to identify 311 local members and active supporters (232 from the East End and 79 from south-west Essex). This sample was then analysed using the social class and occupational categories which were initially developed by Michael Kater and subsequently refined by Detlef Muhlberger to investigate N.S.D.A.P. recruitment patterns.[121]

Linehan found that 90.03 per cent of these 311 Mosleyites came from either the working class or the lower/intermediate levels of the middle class (51.44 per cent and 38.59 per cent respectively).[122] In order of importance, the most prominent occupational sub-groups represented were unskilled/semi-skilled workers (112), skilled workers (48), self-employed merchants (44), junior and middle-ranking white collar employees (43), and independent master craftsmen (24). By way of contrast, only nine from the sample had elite or upper middle class backgrounds. The most significant finding was that 100 of the 232 East End adherents scrutinised had unskilled or semi-skilled manual jobs, which suggested that Mosleyites from these sections of the

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119 Rawnsley, 'The Membership of the British Union of Fascists', p. 164.
120 Linehan, East London for Mosley, Chapter Six.
121 See M.H. Kater, The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders 1919-1945 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); D. Muhlberger, 'Germany' in D. Muhlberger (ed.), The Social Basis of European Fascist Movements (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 40-139; D. Muhlberger, Hitler's Followers: Studies in the sociology of the Nazi movement (London: Routledge, 1991).
122 Linehan, East London for Mosley, pp. 211-230.

working class constituted the "social core" of Blackshirt support in the B.U.F.'s east London heartland.[123]

Although the lack of local Branch membership registers and the fragmentary nature of the sources hamper the task of probing the B.U.F.'s social foundations in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, enough accessible information on the Blackshirts' regional following exists to make a meaningful analysis possible. Three central considerations have prompted the adoption of Linehan's approach in this endeavour. Firstly, prior to the appearance of Linehan's work on the B.U.F. in east London, the present author had commenced compiling a sample of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Mosleyites from written and oral records as a prelude to investigating the social composition of the local movement. This reflected the writer's contention that the earlier academic assessments of the provincial membership provided by Brewer and Rawnsley relied too heavily on tiny samples of ex-B.U.F. interviewees and ignored biographical information in the Blackshirt and non-fascist press which would have broadened the scope of their research.

Secondly, careful examination of the available sources has produced an 'East Anglian' sample of 230 Mosleyites (members and supporters), which is extensive enough to offer an insight into the regional B.U.F.'s social base. This total represents the largest provincial sample so far assembled and compares very favourably with the 232 East End adherents included in Linehan's study, bearing in mind the obvious disparity in Blackshirt strength between the two areas.

Thirdly, by employing the same methodological procedures and the Kater/Muhlberger classification model, these 230 Blackshirt members and supporters can be discussed within the wider context of a comparative analytical framework.[124] In

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[123] Ibid., p. 216.

[124] Ibid., pp. 207-211. In order to make comparisons meaningful, the 'East Anglian' and Dorset samples were constructed in accordance with Linehan's selection criteria. It should be noted, however, that, unlike Linehan, who included Mosleyites writing to local newspapers only if they stated they were members of the B.U.F., the East Anglian sample contains a small number of pro-Blackshirt correspondents from the columns of the provincial press who neither confirmed nor denied that they had a formal link with the movement. These individuals were included because each demonstrated an unusual degree of commitment to the B.U.F. by ignoring the potentially damaging consequences of

this way, the East Anglian sample can be set against both Linehan's findings on the social roots of Mosleyite fascism in east London and the characteristics exhibited by a group of 41 members who were attached to the B.U.F. in the predominantly agricultural county of Dorset during the 1930s. These southern Blackshirts were listed in surviving official B.U.F. membership forms and documents covering the period from 1934 to 1939.[125]

Before commencing the analysis, it is necessary to review briefly the range of sources used to construct the B.U.F. sample and explain how individuals from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were selected for inclusion. A systematic trawl of the Blackshirt press revealed biographical information on a number of local activists, and uncovered letters, advertisements and announcements from members and sympathisers in the area.[126] Several important internal B.U.F. records relating to the regional membership were examined as well. These comprised a set of cards containing personal and membership details of a number of Blackshirts belonging to the Epping District, a selection of private B.U.F. 'Official Gazettes' from the 1936-1938 period listing appointments, promotions and resignations at local level, and documents noting the names and addresses of District officials in certain parts of Essex.[127] A confidential list of prominent B.U.F. members or supporters in Norfolk, Suffolk and Lincolnshire,

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being linked publicly with the Blackshirt cause. Similarly, for the sake of uniformity, the author, in line with Linehan, has also adopted Muhlberger's criticisms of Kater's occupational sub-group and social class categories by (1) replacing Kater's 'lower middle class' with a 'lower middle and middle middle class' category, (2) including a 'status unclear' category for those whose social class background could not be identified, (3) merging Kater's 'skilled craft workers' and 'other skilled workers' (occupational sub-groups two and three respectively) into one occupational sub-group covering all skilled workers.

[125] The sample of 41 Dorset Blackshirts was compiled from information contained in the Saunders Papers which are held at the University of Sheffield. These B.U.F. records, formerly in the possession of Robert Saunders, the District Leader for Dorset West (1936-1940), indicate that the movement attracted a total county membership of approximately 110 between 1934 and 1939. This figure was confirmed by Robert Saunders in a taped interview with the author in 1992. Thus, the sample represents over one-third of all those who belonged to the Dorset B.U.F. at some stage after 1933.

[126] The main B.U.F. publications consulted were Action, Blackshirt, Southern Blackshirt and East London Blackshirt.

[127] Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards (Supplied privately); The British Union of Fascists and National Socialists Official Gazette, 13 July 1936, 21 September 1936, 28 September 1936; The British Union of Fascists and National Socialists Official Appointments List, 8 February 1937, 3 May 1937; The British Union Official Appointments List, 10 October 1938; Essex B.U.F. District Official Cards (Supplied privately). The latter refer to East Ham, West Ham, Ilford and West Leyton.

which was used in the early 1940s to make personal appeals to East Anglian Mosleyites for financial contributions to the 18B Detainees Fund, has also been consulted.[128] In addition, the membership register for the King's Lynn formation of the post-war Union Movement provided a valuable corroborative source, since it made reference to the earlier B.U.F. affiliations of several recruits.[129]

Ex-Blackshirts and B.U.F. supporters from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, who were either interviewed by, or completed questionnaires for, the author, contributed by furnishing details about specific fascists attached to the local movement. Access was also obtained to the taped or written reminiscences of several former Blackshirts from the region, who, for various reasons, could not participate in this project.[130] This retrospective evidence was supplemented with biographical material on local B.U.F. activists, which was extracted from Mosleyite literature produced in the 1980s and 1990s.[131]

A range of non-fascist sources was also consulted for the following membership analysis, the most important being the local press. Close inspection of a large number of regional newspapers yielded additional information, chiefly in the form of articles on the activities of the B.U.F.'s local personnel, reports of magistrate court hearings, where fascists from the area appeared as defendants, witnesses or complainants, and published letters from pro-Blackshirt correspondents.[132] The material accumulated by the Board of Deputies of British Jews during the 1930s on individual Mosleyites

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[128] Norfolk, Suffolk and Lincolnshire B.U.F. Membership List. This list was given to G.J., formerly District Leader of the Norwood B.U.F. in London, who served in the R.A.F. in Norfolk from 1941 to 1946. G.J. visited those on the list to obtain money for the 18B Detainees Fund. Several well-known local Mosleyites, including Viscountess Downe and Henry Williamson, made donations. G.J.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1994.

[129] King's Lynn Union Movement Membership Book. This was supplied by G.J., who became Organiser of the King's Lynn Union Movement.

[130] The taped or written reminiscences of several Blackshirts from Norfolk and Essex, who had either died or who were reluctant to discuss their Mosleyite affiliations with the author, were generously made available by Stephen Cullen and F.O.M..

[131] L. Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts: The Inside Story of the British Union of Fascists 1932-40 (London: Sanctuary Press, 1986); Comrade: Newsletter of the Friends of Oswald Mosley. The latter first appeared in 1986 and is still published two or three times a year.

[132] Fifty-one local newspapers covering Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were consulted.

residing in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex also assisted the data gathering process.[133] Finally, a perusal of released Home Office and Special Branch reports on the movement disclosed a number of references to local Blackshirts, relating mainly to District officials in the area, fascists convicted of various offences, and B.U.F. adherents interned under Defence Regulation 18B (1A).[134]

In order to ensure both accuracy and consistency, only certain categories of identified Mosleyites were selected for the sample. Those described as Blackshirts in the non-fascist sources discussed above were included, as were the recruits listed in the B.U.F. membership records and internal documents. All Mosleyite interviewees and questionnaire respondents from the region, together with any other family members recalled as local Blackshirts, were also added to the total for analysis. Other adherents mentioned in the oral or written testimony of a former B.U.F. member or supporter were incorporated too, providing their occupations and Blackshirt allegiances could be confirmed by a second source. Local fascist personalities reported in the B.U.F. press were also accepted on the same basis. The final category contained individuals who were not explicitly described as Mosleyites, but whose actions were consistent with membership of, or support for, the B.U.F.. These were pro-Blackshirt correspondents writing in the local press, advertisers offering goods or services through the classified columns of Action and Blackshirt, and proposers, seconders and assentors nominating B.U.F. candidates in local election contests. In each case, the fact that the person concerned had chosen to ignore the potentially damaging consequences of being linked publicly with the B.U.F. in some way, suggested a high degree of commitment to the Blackshirt cause.

Several qualifying remarks need to be made about the resulting sample and the ensuing analysis at the outset. Firstly, it is important to recognise that the Blackshirt movement never managed to attract a majority from any particular social class or

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133 The most useful information compiled by the Board of Deputies on the local B.U.F. membership is to be found in B.D.B.J. C6/9/3/1 and C6/9/3/2.
134 See the P.R.O. HO 45, 144 and 283 series.

occupational group, even in areas most receptive to the fascist creed such as east London. Thus, the regional B.U.F.'s social base comprised of minority elements drawn from these categories. Secondly, the findings discussed below should not be taken to imply that fascist allegiances were invariably related to an individual's position in the social hierarchy or their form of employment. As the case studies examined in the next chapter reveal, Blackshirt affiliations could stem from class or occupational concerns, but were also fostered by a variety of other factors.

Thirdly, the 230 local Mosleyites assembled constitute only a fraction of the B.U.F.'s overall local strength and cannot claim to be perfectly representative of the wider movement in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex in terms of social composition, age distribution and the ratio of males to females. Therefore, only tentative conclusions about these features of the regional B.U.F.'s membership and support can be derived from this evidence. Lastly, the deficiencies of the source material not only prevent an examination of how the local movement's constituency developed during the 1930s, but also make it impossible to categorise every individual in the sample as either a B.U.F. member or a sympathiser, since the precise status of a small number of selected Mosleyites is unclear.

Table 3 suggests that, although the B.U.F. was able to attract adherents from across the social spectrum in the three counties, the distribution of regional support for the Blackshirts was skewed. Four out of every five Mosleyites investigated (80.98 per cent) had either 'lower middle and middle middle' or 'lower' class backgrounds. Over half of the 'East Anglian' sample (52.66 per cent) came from the lower and intermediate levels of the middle class and slightly more than one quarter (28.32 per cent) belonged to the working class. Conversely, only sixteen (6.94 per cent) of the 230 identified were drawn from the 'elite or upper-middle' echelons.

In occupational terms, five sub-groups accounted for the bulk of the sample. Nearly one-fifth (19.18 per cent) earned a living as junior or middle-ranking white collar employees, and a slightly smaller proportion (17.83 per cent) were self-employed merchants. Farmers, on 7.83 per cent, constituted the other significant middle class

TABLE 3 SAMPLE OF 230 B.U.F. MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS IN NORFOLK, SUFFOLK AND ESSEX BY SOCIAL CLASS AND OCCUPATIONAL SUB-GROUP 1933-1940

Social Class	Occupational Sub-Group	Norfolk	Suffolk	Essex	Total Sample
Lower	1. Unskilled/semi-skilled workers	8 (12.90%)	1 (3.45%)	26 (18.71%)	35 (15.28%)
	2. Skilled workers	3 (4.84%)	1 (3.45%)	26 (18.71%)	30 (13.04%)
Lower-Middle & Middle-Middle	4. Master craftsmen (independent)	3 (4.84%)	-	2 (1.44%)	5 (2.17%)
	5. Non-academic professionals	7 (11.29%)	-	3 (2.16%)	10 (4.35%)
	6. Lower/intermediate employees	6 (9.68%)	3 (10.34%)	35 (25.18%)	44 (19.18%)
	7. Lower/intermediate civil servants	-	-	3 (2.16%)	3 (1.30%)
	8. Merchants (self-employed)	19 (30.65%)	9 (31.03%)	13 (9.35%)	41 (17.83%)
	9. Farmers (self-employed)	6 (9.68%)	8 (27.59%)	4 (2.88%)	18 (7.83%)
Elite or Upper-Middle	10. Managers	2 (3.23%)	-	1 (0.72%)	3 (1.30%)
	11. Higher civil servants	1 (1.61%)	-	-	1 (0.43%)
	12. Students (upper school/university)	-	-	1 (0.72%)	1 (0.43%)
	13. Academic professionals	-	-	5 (3.60%)	5 (2.17%)
	14. Entrepreneurs	2 (3.23%)	3 (10.34%)	1 (0.72%)	6 (2.61%)
Status Unclear	15. Non-university students	-	-	-	-
	16. Retired	-	-	5 (3.60%)	5 (2.17%)
	17. Married women	4 (6.45%)	2 (6.90%)	4 (2.88%)	10 (4.35%)
	18. Military personnel	-	-	-	-
	19. Unemployed	-	-	4 (2.88%)	4 (1.74%)
	20. School pupils	-	-	3 (2.16%)	3 (1.30%)
	21. Full-time salaried B.U.F. employees	1 (1.61%)	1 (3.45%)	3 (2.16%)	5 (2.17%)
	22. Other	-	1 (3.45%)	-	1 (0.43%)
	TOTALS	62(100.01%)	29(100.00%)	139(100.03%)	230(100.03%)

TABLE 3 (contd) SAMPLE OF B.U.F. MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS IN EAST LONDON (232), SOUTH-WEST ESSEX (79) AND DORSET (41) BY SOCIAL CLASS AND OCCUPATIONAL SUB-GROUP 1933/34-1940

Social Class	Occupational Sub-Group	East London	S.W. Essex	Dorset
Lower	1. Unskilled/semi-skilled workers	100 (43.10%)	12 (15.19%)	5 (12.20%)
	2. Skilled workers	34 (14.65%)	14 (17.72%)	2 (4.88%)
Lower-Middle & Middle-Middle	4. Master craftsmen (independent)	18 (7.76%)	6 (7.59%)	2 (4.88%)
	5. Non-academic professionals	3 (1.29%)	3 (3.80%)	6 (14.63%)
	6. Lower/intermediate employees	20 (8.62%)	23 (29.11%)	5 (12.20%)
	7. Lower/intermediate civil servants	1 (0.43%)	2 (2.53%)	-
	8. Merchants (self-employed)	39 (16.81%)	5 (6.33%)	10 (24.39%)
	9. Farmers (self-employed)	-	-	5 (12.20%)
Elite or Upper-Middle	10. Managers	1 (0.43%)	1 (1.26%)	-
	11. Higher civil servants	-	-	-
	12. Students (upper school/university)	1 (0.43%)	-	-
	13. Academic professionals	-	5 (6.33%)	1 (2.44%)
	14. Entrepreneurs	1 (0.43%)	-	-
Status Unclear	15. Non-university students	-	-	1 (2.44%)
	16. Retired	-	3 (3.80%)	1 (2.44%)
	17. Married women	3 (1.29%)	1 (1.26%)	2 (4.88%)
	18. Military personnel	-	-	-
	19. Unemployed	7 (3.02%)	-	-
	20. School pupils	2 (0.86%)	1 (1.26%)	1 (2.44%)
	21. Full-time salaried B.U.F. employees	2 (0.86%)	3 (3.80%)	-
	TOTALS	232 (100.00%)	79 (100.00%)	41 (100.02%)

(Derived from T.P. Linehan, East London for Mosley, Tables 6 and 7, pp.214-215, and the Saunders Papers, University of Sheffield)

occupational sub-group. Manual workers were also well represented with the 65 lower class Mosleyites almost evenly divided between the unskilled/semi-skilled and skilled categories (15.28 and 13.04 per cent respectively).

An examination of the sample at county level reinforces and refines this general analysis. The most striking discovery was the large percentage of lower middle and middle middle class fascists in Norfolk (66.14 per cent), Suffolk (68.96 per cent) and Essex (43.17 per cent), a finding which suggests that the B.U.F. depended greatly on non-manual support across the region. It is worth noting too that, for Suffolk and Essex, the three largest occupational sub-groups within this class category were lower/intermediate white collar workers, merchants and farmers. In Norfolk, the same three sub-groups were among the four largest in the lower middle and middle middle class band. At the very least, this raises the possibility that much of the middle class backing for Mosleyite fascism in eastern England came from adherents engaged in these specific types of employment. Furthermore, the proportion of elite or upper middle class fascists in each county sample was broadly similar, ranging from 5.76 per cent in Essex to 10.34 per cent in Norfolk.

The distribution of manual support, however, was far from uniform. Indeed, 52 of the 65 lower class Mosleyites identified were based in Essex. Interestingly, in view of Linehan's conclusions discussed below, almost half of the proletarian fascists from the county (23) were concentrated in the four Boroughs bordering east London which contained sizeable working class populations, namely Walthamstow, Leyton, West Ham and East Ham. If the Essex sample is divided into two groups, one covering the four Boroughs and the other the remainder of the county, a contrasting pattern emerges. Of the 48 Mosleyites from those districts in close proximity to the East End, 47.92 per cent had lower class backgrounds and 35.42 per cent belonged to the lower middle and middle middle class. For the rest of Essex, the relative importance of the two class categories was reversed, with corresponding percentages of 31.87 and 47.26. To a certain extent, therefore, it would appear that the Essex B.U.F.'s social base

mirrored the local environment, becoming increasingly working class nearer to east London and more middle class in the suburban and provincial parts of the county.

The social and occupational features exhibited by the 'East Anglian' and East End samples tend to indicate that the Blackshirt movement relied on different constituencies for its core support in the two areas. Whereas 52.66 per cent of the 230 Mosleyites from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex had lower middle and middle middle class backgrounds, 57.75 per cent of the 232 east London adherents traced by Linehan came from the lower class. Thus, despite being able to appeal across the manual-non-manual divide, the East Anglian B.U.F. seemingly acquired a predominantly middle class following, and the East End movement assumed a distinctly proletarian character. In addition, elite and upper middle class Mosleyites accounted for 6.94 per cent of the 'East Anglian' total but comprised only 1.29 per cent of the east London sample. This also suggests, as might be expected, that Blackshirt formations in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex had proportionally more success than their east London counterparts in attracting recruits or sympathisers from the upper reaches of British society.

Another interesting, though necessarily tentative, contrast concerns the nature of working class fascism in the two regions. Linehan's research indicates that unskilled/semi-skilled workers formed the mainstay of the East End B.U.F., with skilled workers playing a significant but clearly subordinate role. Yet, in the East Anglian sample, which revealed a notably lower level of manual representation, there was little disparity between occupational sub-groups one and two. These findings might indicate that such Mosleyites were drawn more evenly from these sections of the working class in the three counties than in east London. However, given the small number of fascist manual workers identified in Norfolk and Suffolk, this argument should not be pressed too far.

Having noted these differences, it is important not to overlook the similarities that exist between the two samples. Firstly, even though the percentages varied, both were composed chiefly of individuals from the lower class and lower middle and middle middle class. Secondly, the same four occupational sub-groups (one, two, six and

eight) accounted for a majority of the 230 East Anglian and 232 East End Mosleyites. These findings lend weight to the argument that, as a national organisation, the B.U.F. relied heavily on working class and routine non-manual elements. They also suggest that, irrespective of locality, marginalised or alienated manual workers, shopkeepers, owners of small businesses and routine white collar employees formed key components of the Blackshirt constituency.

An examination of the 41 B.U.F. members from Dorset supports much of the preceding analysis. The pronounced lower middle and middle middle class bias of the sample (68.30 per cent), coupled with the smaller but still significant percentage of working class recruits (17.08 per cent), broadly resembles the pattern for Norfolk, Suffolk, and suburban/provincial Essex. This further suggests that, in predominantly rural and agricultural areas, the B.U.F. appealed mainly, though not exclusively, to fringe elements from the lower and intermediate levels of the middle class. Moreover, most of the 28 Dorset fascists within this class category came from the same range of occupations as the majority of their East Anglian counterparts, since merchants (24.39 per cent of the overall total), white collar employees (12.20 per cent) and farmers (12.20 per cent) comprised three of the four most prominent sub-groups. The only significant difference was the higher percentage share attained by non-academic professionals (14.63 per cent) in the southern sample.

4. The Middle Classes and the B.U.F.

One of the key reasons explaining the B.U.F.'s ability to attract lower middle and middle middle class adherents was the fact that, generally speaking, the institutions and organisations which existed to defend the occupational interests of groups such as independent traders, shopkeepers and those running small businesses lacked both the "cohesive core ideology" and uncompromising anti-fascism manifested by many of their working class counterparts.[135] This had three important consequences. Firstly,

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135 Linehan, East London for Mosley, p. 227.

compared with manual workers, there were fewer moral and institutional constraints to prevent members of the lower and intermediate middle class from abandoning their 'natural' political affiliations and joining or supporting Mosley. Secondly, the B.U.F.'s political penetration of these middle class organisations was more successful than fascist efforts to infiltrate the Labour movement.[136] In addition, bodies representing non-manual interests were more likely to engage Blackshirts as guest speakers at their meetings. Thirdly, B.U.F. attempts to set up fascist-controlled associations to protect specific middle class occupations also appeared to reap greater rewards than those designed to mobilise sections of the working class.

Several features of the B.U.F.'s development in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex support this general argument. Middle class audiences, drawn from the local business and farming community, attended a number of Blackshirt propaganda events designed to cultivate a non-manual following, notably three Norfolk luncheons and a Suffolk dinner, which were all addressed by Mosley himself.[137] There is also clear evidence that a group of Lowestoft fascists, led by George Surtees, were able to promote B.U.F. thinking on the importance of preserving small businesses by using their membership of the local Incorporated Chamber of Commerce to arrange and hold a trades fair for private enterprises in the town during March 1938.[138] Furthermore, the Blackshirt movement was able to explain its programme to a variety of middle class forums in the region from late 1932. These included the Essex County Poultry Association and local Branches of the Round Table, Rotary Club, Junior Imperial League and India Defence League.[139] In October 1938, William Sherston, the B.U.F. prospective parliamentary

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136 During the late 1930s, the B.U.F. adopted 'infiltration' tactics and encouraged non-active adherents to join private trading and professional organisations. By this stage, Mosleyites belonged to the Private Traders' Association and the Newsagents' Federation. See P.R.O. HO 144/21281/7-11. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 20 January 1938.

137 See, for example, E.D.P., 21 December 1935, p. 3, 14 December 1937, p. 13; N.N.W.P., 18 December 1937, p. 7; E.A.D.T., 13 December 1938, p. 12; Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury (S.C.M.), 16 December 1938, p. 1.

138 Lowestoft Journal (L.J.), 12 March 1938, p. 11. See also Chapter Four.

139 See for example E.A.D.T., 23 July 1934, p. 8; Yarmouth Mercury (Y.M.), 17 December 1932, p. 15; L.N.C.P., 17 April 1934, p. 5; Saffron Walden Weekly News (S.W.W.N.), 28 June 1935, p. 12; L.J., 3 December 1938, p. 6; The Boro' of West Ham, East Ham and Stratford Express (S.E.), 24 March 1934, p. 9, 14 July 1934, p. 2; Essex County Standard (E.C.S.), 16 February 1935, p. 9. Of

candidate for the Woodbridge division, explained the Blackshirt policy for agriculture at a special meeting of the County Executive of the Suffolk Branch of the National Farmers' Union (N.F.U.).[140] Moreover, as Blackshirt involvement in the Oulton Broad Motor Boat Club illustrates, middle class organisations could also provide local Mosleyites with a conducive social and political environment in which to meet and spread the fascist message.[141]

Specific occupational groups from the lower and intermediate levels of the middle class were targeted by the B.U.F. One such category, which figured prominently in the East Anglian sample, was junior and middle-ranking white collar employees. Blackshirt propaganda maintained that, under financial democracy, the 'blackcoated worker', although vital to the smooth running of the economy, was neglected by the major parties and ground "between the upper stone of the Banks and the lower stone of the Trade Unions".[142] In particular, clerks were said to be suffering due to poor wages, impotent unions and government indifference, with unemployed clerical workers being compelled to take 'commission only' sales jobs. To improve their living standards, the B.U.F. advocated a national clerks' union within the future fascist Corporate State to secure higher wages and obtain legal safeguards against unscrupulous employers in the professions.[143]

Shopkeepers, independent traders and the owners of small businesses were also canvassed extensively for support in the B.U.F.'s literature.[144] Blackshirt pamphleteers contended that since financial interests controlled the democratic system to ensure

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course, not all of these local organisations were happy to provide the B.U.F. with a platform for its views. See for example Walthamstow, Leyton and Chingford Guardian (W.L.C.G.), 1 July 1938, p. 11; The British Trader, No. 5, July 1939, p. 4.

[140] GC 462/1/1/6. National Farmers' Union Suffolk County Branch Minutes. Minutes of a special meeting of the County Executive held at Ipswich on 11 October 1938. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich. This meeting was convened to hear the views of all the prospective parliamentary candidates for the division.

[141] Swan. Taped interview.

[142] 'Blackcoats and Blackshirts' (B.U.F. Leaflet). MSS 292/743/5. M.R.C..

[143] Blackshirt, 17 January 1936, p. 6; Action, 21 August 1937, p. 3. See also Blackshirt, 17 August 1934, p. 5.

[144] Action ran a regular column for shopkeepers, small traders and the owners of small businesses from 1936. Numerous articles devoted to this occupational group were also carried in the B.U.F. press. See for example Action, 6 March 1936, p. 13; Blackshirt, 11 April 1936, p. 2.

preferential treatment for their chain stores and multiples, small traders faced economic hardship and their organisations were unable to get effective protection from the government. The B.U.F.'s solution was to introduce a self-governing distributive corporation to preserve the small business community. Once established, this would prevent geographical saturation with its attendant cut-throat competition, limit discounts on bulk orders which favoured large concerns, and ban price-cutting. In addition, the B.U.F. planned to separate retailing, wholesaling and manufacturing to prevent the rise of monopolies and also aimed to outlaw the formation of new combines. Lastly, where possible, the fascists promised to dismantle multiple combines by selling off their existing shops to independent traders or by funding local managers to set up on their own.[145]

Although Blackshirt interest in the petit bourgeoisie had been apparent from the outset, the B.U.F. made its most concerted effort to attract the 'small man' during the late 1930s. At the end of 1938, the movement established a British Union Traders' Group, but this was quickly superseded by the British Traders' Bureau, which was launched in February 1939.[146] Led by Peter Heyward, the Bureau functioned as a vehicle for Blackshirt propaganda by publishing a journal entitled The British Trader and seeking to forge links with, and recruit members from, local traders' organisations.[147] Regional meetings were also staged to make small traders aware of B.U.F. policy and, on a grander scale, in February 1939, Mosley addressed over 1,000 shopkeepers at London's Memorial Hall.[148] The aforementioned Blackshirt initiatives at Walthamstow and Ilford to recruit local traders, for example, formed an integral part of this ongoing fascist campaign.[149]

The B.U.F. also regarded farmers as another important potential source of support in this social class category. Blackshirt policy for agriculture, based on

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145 F.D. Hill, 'Gainst Trust and Monopoly! Shopkeepers Action (London: Abbey Supplies, n.d.); P. Heyward, Menace of the Chain Stores (London: Greater Britain Publications, Abbey Supplies, n.d.).
146 Action, 29 October 1938, p. 6, 4 February 1939, p. 6.
147 The British Trader, No. 1, March 1939.
148 Ibid., p. 2.
149 See Chapter Five.

proposals to expand domestic production and develop a larger, more affluent home market within the protected framework of an imperial 'autarchic' bloc, was regularly promoted in B.U.F. articles and pamphlets.[150] Blackshirt speaking tours were conducted in farming districts across England by Mosley and other officials.[151] An attempt was also made to induce rural sympathisers to join a body known as the British Union of Farmers.[152] In the eastern counties, of course, the fascists supplemented these propaganda techniques with high profile tactics to woo the agricultural community. Mosleyites actively intervened in the East Anglian 'tithe war' during 1933-1934, mounted a campaign to establish a Blackshirt constituency organisation in the South-West Norfolk division in 1935, and made well-publicised efforts to extract political capital from the local rural discontent which was generated by depressed barley prices in 1938-1939.[153]

Many of the leading Blackshirt officials in the area belonged to sub-group six, the largest single occupational category in the sample, which encompassed clerks, sales representatives, commercial travellers and supervisory staff . Frederic Ball (Epping), Harold Scott-Turner (Leytonstone and Walthamstow West) and Walter Nichols (Walthamstow West) all had clerical jobs.[154] Junior and middle managers also joined the movement and took an active role. Alfred Ilett, District Leader and B.U.F. prospective parliamentary candidate for the King's Lynn division, was employed as a local works manager for General Refractories , a company specialising in the manufacture of foundry moulding sands.[155] Richard Bullivant, who briefly headed the West Ham B.U.F. formation in 1935, was a shop manager in Ilford.[156] Another Essex

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[150] See for example Fascism and Agriculture (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.); J. Jenks, The Land and the People: British Union Policy for Agriculture (London: Greater Britain Publications, n.d.); Blackshirt, 21-27 October 1933, p. 3, 6 July 1934, p. 3, 10 May 1935, p. 6, 10 April 1937, p. 8, 22 January 1938, p. 5; Action, 5 December 1936, p. 16, 17 April 1937, p. 6, 11 June 1938, p. 6, 20 May 1939, p. 6.

[151] See for example Blackshirt, 7-13 October 1933, p. 3, 4-10 May 1934, pp. 2-3.

[152] Fascist Week, 16-22 March 1934, p. 5; B.D.B.J. ACC/3121/E03/096. The Development of the British Union of Fascists (confidential memorandum, n.d.), p. 4.

[153] See Chapters Two, Three and Six.

[154] Ball. Interview; W.L.C.G., 28 October 1938, p. 4, 24 May 1940, p. 4.

[155] E.D.P., 22 January 1937, p. 11.

[156] V.K.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1998; F.T.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 17

Blackshirt official engaged as a store manager was Reginald Mace, an Assistant District Leader at Epping.[157] Commercial travellers and sales representatives also figured prominently in the local B.U.F. hierarchy, notably Ralph Ratcliffe, a one-time District Leader at King's Lynn, and Walter D. Wragg, a County Inspector for Essex.[158]

A number of the Mosleyites in this sub-group have not been mentioned in the previous chapters. These include C.W. Luker, a waterworks manager from Mundesley in Norfolk and Albert Osborne, a Blackshirt speaker residing in Ilford, who was employed as a receiving clerk.[159] Another hitherto unmentioned B.U.F. recruit was Arthur Watkiss, a 42 year old ex-serviceman from Chelmsford. Watkiss had lost a leg serving in the Middlesex Regiment during the First World War and worked as a secretary for a local garage firm.[160]

Adherents from this occupational category appeared to dominate certain Branches in the region. At Epping, for instance, much of the District membership was composed of lower and intermediate white collar employees.[161] Indeed, local Blackshirts jokingly referred to the Epping formation as the 'British Union of Bank Clerks'.[162] Information provided by contemporary sources and a former member indicate that the Southend B.U.F. similarly depended on this type of recruit.[163] Conversely, the Mosleyite affiliations of the Felixstowe clerk, Edward Frost, suggest

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August 1993.

157 D.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991; L.B.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1997. Mace was employed by the Home and Colonial Grocery store in George Lane, Woodford.

158 R.W. Ratcliffe. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985; Ball. Interview; E.G.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1997.

159 Action, 22 July 1937, p. 18; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1937 (London: Kelly's Directories, 1937), p. 288; East Ham Echo (E.H.E.), 17 March 1939, p. 1.

160 Blackshirt, 24 July 1937, p. 5; Essex Weekly News, 14 July 1937, p. 2.

161 Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards.

162 L.B.. Taped interview.

163 Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire. Reply of Southend Trades Council and Labour Party. LP/FAS/34/109; S.T., 7 April 1937, p. 8; M.G.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 30 March 1993; M.G.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 8 April 1993.

that limited white collar support for the B.U.F. could also be detected in areas where no formal Blackshirt organisation existed.[164]

Merchants, shopkeepers and owners of small businesses (sub-group eight) formed another central component of the B.U.F.'s regional support base. Several well-known local Blackshirts were drawn from this occupational category, such as George F. Surtees, the District Leader at Lowestoft, and Shirley Herbert Potter, the Norfolk cafe owner and B.U.F. Assistant District Leader.[165] The Brightlingsea couple, Mr. and Mrs. A. Rickman, who ran a cafe and guest house respectively in the town, were also prominently associated with the local B.U.F..[166]

Other small business owners were attracted to the regional movement as well. Donald H. Steed, an agricultural contractor from Great Cornard, near Sudbury, was known to be one of the region's most steadfast Blackshirts.[167] Two more Suffolk Mosleyites in this category owned a stationery, printing and chemist's outlet in Eye.[168] The local District Leader later recalled that this brother and sister partnership supported the B.U.F. "in a quiet way" in order to protect their business.[169] A small number of East Anglian drapers also had formal connections with the movement, notably Claude Goddard Chead, an ex-socialist Blackshirt speaker from Mundesley in Norfolk, Eric D. Rivett, a King's Lynn resident, and Vincent Smith of Lowestoft.[170] In addition, several merchants, shopkeepers and small traders belonged to the Epping District B.U.F., including a tripe shop owner, a grocer, and a furniture dealer.[171]

One interesting feature of this occupational sub-group is the regular appearance of Mosleyites who ran small businesses associated with the automobile and radio

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164 Times, 27 February 1934, p. 11, 27 March 1934, p. 11.
165 P.R.O. HO 45/23683. George Frederick Surtees; Bellamy, 'We Marched With Mosley', pp. 1013-1014; P.R.O. HO 45/23681/840457/C. Statement of Case Against Albert Edward Gore. 19 August 1940; Norfolk Chronicle, 1 March 1935, p. 4; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1933 (London: Kelly's Directories, 1933), p. 279.
166 Blackshirt, 21 September 1934, p. 10, 26 October 1934, p. 9; information provided by F.O.M..
167 Norfolk, Suffolk and Lincolnshire B.U.F. Membership List.
168 N.S.J.D.E., 27 January 1939, p. 8.
169 Ronald N. Creasy. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 20 October 1995.
170 Norfolk Chronicle, 1 March 1935, p. 4; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1933, p. 279; L.N.C.P., 25 October 1938, p. 12; G.J.. Taped interview; Action, 26 March 1938, p. 17; Swan. Taped interview.
171 Ball. Interview; L.B.. Taped interview; Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards.

trades. Most of those identified were King's Lynn Blackshirts. Ernest and Frederick Sillett jointly owned a small motor engineers business at the port, as did two other Blackshirt brothers named Giles.[172] The King's Lynn B.U.F. local election candidate, Philip A.E. Vare, operated as a radio and motor engineer from commercial premises in the town.[173] Another local adherent was Peter L., a radio dealer.[174] George Surtees also owned an automobile engineer and radio business at Lowestoft, and the Wrentham Blackshirt sympathiser, George Sawyer, was similarly engaged in the motor trade.[175] In Essex, Mosley's following included William Syrett, the proprietor of a motor works and garage at Weeley, who advertised a filling station job in Blackshirt in October 1934, a radio dealer from Kirby-le-Soken, and the owner of a car and omnibus business at Kelvedon.[176]

The agricultural community (sub-group nine) provided another important source of recruits and supporters for the eastern England movement. A number of local farmers assumed official Blackshirt positions in the region during the 1930s. The most senior were Douglas Gunson, the East Anglian Area Administrative Officer, and William Sherston, the B.U.F. County Inspector for Suffolk.[177] Several others already encountered, namely R.S. Banyard (Hornchurch), A.J. MacPherson (Chelmsford and Maldon), William Chapman (Hunstanton), and George Hoggarth (Eye), served as Branch Organisers or District officials in the area.[178] The Blackshirt movement in the three counties could also rely on the support of other 'fascist farmers'. Clement Rolfe

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[172] King's Lynn Union Movement Membership Book; G.J.. Taped interview; information provided by F.O.M..

[173] L.N.C.P., 16 April 1935, p. 6. Vare's business was located at 19-20, Railway Road, King's Lynn.

[174] L.N.C.P., 25 October 1938, p. 12; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1937, p. 251.

[175] P.R.O. HO 45/23683; Swan. Taped interview; P.R.O. HO 45/25714/840452/8.

[176] Blackshirt, 5 October 1934, p. 11; Kelly's Directory of Essex 1937 (London: Kelly's Directories, 1937), p. 556. Clacton Times and East Essex Gazette (C.T.E.E.G.), 1 February 1936, p. 6; Harwich and Dovercourt Standard (H.D.S.), 1 February 1936, p. 4; R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview; P.F.. Taped interview.

[177] E.D.P., 28 October 1933, p. 9; Action, 5 March 1938, p. 17; Creasy. Taped interview, 1995. W.E. Sherston was classified as a farmer because his mother was the owner of Otley Hall during this period, and, owing to a later family rift over his choice of bride, Dorothy Sherston disinherited her son.

[178] Romford Recorder (R.R.), 27 September 1935, p. 4, 28 October 1938, p. 10; Essex Chronicle (E.C.), 8 June 1934, p. 6; Blackshirt, 23 August 1935, p. 7; Times, 27 February 1934, p. 11, 27 March 1934, p. 11; Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts, p. 42; Creasy. Completed questionnaire.

Ingelby, a pig breeder residing at Snettisham in Norfolk, was known to be a staunch supporter of the movement, as was Charles Ellis of Glaven Farm, Letheringsett, near Holt.[179] An early Essex Mosleyite was Major William Frederick Cosens, who farmed over 150 acres at Tillingham.[180] One of the last recruits to join the Eye B.U.F. in 1940 was Y.C., a poultry farmer, who lived near Diss in Norfolk.[181]

One of the most prominent, and unusual, recruits in this category was the Norfolk agriculturist Captain Jocelyn Lee Hardy. In March 1934, as a recent fascist convert, Hardy gave a talk to the King's Lynn B.U.F. on his wartime experiences, which included escape attempts from a German prisoner-of-war camp.[182] Hardy, who now cultivated 600 acres at Washpit Farm, Rougham, near King's Lynn, had been born in London in 1894. After attending Berkhampsted School and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, he served in the Connaught Rangers during the First World War when, at the age of twenty, he was taken prisoner by the Germans. During the next three years, Hardy made six unsuccessful escape attempts before finally eluding his captors in 1918, events that were subsequently recalled in his 1927 book, I Escape. He returned to the front where he was wounded twice and lost a leg. After the war he served briefly in Dublin and co-authored a play with Robert Gore-Brown entitled 'The Key' based on his experiences there. Hardy's bravery gained him the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross and an audience with the King. During the 1930s, the rights to some of his adventure novels were bought by film companies. For example, Hardy sold the film rights to his 1935 novel, Everything is Thunder ,to the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, who turned it into a feature film starring Constance Bennett.[183]

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179 G.J.. Taped interview; information provided by F.O.M.; E.D.P., 17 November 1938, p. 5.
180 Maldon Express (M.E.), 2 June 1934, p. 1.
181 Y.C.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 8 May 1991; Ronald N. Creasy. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 8 March 1994. Y.C. declined to be interviewed.
182 Blackshirt, 23-29 March 1934, p. 3.
183 L.N.C.P., 18 February 1936, p. 10, 25 February 1936, p. 11; The Author's and Writer's Who's Who 1934 (London: Shaw Publishing, 1934), p. 274.

Despite having some success in attracting local lower middle and middle middle class adherents, the B.U.F. was unable to create a sizeable non-manual constituency in the region. The 121 Mosleyites from the sample in this social class band were spread across twelve occupational categories.[184] Such diversity, coupled with the small numbers involved, indicates that the B.U.F. attracted only alienated and peripheral elements from the intermediate strata of society. Again, this accords with the Griffin-Copsey model, since the Blackshirts' failure to move beyond the political margins inevitably placed 'mainstream' support out of reach.

Blackshirt efforts were thwarted by a range of factors, which denied the movement the political space in which to appeal effectively to middle class groups in the area. The latter, generally speaking, were not badly affected by the depression and enjoyed improving economic conditions from 1933-1934. Discontent did surface within the East Anglian farming community, principally over financial returns and tithe payments, but the potential for fascist growth here was largely checked by the patchy impact of the economic downturn, the subsequent modest recovery, government measures to assist agriculture, and the existence of established grass root farmers' organisations, such as the tithepayers' associations and the county Branches of the N.F.U., which distanced themselves from the B.U.F. and provided more credible outlets for protest. Furthermore, Conservative and Liberal local party organisations in the three counties were in a much healthier state than their east London counterparts. In turn, this offered little scope for the B.U.F. to pose convincingly as the only political movement in the area able to defend middle class interests.[185]

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[184] 42 were in commercial, financial or insurance occupations, 24 were employed as clerks, draughtsmen or typists, twenty worked in agriculture, eight had professional jobs, seven were engaged in personal service, four were employed in entertainment and sports, two worked in skins, one was engaged in quarrying, one made food, one was a photographer, and one ran a building company. These occupational categories are based on Census of England and Wales 1931: Occupation Tables (London: H.M.S.O., 1934), Table 16, pp. 202-297.

[185] Linehan found that the decline of Liberalism in Bethnal Green and the weakness of Conservative Party political organisation in the East End enabled the B.U.F. to attract many local small business owners, traders and middle class residents who felt they had been effectively disfranchised. See Linehan, East London for Mosley, Chapter Three.

5. The Working Classes and the B.U.F.

Blackshirt propaganda also repeatedly stressed that the B.U.F. was pro-labour. Indeed, Mosleyite literature argued that fascism was "inspired by the century old struggle of the workers towards unity", represented the "logical outcome of the Trade Union movement's fight for fair conditions" and embodied "the next stage in the evolution of industrial structure".[186] According to the fascist viewpoint, the British working class faced the prospect of mounting unemployment and declining living standards because the liberal democratic 'old gang' (including the Labour Party with its espousal of 'evolutionary socialism') and the free trade system were incapable of solving the fundamental economic problems of the post-war period - underconsumption in an age of plenty, the loss of overseas markets and the adoption of mass production techniques by foreign competitors.[187] Moreover, from the B.U.F.'s perspective, the existing trade union movement operated in a manner which neither articulated nor safeguarded workers' interests. It was alleged that the present system of industrial representation fostered a culture of careerism and cronyism among union leaders, diverted much-needed funds into official salaries, political contributions, and other inappropriate donations, and promoted an international left-wing agenda, rather than the cause of the British worker.[188]

Mosley argued that only the establishment of the Corporate State, based on an insulated home market and an autarchic system of imperial trade, could protect the working class by guaranteeing the market for domestic industries, creating a high wage economy, and excluding goods produced by cheap foreign labour. Within this framework, the B.U.F. pledged, necessary schemes of industrial rationalisation and modernisation would be implemented in a controlled way to facilitate the transfer and training of the workforce. Displaced workers, who could not be provided with

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186 Fascism for the Million: The New Movement Simplified (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1936), pp. 57-58.
187 See Mosley, The Greater Britain.
188 J. Beckett, Fascism and Trade Unionism (Extract supplied privately), pp. 2-6; Trade Unions (Speakers' Notes No. 20, B.U.F. Policy Propaganda Department, November 1936).

alternative employment, would receive maintenance and be eligible for additional financial assistance from a Labour Reserve Fund. Another Blackshirt undertaking was to ban the practice, common in some lower class jobs, of working abnormally long hours without extra remuneration.[189]

Furthermore, under a future B.U.F. government, the working class were to be represented as industrial co-partners in the Corporate State by 'national' trade unions, which were to be given exclusive legal status as employees' organisations.[190] All workers would be required by law to join the appropriate union, and each membership would elect rank and file representatives, via free internal ballots, to sit on the relevant corporate decision-making bodies. As union leaders, those elected remained accountable to their members and were expected to show "a completely disinterested devotion to the service of workers and the nation".[191] Each union was to be concerned solely with issues relating to the functioning of its own industry, such as working arrangements, production levels and employees' rights. All forms of 'political' involvement, including contributions to the Labour Party and grants to "subversive foreign movements", were to be prohibited on the grounds that this type of activity had corrupted and perverted the unions' original purpose.[192] Finally, the B.U.F. maintained that, since their protectionist and corporate remedies would provide lasting prosperity for manual workers and thus remove the economic justification for industrial action, the right to strike would also be withdrawn.

This general analysis underpinned B.U.F. propaganda which was directed towards specific working class occupations. Numerous Blackshirt pamphlets and articles criticised the conditions under which various manual groups were currently employed and recommended the implementation of the fascist proposals outlined above within each sector to defend workers' interests. In this way, a diverse range of lower class employees, including miners, textile operatives, agricultural labourers, transport

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189 Fascism for the Million, pp. 57-64.
190 W. Risdon, Strike Action Or Power Action (London: Abbey Supplies, n.d..).
191 Fascism for the Million, p. 63.
192 Trade Unions (Speakers' Notes), p. 4.

workers, shop assistants, laundry staff, and taxi drivers, were urged to embrace the Blackshirt creed.[193]

The presence of 65 lower class Mosleyites in the regional sample suggests that, in terms of overall numbers, manual converts provided the Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex B.U.F. formations with an important secondary source of recruits and sympathisers. Several of these working class fascists served as local District Leaders. Richard Bellamy, then a casual labourer in Norfolk, founded the B.U.F. Branch at Downham Market in 1933 and became its first Organiser.[194] At various times, workers also headed Blackshirt groupings in Essex. Among the most prominent were Frederick Ralph, a baker's roundsman (Ilford), Aubrey Hunt, a sheet metal worker (Ilford), Frank Osborn, a stock-keeper (East Ham), Arthur Beavan, a painter (West Ham), John Aldrich, a tobacco worker (Walthamstow West), Frederick Young, a fish curer (Walthamstow West), L.B., a cabinet maker (Epping), and Leonard Hidden, a carpenter (Harwich).[195] Other local B.U.F. officials were also drawn from the working class, including Roy Hockin, a Brightlingsea printer, V.N., an Assistant District Leader at Ilford employed as a shoe repairer, and the East Ham District Treasurer, T.M., who worked as an upholsterer.[196]

The working class Mosleyites identified were drawn from a wide range of occupations, a feature which reinforces the general impression that the B.U.F. was unable penetrate any particular industry in the three counties and relied instead on small numbers of marginalised and disaffected manual workers employed in various sectors of the local economy. This pattern of support, which resembled the peripheral nature of

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193 See for example A. Raven Thomson, Cotton! Communists and Socialists Exposed (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.); Yorkshire Betrayed: British Union Textile Policy (Wool) (London: Abbey Supplies, n.d.); Blackshirt,, 4 April 1936, p. 2, 18 April 1936, p. 3, 4 July 1936, p. 3, 24 April 1937, p. 8.

194 Bellamy. Taped interview.

195 V.N.. Telephone interview; Linehan, East London for Mosley, p. 115; Ilford Recorder (I.R.), 28 October 1937, p. 9; E.H.E., 29 October 1937, p. 1; S.E., 21 May 1938, p. 11; W.L.C.G., 27 May 1938, p. 19, 23 February 1940, p. 2; E.C.S., 28 September 1935, p. 13. The East Ham B.U.F.'s first Branch Organiser, Thomas Sullivan, worked as a labourer. See E.H.E., 2 August 1933, p. 2.

196 E.C.S., 13 April 1935, p. 10, 28 September 1935, p. 13; V.N.. Telephone interview; T.M.. Taped interview.

non-manual backing for the regional movement, further emphasised that the critical conditions for fascist growth did not exist in the three counties. Sub-group one contained 35 unskilled or semi-skilled adherents who between them were engaged in 29 different jobs.[197] Within this occupational category were to be found such diverse types as Frederick Burton, a 22 year old seaman belonging to the King's Lynn Branch, Wilfred Slegg, a Downham Market labourer in his late twenties, a Leyton Blackshirt named John Dean, who worked as a bartender, E. Godfrey, a garment cleaner and presser from West Ham, and E.G. Hodgson, a chauffeur attached to the Epping B.U.F..[198]

Sub-group two offered a similarly heterogeneous collection with 30 Mosleyites employed in twenty occupations.[199] A variety of local skilled workers were attracted to the B.U.F., including G. Green, a specialist willow worker from Woodbridge, James Hudson, a King's Lynn Blackshirt, who earned his living as a bootmaker, and G. Hammond, a Romford-based clothes cutter.[200] At Epping, a typewriter mechanic, a telephone fitter and a piano tuner were among those from this category who joined the District formation.[201]

Ten of the lower class Mosleyite sample (15.4 per cent) were classified as wood or furniture workers.[202] These included Alfred S. Hatton, an elderly woodcarver

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[197] Sub-group one was comprised of three painter/decorators, two labourers, two nurserymen, two shop assistants, two storekeepers, an agricultural labourer, a baker's assistant, a baker's roundsman, a bartender, a bus conductor, a casual worker, a chauffeur, a domestic servant, a factory worker, a fish curer, a fisherman, a fitter, a footman, a garment cleaner, a general handyman, a grocery roundsman, a railway worker, a seaman, a shoe repairer, a soap boiler, a sprayer, a taxi cab driver, a tobacco worker, and a woodworker.

[198] Times, 27 February 1934, p. 11, 27 March 1934, p. 11; S.E., 16 June 1939, p. 6; Blackshirt, 11 October 1935, p. 6; Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards.

[199] Sub-group two was comprised of four printers, three cabinet makers, three carpenters, two blacksmiths, two bricklayers, two welders, a baker, a bootmaker, a clothes cutter, an electrician, a hairdresser, a piano tuner, a sheet metal worker, a tailor, a telephone fitter, a typewriter mechanic, an upholsterer, a willow worker, a wireless engineer, and a woodcarver.

[200] Blackshirt, 2 August 1935, p. 7; Times, 27 February 1934, p. 11, 27 March 1934, p. 11; Action, 17 September 1938, p. 19.

[201] Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards.

[202] The lower class sample was divided into sixteen occupational categories. Ten were workers in wood and furniture, six were employed in transport and communication, five were engaged in personal service, five were metal workers, four had commercial occupations, four were printers, four were engaged in the production of food and tobacco, four made textile goods and articles of dress, three were painters and decorators, three had agricultural occupations, two were storekeepers, two

belonging to the Epping District, and Thomas Edgar Hilton, a carpenter and joiner who contested the Endlebury ward for the movement during the 1938 Chingford local elections.[203] Half of the individuals in this category either lived or worked in the vicinity of east London. This finding supports Linehan's argument that Jewish-Gentile economic tensions in the East End wood and furniture trades provided the B.U.F. with fertile ground for its anti-Semitic propaganda and attracted numerous recruits from this sector of the local economy.[204] Three of these workers have not appeared in earlier chapters, namely Albert John Lipscombe, a Walthamstow woodworker, and the brothers Horace and Sidney M., cabinet makers who both joined the East Ham B.U.F. in the late 1930s.[205]

An anti-Semitic connection can also be detected in the second largest manual group, transport and communication workers, which contained six working class Mosleyites. During the second half of the 1930s, fascist efforts to mobilise taxidrivers, particularly in the East End, were stepped up. The Blackshirt press argued that Gentiles engaged in this occupation faced unfair Jewish competition, and a B.U.F. Cab Trade Group was established to recruit sympathetic taximen.[206] Furthermore, in June 1938, before an audience of 900-1,000 cab drivers at the Memorial Hall, London, Mosley promised that the B.U.F. would not only abolish private car hire services because they undercut the ordinary taxi man but also ban the "largely non-British" part-time cabbies, since they took custom away from their full-time British counterparts.[207]

Information passed to the Board of Deputies in 1938-1939 documented some of the B.U.F.'s anti-Jewish activities amongst taxi drivers in east London. According to the Board's sources, from mid-to-late 1938, Blackshirt activists in the trade were

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were bricklayers, two installed and repaired electrical items, one worked in undefined materials, and one was a fisherman. The remaining nine were classified as other and undefined workers. Census 1931: Occupation Tables, Table 16, pp. 202-297.

203 Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards; W.L.C.G., 28 October 1938, p. 3.

204 Linehan, East London for Mosley, pp. 217-222.

205 W.L.C.G., 11 February 1938, p. 2; T.M.. Taped interview.

206 Blackshirt, 4 July 1936, p. 3.

207 Action, 2 July 1938, p. 16; Blackshirt, July 1938, p. 4.

disseminating propaganda in the East End which alleged that Jewish drivers were flooding into this type of work, stealing fares from ranks and putting Gentile cabmen out of business.[208] This campaign strained relations between local Jewish and Gentile taxi operators and induced "hundreds" of cabbies to join the B.U.F..[209] Interestingly, it was reported that, as far as could be ascertained, the majority of these recruits "live in the Ilford and Forest Gate Area".[210] The same informant noted that "many BUF cabmen" had joined the London Cabdrivers' Cooperative Society and pointed out that Blackshirts also sat on the latter's management committee.[211] By March-April 1939, however, there were signs that this B.U.F. initiative was no longer reaping many rewards. Another Mosley meeting for taximen, held at the Memorial Hall on 27 March 1939, apparently attracted only 32 cabmen. The audience was hurriedly made up to about 160 by drafting in a number of young people, none of whom had any connection with the taxi business. At this juncture, the number of cab driving Blackshirts was also said to be on the decline.[212]

One of the working class Mosleyites identified as being involved in this agitation was A. Phelps, a taxi driver residing at Ley Street, Ilford. Phelps worked for a Jewish-owned cab firm in Three Colts Lane, Bethnal Green and was "very prominent" in the B.U.F. Cab Trade Group.[213] Described as an official of the movement, he was observed on a Blackshirt march from Stratford to Wanstead wearing a B.U.F. armlet and tie. He was also thought to be the source of the anti-Semitic and pro-fascist 'stickyback' labels which were being attached to local taxis.[214]

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[208] B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. J.C.. Letter to S. Saloman. 9 October 1938. J.C. was active in the East London Cab Branch of the Cab Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union. He reported that many of the B.U.F. activists in the trade were past or present employees of east London Jewish-owned taxi firms.
[209] Ibid.. See also B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. M. E. Waldman, General Secretary, Order Achei Ameth, Brethren of Truth Friendly Society. Letter to A.G. Brotman, Secretary, Jewish Board of Deputies. 9 June 1938.
[210] Ibid..
[211] B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. J.C.. Letter to S. Saloman. 2 April 1939.
[212] Ibid..
[213] B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. Untitled Report.
[214] B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. J.C.. Letter to L.A.C. (?). 11 September 1938; B.D.B.J. C6/9/1/7. J.C.. Letter to S. Saloman. 9 October 1938.

Bus company employees, another group of transport workers represented in the sample, were also courted by the B.U.F..[215] At the end of September 1934, the Agent of the East Ham North Labour Party sent a copy of a B.U.F. leaflet on 'Busmen And Fascism', which had been circulated in a local Branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union, to the T.U.C..[216] In December 1936, a Blackshirt representative named O. Auton visited the Ipswich depot of the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company to consult with drivers and conductors, who were demanding better wages and conditions for the firm's 1000-strong workforce. Convinced that these employees had a "just case" and had been badly served by their union, Auton suggested that B.U.F. members, acting in a private capacity, would be prepared to assist them.[217] Seven months later, Mosley spoke at a N.H.Q. meeting for London busmen, who either belonged or were sympathetic to the movement. Only 49 bus workers attended this event, including an unspecified number from the Forest Gate garage.[218] The East Ham District B.U.F. also arranged a meeting for 25 January 1939 to enable Blackshirt and fascist-inclined bus company employees "to hear the British Union attitude towards the problems of transport workers".[219] Shortly before the scheduled date, permission to use the booked venue, a room in a local public house, was withdrawn.[220]

The inclusion of a small number of lower class adherents engaged in agricultural occupations supports Blackshirt claims that the movement was able to recruit this type of worker in places such as King's Lynn, Downham Market, Eye and Woodbridge.[221] Interestingly, the three fascists in question - I.F. Carlile, Thomas Hingley and William Smith - all held official positions within the Norfolk B.U.F..[222]

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[215] The sample included George William Barrick of Chingford, a bus conductor and member of the Transport and General Workers' Union, who joined the Epping District B.U.F. as a non-active member on 13 January 1939. Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards.
[216] Stewart Rainbird, Agent and Secretary, East Ham North Labour Party. Letter to the Secretary, Trades Union Congress. 28 September 1934. MSS 292/743/4. M.R.C..
[217] Blackshirt, 19 December 1936, p. 4.
[218] P.R.O. HO 144/21064/189. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 8 July 1937.
[219] Action, 11 February 1939, p. 16.
[220] Ibid..
[221] E.D.P., 13 September 1934, p. 7; Bellamy. Taped interview; Creasy. Taped interview, 1991.
[222] P.R.O. HO 45/25754/863027/3. Fascist Appeals To The Home Office Advisory Committee. Memorandum by E.B. Stamp. 22 August 1940; Y.M., 18 November 1933, p. 11; L.N.C.P., 23 March

Nonetheless, the fact that this trio accounted for less than two per cent of the sample reinforces the argument that the B.U.F. failed to penetrate the ranks of the agricultural working class to any significant extent. Confronted by a host of obstacles, including a geographically scattered labour force, the fragmented nature of farm work, the 'paternalistic' farmer-employee relationship, the anti-Blackshirt stand taken by the National Union of Agricultural Workers (N.U.A.W.), improving economic conditions from the mid-1930s, and the continuing flight of rural labourers to the towns in search of better jobs, fascist efforts to mobilise agricultural workers in the eastern counties made little impact.

Blackshirt propagandists also targeted the east coast fishing industry. The B.U.F. press and fascist speakers maintained that British fishermen, in places such as Brightlingsea, Lowestoft and Yarmouth, would enjoy greater economic security and protection under the Corporate State.[223] This was to be achieved by implementing a number of measures, including a complete ban on foreign-caught fish to create an assured domestic market and offset the threat of unemployment, the introduction of stable fish prices for those landing the catch, the removal of unnecessary 'middle' agencies, and the provision of credit to enable fishermen to acquire new boats and upgrade their equipment.[224]

Mosleyite sources indicate that the movement attracted members of the East Anglian fishing community. In 1934, the Blackshirt noted that support for the B.U.F. at Brightlingsea "seems particularly strong...among the workers in the fishing industry", and anecdotal evidence suggests that, at some stage, the local Branch was run by a family engaged in this type of work.[225] The fascists press also reported that Lowestoft fishermen were attending Blackshirt meetings at the Suffolk port and claimed that some

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1934, p. 7; Lynn Advertiser, 13 April 1934, p. 6. Carlile and Hingley were nurserymen and Smith was an agricultural labourer.

[223] See for example Blackshirt, 17 August 1934, p. 3, 14 September 1934, p. 9, 16 November 1934, p. 4, 18 January 1935, p. 2.

[224] Ibid.. The B.U.F. also proposed to establish a Central Fish Office in London to reduce wastage, coordinate efficient distribution to centres of consumption, lower transport costs and minimise the volume of freight. See Blackshirt, 7 September 1934, p. 5.

[225] Ibid., 7 September 1934, p. 11; information provided by F.O.M..

of these had enrolled.[226] Nevertheless, the fact that the sample contains only one Blackshirt with this occupation tends to suggest that, in reality, few workers employed in the fishing industry were tempted by the B.U.F.'s programme.[227]

Blackshirt attempts to mobilise working class support in the three counties made little impact. With local economic conditions improving from 1933-1934, the overwhelming majority of manual workers in the region regarded Mosley's drastic remedies as irrelevant and unattractive. Furthermore, most of the radicalised minority put their faith in organisations on the extreme left, particularly the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, which disrupted B.U.F. activity in places such as Norwich, Yarmouth, Eye, Braintree and West Ham.[228] The Labour Party and the trade unions also exerted moral and ideological pressures to preserve working class political loyalties and thus prevent the Blackshirts creating a sizeable manual constituency in the area. Local labour movement figures warned of the dangers fascism posed for the working class, and urged their members and supporters to stay away from B.U.F. events.[229] In addition, Blackshirt speakers were rarely permitted to address left-wing bodies, and Labour-controlled local authorities regularly prevented the B.U.F. hiring council halls for political meetings.[230]

6. Elites and the B.U.F.

The sample also shows that the movement was able to recruit members of the upper middle and elite classes, albeit on an even more modest scale. A handful fell into the managerial category, such as R.W., who worked as a trainee manager in his

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226 Blackshirt, 10 July 1937, p. 6.
227 The sample includes A.R. Pawle, a Brightlingsea fisherman who joined the movement in 1934. He subsequently advertised fishing trips on a trawler in the B.U.F. press. See E.C.S., 3 November 1934, p. 12; Blackshirt, 3 July 1937, p. 7.
228 N.N.W.P., 12 September 1936, p. 1, 19 September 1936, p. 1; Y.M., 17 June 1933, p. 11, 1 July 1933, p. 16; Creasy. Taped interview, 1991; P.R.O. HO 144/20141/312. Report on the Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom, Excluding Northern Ireland. Report No. I. Developments up to the end of May 1934; Beavan. Taped interview; F.T.. Taped interview.
229 E.D.P., 2 July 1934, p. 16, 4 June 1935, p. 14; Diss Express (D.E.), 13 July 1934, p. 2; Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire. Reply of Ilford Trades Council and Labour Party. LP/FAS/34/107.
230 The B.U.F. seldom addressed left-wing or working class forums in the region. For rare exceptions see S.E., 7 September 1935, p. 5; I.R., 5 November 1936, p. 19.

family's manufacturing firm at Walthamstow, and Brian Smith, the prominent Sheringham Blackshirt employed as a director of Stapley and Smith, the London-based textile house.[231] The most notorious senior manager in the region with known Mosleyite connections was Edgar Gargett, a director of several East Anglian shipping companies, who served briefly as the King's Lynn B.U.F. Branch Organiser in 1933-1934. Gargett was in his early fifties and was a well known figure in the King's Lynn business community, having been a former President of the local Chamber of Trade. During the First World War, he had served as a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.[232]

Gargett's resignation from the executive post of the local Blackshirt formation was followed by a dramatic and sharp fall from grace. In January 1935, at King's Lynn petty sessions, he was convicted of tobacco smuggling through the port and was given the option of either a fine of £2,227 10s. (with 50 guineas costs) or six months in prison.[233] It would appear that he served a sentence at Wakefield Prison.[234] Early in February 1935, Grimston petty sessions fined Gargett a further £50 for being found in possession of an unlicensed spirits still.[235] Just over a year later, Gargett appeared before Grimston justices to account for his failure to pay the latter fine. Gargett's explanation was that, after serving his prison sentence for tobacco smuggling, his reduced income of two pounds per week prevented him from paying off the fine at the stipulated rate of ten pounds per month. The justices accepted Gargett's offer of monthly repayments of ten shillings and adjourned the case for six months to allow him to pursue a position in a dam construction project in Egypt.[236]

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231 R.W.. Completed questionnaire; R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview; Home Office Advisory Committee (HOAC) Report. Brian Smith. 20 August 1940; E.D.P., 10 December 1935, p. 14. Smith became chairman of the company on 20 November 1935.
232 L.N.C.P., 5 December 1933, p. 7, 21 April 1936, p. 12; E.D.P., 2 January 1934, p. 6; Blackshirt, 16-22 March 1934, p. 4.
233 L.N.C.P., 29 January 1935, p. 1.
234 Ibid., 21 April 1936, p. 12.
235 Ibid., 5 February 1935, p. 1.
236 Ibid., 21 April 1936, p. 12.

Representatives from the higher professions joined the regional B.U.F. too. Information sent to the Board of Deputies in 1939 revealed that an Ilford resident named Michael Frederick Cahill, a solicitor practising in the City of London, was "prominently connected with the Fascist Party".[237] Cahill was also thought to act as an official conduit for channelling financial donations from abroad into the B.U.F.. Another recruit from the upper occupational ranks was Dr. F.N. Bray, a medical practitioner, who lived at Woodford Green in Essex. A latecomer to the B.U.F., Bray joined the Epping District as a non-active member on 14 September 1939.[238] From time to time, professionals also advertised their services in the B.U.F. press. In 1938, for example, "G", an unemployed Leytonstone accountant, and a dentist based in Forest Gate, both appealed for work in the classified columns of Action.[239]

A number of Mosleyite entrepreneurs provided further elite backing for the Blackshirt movement in the three counties. Most of those identified were prominent local landowners with a strong public commitment to the B.U.F. cause, such as Dorothy, Viscountess Downe, Dorothy Sherston, and Ronald Creasy. The Norfolk J.P. and Deputy Lieutenant, Colonel Henry Albert Barclay, was another landed fascist. Barclay, the owner of Hanworth Hall, which was situated in the north of the county, joined the B.U.F. in May 1934.[240] Furthermore, George Baerselman, proprietor of the Mount Liell Hotel at Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex, advertised his establishment in the Blackshirt press as a "STRICTLY NON-JEWISH" concern.[241]

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[237] B.D.B.J. C6/10/32. F. Austin, General Cabinet Manufacturer (Leyton), Argall Avenue, Lea Bridge Estate, London, E.10. Letter and enclosure to Cyril Picciotto, 3, Elm Court, London, E.C.4. 24 February 1939. Cahill had offices at 89, Charterhouse in the City of London and lived at 8, Beaufort Gardens, Ilford. He was understood to have been previously employed as a solicitor for the London Cooperative Society.

[238] Epping B.U.F. Membership Cards. According to the last District Leader at Epping, three medical doctors belonged to the local formation. L.B.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1993.

[239] Action, 23 July 1938, p. 19, 6 August 1938, p. 19. In June 1934, the Norwich Labour Party reported that a former member of the Board of Guardians, who worked as an accountant in the city, was associated with the local B.U.F.. See Labour Party Fascist Questionnaire. Reply of Norwich Labour Party. LP/FAS/34/191. Henry Mole, the District Treasurer at Leytonstone, was also believed to be an accountant. E.G.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.

[240] Norfolk Chronicle, 27 July 1934, p. 7; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1929 (London: Kelly's Directories, 1929), p. 173; Kelly's Directory of Norfolk 1933, p. 176.

[241] Action, 29 July 1939, p. 15. According to Baerselman, the Mount Liell Hotel was "entirely gentile" and offered the most modern accommodation in Westcliff. See Kelly's Directory of Essex

7. Women and the B.U.F.

Although the B.U.F. was identified with 'masculine' values, such as struggle, action and heroism, from its inception the movement made a concerted effort to recruit female members. The Blackshirt appeal to women was an uneasy amalgam of conservative and progressive ideas, ranging from "an unashamed 'traditionalism' to a form of 'fascist feminism'".[242] However, the central thrust of B.U.F. thinking posited the 'natural' affinity between women and the domestic sphere. Mosleyite propaganda claimed that liberal democracy had failed women in a number of ways. Parliament, it was alleged, gave no effective representation to recently-enfranchised housewives and mothers, mainly because the legislature had little interest in 'female issues', such as childcare, education and health. Furthermore, the B.U.F. asserted that male unemployment or low wages had driven many women and children onto the labour market to supplement meagre household incomes.[243]

Under a future Blackshirt government, wives, women housekeepers and female domestic servants were to be given their own Corporation, which would not only facilitate consultation with the executive on matters of concern but also protect and promote the important 'female' roles of childrearing and home-making. In addition, B.U.F. literature declared that fascist economic policy, by eradicating low wages and job shortages, would give more women the option to choose married life at home. With better paid and more plentiful work, male breadwinners could support their families on one income, and their spouses would not be pressured into employment to help make ends meet. At the same time, the Blackshirt movement attempted to counter opponents' claims that fascism wished to shackle women to motherhood and the home by pointing to more radical proposals. The B.U.F. insisted that, under fascist rule, women would be free to pursue the career of their choice on the basis of 'equal pay for equal work', subject only to talent, physical capacity and national need. Moreover,

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1937, p. 782.
[242] Martin Durham, 'Gender and the British Union of Fascists', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1992), p. 517. See also M. Durham, Women and Fascism, Chapter Two.
[243] Mosley, The Greater Britain, pp. 40-42; A. Brock Griggs. Women and Fascism (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.), p. 2.

working women would be entitled to the occupational franchise and would receive more effective representation through the Corporate State. The obstacles faced by employed females were to be overcome by fascist initiatives to end sexual discrimination, introduce 'equal pay for equal work' and ban the practice of sacking women once they were married. A B.U.F. 'Charter of Labour' also called for maternity leave on full pay, provisionally for four months.[244]

Blackshirt writers argued that these changes, in conjunction with B.U.F. economic reforms, would increase national prosperity and protect working women. The male unemployment and wage undercutting attributed to the existence of a growing female labour force were to be removed by raising pay, expanding job opportunities and remunerating women at the same rates as men. Finally, the Corporate State would give female employees a meaningful voice and establish the machinery to improve their pay and conditions.

However, this progressive strand in Blackshirt policy has to be kept in perspective. B.U.F. pamphlets explicitly stated that, although there would be jobs for all those wishing to work, "we regard the home as the best place for women".[245] The national leadership was a male bastion which encouraged the preservation of 'appropriate' gender roles, and influential members of the fascist elite, such as A.K. Chesterton and Raven Thomson, endorsed Mosley's call for "men who are men and women who are women".[246] Furthermore, female Blackshirts held a variety of opinions across the traditional-feminist spectrum and were, in any event, outnumbered approximately three or four to one by their male counterparts, who usually subscribed to a patriarchal ordering of society.

The small number of female Mosleyites in the sample precludes a conclusive investigation into the social characteristics of women associated with the regional

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244 A. Raven Thomson, The Corporate State (London: B.U.F. Publications, n.d.), pp. 43-44; A. Raven Thomson, The Coming Corporate State (London: Action Press, 1937), p. 29 and p. 32; Griggs, Women and Fascism, pp. 2-8.
245 A. Freeman, We Fight For Freedom (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1936), p. 32.
246 Mosley, The Greater Britain, pp. 40-41; Durham, 'Gender and the British Union of Fascists', pp. 522-523.

B.U.F..[247] Nonetheless, an examination of the 30 individuals concerned reveals several interesting features. Firstly, as a number of previously unmentioned examples illustrate, the B.U.F. was able to attract women across the social and occupational range in the eastern counties. Lady Esther Makgill (nee Bromley), who resided at Yaxley Hall near Eye in Suffolk, was another local fascist drawn from the upper middle or elite ranks of society.[248] The wife of baronet Sir Donald Makgill, she apparently launched the B.U.F.'s Women's Section in March 1933 and became its Chief Organiser. She also organised agricultural meetings for Mosley during the movement's formative period.[249] After being suspended from her post because of reported financial irregularities within the Section, Makgill severed her connection with the B.U.F. in May 1934.[250] Several other identified women belonged to the lower middle and middle middle class category, including Edna M., a seventeen year old Epping Blackshirt employed as a shop manageress, Mrs G., a laundry office supervisor in her mid-thirties from Leytonstone, and Miss Walker, a Suffolk typist who advertised for work in the B.U.F. press.[251] The most unusual lower class female recruit encountered was a 23 year old German woman named Maria Gleixner, a dedicated member of the N.S.D.A.P. and ardent admirer of Hitler. Having travelled to England in 1936, Gleixner became a

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247 30 female Mosleyites were identified. This group was comprised of a shop assistant, a domestic servant, a private foreign language teacher, an estate manager, a laundry office supervisor, a shop manageress, a shopkeeper, a telephonist, a secretary, a typist, the Controller of the Daily Mail's Women's Canvass Staff, a Post Office clerk, the co-owner of a stationery, printing and chemist's business, a guest house proprietor, two landowners, two retired spinsters, ten married women/housewives, the sister of a farmer, and the Leader of the B.U.F.'s Women's Section (1933-1934).

248 T.U.C. General Council Research Department, 'Fascism in Great Britain' (21 February 1934), p. 9. Born in February 1905, Esther Lilian Bromley was the younger daughter of the 6th Baronet Sir Robert Bromley. He had served as Assistant Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Joseph Chamberlain) between 1901 and 1903. She married Sir Donald Makgill, the 12th Baronet of Makgill, on 5 July 1927. See Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage Baronetage and Knightage (London: Burke's Peerage, 1970), p. 365 and p. 1727.

249 David Pryce-Jones, Unity Mitford: A Quest (London: Phoenix Giants, 1995), p. 72.

250 Lady Makgill, 'Women, Home, And Country', The Age of Plenty: A Journal of the New Politics, Vol. II, No. 1 (1934), p. 13; P.R.O. HO 144/20140/112. Special Branch Report on the B.U.F.. 1 May 1934.

251 D.T.. Taped interview; L.B.. Taped interview; E.G.. Taped interview, 1991; Action, 11 September 1937, p. 19.

domestic servant at Southend, where she joined the B.U.F.. Eighteen months later, she married M.G., a local Blackshirt activist.[252]

Secondly, in line with the overall findings, twelve of the seventeen women engaged in paid work were drawn from occupational sub-groups within the lower middle and middle middle class category. Two were non-academic professionals, six had lower/intermediate white collar jobs, one was a lower grade civil servant, and the remaining three were self-employed merchants. Finally, in view of the B.U.F.'s patriarchal pronouncements on women and the domestic sphere, it is also interesting to note that one-third of the female Mosleyites in the sample were described as housewives. In total, seventeen women were married, and, of these, fifteen had husbands who were either members or supporters of the B.U.F.. However, a much larger female sample would be required in order to determine with any degree of precision whether these biases towards lower middle and middle middle class occupations, home-making, marriage, and pro-fascist partners were in fact typical.

8. Youth and the B.U.F.

Mosley's movement also deliberately appealed to the young. The Blackshirts maintained that national resurgence could only be achieved by emulating the selfless example of the 'war generation' and by ousting their discredited elders from political power.[253] It was hoped that this would encourage British youth to identify with the sacrifices made by the servicemen of 1914-1918 and join the struggle for the latter's 'new society'. Mosleyite propaganda created the image of an organisation which faithfully reflected the spirit and hopes of the fallen in order to bind surviving ex-servicemen and the young closer together in their quest to fulfil the peacetime mission of the war dead. According to the B.U.F., the country could only be restored by an ex-service-youth alliance that would sweep the 'old gang' aside. B.U.F.

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252 M.G.. Telephone interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993; S.T., 15 December 1937, p. 3.
253 See for example Mosley, The Greater Britain; A.K. Chesterton, Portrait of a Leader (London: Action Press, 1937).

publications proclaimed that the new 'fascist men', drawn from the war generation and the young, were imbued with the Blackshirt tenets of discipline, loyalty, vigour, patriotism, determination and spartan morality to combat the enervating forces of conservatism, the dead-weight of orthodoxy, and the 'decadence' of bourgeois society. Unsullied by the mistakes and thinking of the past, the B.U.F. aimed to produce "not only a new system of government but also a new type of man who differs from the politicians from the old world as men from another planet".[254]

Certain other features of the movement accentuated its youth orientation. Of the 84 senior Blackshirts in Mandle's sample with recorded ages, 57 were under 40 in 1935, including Mosley, Francis Hawkins, Raven Thomson and William Joyce. Just under twenty per cent of all 103 had not yet reached 30.[255] A similar pattern emerged from an investigation of the movement's prospective parliamentary candidates. The ages of 55 would-be Blackshirt M.P.s were ascertained and, of these, 37 were under 40 in 1937 and fourteen were in their twenties.[256] Young adherents were to be catered for by the establishment of a B.U.F. Youth Movement in July 1936. This was divided into a Fascist Youth Division for nine to fourteen year olds and a Blackshirt Cadet Division for the fourteen to eighteen age range.[257] The emphasis placed on uniforms, activism, marches, rallies, athleticism and the like was also designed to attract the young and set the B.U.F. apart from the 'lacklustre' and 'lethargic' world of mainstream parliamentary politics.

Two earlier studies of the B.U.F.'s membership, based on small samples of surviving ex-Blackshirts, reinforce the impression that Mosley's recruits tended to be young. Eighty per cent of Brewer's fifteen former members had joined by the time they were 30, and Cullen's survey of 43 ex-fascists found that the average entry age was just under 21, with only five per cent enrolling after their 30th birthday.[258] However,

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254 Oswald Mosley. Quoted in Cross, The Fascists in Britain, p. 57.
255 Mandle, 'The Leadership of the British Union of Fascists', p. 361.
256 Ibid., pp. 370-383.
257 Blackshirt, 18 July 1936, p. 3, 28 November 1936, p. 7.
258 Brewer, Mosley's Men, p. 7; Cullen, 'The British Union of Fascists', pp. 48-50. Neither Rawnsley nor Linehan analysed the age distribution of their samples.

these findings need to be treated with caution. Both Brewer and Cullen's samples were extremely small and thus could not be considered representative of either the west Midlands B.U.F. or the national movement. Furthermore, since only younger Blackshirts could still come forward to participate in these projects, the youthful fascist element was probably overrepresented in relation to the actual age distribution of the membership.

In order to produce a more extensive analysis for the 'East Anglian' B.U.F., the ages of 104 members of the Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex sample were ascertained by consulting the previously discussed oral and documentary sources. The results, given in Table 4, suggest that, although the regional movement was composed primarily of adherents under 30, Mosley's appeal spanned the generations and a significant minority developed fascist leanings after, rather than during, their formative years. This highlights yet another pitfall of relying exclusively on tiny samples of surviving ex-Blackshirts to draw conclusions about the social characteristics of B.U.F. members or supporters.

TABLE 4
AGE OF 104 B.U.F. MEMBERS OR SUPPORTERS IN NORFOLK, SUFFOLK AND ESSEX, 1933-1940

Age	**10-19**	**20-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60+**
Number	21	44	17	12	4	6

Just under two-thirds of the 'East Anglian' Mosleyites from the sample with identifiable ages (65) had yet to reach 30. Most of these (44) were in their twenties, the remainder (21) falling into the ten-nineteen age band. Some were extremely young. A.D. and B.M. became B.U.F sympathisers at Epping aged eleven and fifteen respectively, and Donald P. joined the same District as a fourteen year old.[259] Another

[259] A.D.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991; B.M.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993; L.B.. Taped interview; N.B.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

youthful recruit was Denis Horst, a seventeen year old Walthamstow Blackshirt employed as a clerk.[260] A number of those who enrolled in their twenties have not been mentioned previously in this study. These include Francis Jermy, a 22 year old footman attached to the Norwich District, 27 year old Hilda Bellamy, the wife of Richard Bellamy, Ivy Futter, a 24 year old married woman from Great Yarmouth, and Francis Holland, a teacher from West Ham in his late twenties.[261]

Despite the obvious emphasis on youth, almost 40 per cent of the 104 Mosleyites under scrutiny were aged 30 or over. A few of these have not appeared in earlier chapters, such as Mrs. O.W., a 31 year old farmer's wife, who joined the Eye B.U.F. as an activist in 1939, and the Leytonstone member Richard Boughton, a hire purchase debt tracer in his early thirties.[262] Another in this category was Reginald Swift, a street market trader with a history of mental instability, who undertook political work for the B.U.F. in West Ham. In 1938, at the age of 36, Swift committed suicide by jumping from an upstairs window of his Forest Gate home.[263] The senior age bands also include the Woodford carpenter George M., a trade union organiser and former Labour Party supporter. He became a Blackshirt in c.1936 at the age of 48.[264] Among the region's oldest B.U.F. stalwarts were the Cross sisters, two retired spinsters in their sixties from south-west Essex. Both women were disillusioned Conservatives who joined the movement because of its patriotic and dynamic image.[265]

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260 S.E., 15 September 1939, p. 14.
261 Francis Jermy. F.O.M. taped interview, 1989; Hilda Bellamy. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.; Y.M., 12 May 1934, p. 5; Daily Herald, 13 March 1941, p. 3.
262 O.W.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1993; D.T.. Taped interview.
263 S.E., 23 September 1938, p. 11.
264 D.T.. Taped interview.
265 L.B.. Taped interview; N.B.. Taped interview.

CHAPTER EIGHT

'WE MARCHED WITH MOSLEY': INVESTIGATING THE MOTIVATIONS OF LOCAL B.U.F. MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS IN ESSEX, NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK, 1933-1940

1. Introduction

Any serious study of the regional B.U.F. has to address the contentious issue of motivation, and it is in this context that recorded interviews with surviving participants have the potential to illustrate why many were drawn to the Blackshirt movement. However, mindful of A.J.P. Taylor's caustic dismissal of oral history as little more than "Old men drooling about their youth", from the outset, it must be recognised that there are a number of problems associated with this approach.[1] Oral sources lack contemporaneity and rely, to a greater or lesser degree, on hindsight. These limitations can present a number of difficulties. Recollections may be flawed due to memory loss, particularly with regard to dates, names and sequences of events. Moreover, the act of remembering a specific period of one's life is influenced by, and percolates through, a person's subsequent experience. Thus, the end result is not a direct encounter with the past but rather a distillation of the past and the present. Furthermore, interviewees may give an inaccurate or partial account when discussing a sensitive subject, either to rationalise decisions made or to justify actions taken. The interviewer's role in this process is not without its pitfalls too. Selection of an unrepresentative sample of informants can seriously distort the picture that emerges. The mere presence of an outsider may affect how an interviewee recalls the past and talks about it. Oral historians also need to guard against 'leading' an eyewitness in a specific direction through poorly constructed or narrowly focused questions, which tap no more than a fraction of that individual's relevant knowledge.[2]

Having noted these drawbacks, careful examination of oral sources can still furnish the historian with a valuable insight into the appeal of Mosleyite fascism. Paul

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1 A.J.P. Taylor. Quoted in B. Harrison, 'Oral History and Recent Political History', Oral History, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1972), p. 46.
2 J. Tosh, The Pursuit of History (London: Longman, 1991), Chapter Ten.

Thompson, a leading advocate of 'history by word of mouth', states that oral testimony has the indispensable capacity to reveal the subjective perceptions of the respondent, because an individual's memory of the past is filtered through a complex web of private attitudes, hopes and beliefs.[3] Consequently, the process of recollection invests 'external' reality with highly personal interpretations to produce history which "is not just about events, or structures, or patterns of behaviour but also about how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination".[4] Hence, even allowing for the fact that public revulsion and the failure of fascism must have coloured the views of Blackshirts who lived through the post-war decades, personal reminiscences help to identify not only an individual's values and opinions but also how they interact with the outside world, thereby divulging the links between the private and public spheres.[5]

In addition, other arguments made in defence of oral history can be used to support the recording and analysis of testimony from former Blackshirts or B.U.F. sympathisers. Firstly, many of the social constraints and pressures preventing the open disclosure of information weaken with the passage of time, which can often make old age a period of candid reflection.[6] Secondly, any memory loss tends to occur during and immediately after the experience in question, rather than later on in life. In any case, this deterioration is usually marginal if the interviewee regards an event as significant. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the oral history method often provides the only means of recreating an aspect of the past which has been overlooked by conventional written sources.[7]

Students working in the late twentieth century face obvious obstacles when trying to locate the Mosleyites of the 1930s, due to the years that have elapsed and the

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[3] P. Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 101-149.
[4] Ibid., p. 139.
[5] J.D. Brewer, 'Looking Back at Fascism: A Phenomenological Analysis of B.U.F. Membership', The Sociological Review, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1984), pp. 742-760.
[6] See for example J. Steinhoff, P. Pechel and D. Showalter, Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History (London: Grafton Books, 1991).
[7] Thompson, The Voice of the Past, pp. 101-149. See also P. Thompson, The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society (London: Routledge, 1992).

near-universal opprobrium attached to fascism since 1945. In spite of these difficulties, 21 individuals formally or informally connected with the British Union in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were contacted. Of these, thirteen consented to be interviewed.[8] The resulting taped conversations were supplemented by recordings of five deceased former Blackshirts, which were generously made available by Stephen Cullen and the Mosleyite veterans' association, Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M.).[9] This oral material clearly indicates how respondents' perceptions and experiences contributed to their fascist outlook and, therefore, forms the basis of the present investigation. Moreover, these eye-witness accounts were used in conjunction with a range of relevant written primary sources, such as memoirs, letters and questionnaires, detailing an additional four B.U.F. careers.[10] In total, the sample contained twenty-two Mosleyites - three from Norfolk, three from Suffolk and sixteen from Essex.

The stated grounds for joining or supporting the 'East Anglian' movement can be set in perspective in two ways. Firstly, they may be measured against the impressionistic views of contemporary B.U.F. and non-fascist commentators to see if common themes emerge. Secondly, the justifications of the Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk group may be compared with those of a further 75 ex-Blackshirts or sympathisers from other regions in England.[11] This 'national' collection of B.U.F. life histories, the largest ever assembled, provides another valuable yardstick by which to gauge the motives of the fascists from the eastern counties. Nevertheless, since the scattered evidence

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[8] Thirteen 'East Anglian' Mosleyites were interviewed by the author. Two of these, Frederic Ball and Eric Pleasants, consented on condition that their reminiscences were not tape recorded. Eight of those approached declined to participate in this study.

[9] It should be noted that Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M.), although extremely helpful to academic researchers, has an obvious revisionist agenda. For this reason, the four oral testimonies supplied by this organisation were checked for consistency against other taped or written accounts produced by the same 'East Anglian' Mosleyites, either for the author or Stephen Cullen.

[10] This written material included detailed questionnaires completed for Stephen Cullen by Kenneth T. Dutfield, Derrick Millington and R.W. Ratcliffe. George Hoggarth's short memoir 'The Essex Farmworker' in L. Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts: The Inside Story of the British Union of Fascists 1932-1940 (London: Sanctuary Press, 1986) was also consulted.

[11] This 'national' sample was compiled with the help of Stephen Cullen, Stuart Rawnsley, Martin Durham and F.O.M., who all generously made available taped or written memoirs of former B.U.F. members or supporters.

available precludes an analysis of truly representative provincial or national membership samples, the findings in this chapter have to be seen as illustrative rather than definitive.

2. Contemporary Views on Fascist Motivation

From the outset, Mosley and his lieutenants put forward a variety of opinions to explain why some people responded positively to the fascist message. A chief aide, W.E.D. Allen, emphasised the B.U.F.'s ability to attract both patriots and radicals:

> ...Fascism appeals alike to those elements among the younger minded middle class who are conservative by temperament and strongly nationalist in spirit, and to those rarer and more dynamic individuals who, naturally revolutionary in their outlook, have been disappointed and exasperated by the failure of all leadership from the Left to approach any fulfilment of their aspirations.[12]

Other senior B.U.F. figures preferred to concentrate on the legacy of World War One. A.K. Chesterton, the editor of Blackshirt and then Action in 1937-1938, regarded the B.U.F. as the natural refuge of the survivors of the 'war generation'. In his estimation, ex-servicemen recognised that only the Blackshirts, by championing their cause and railing against the post-war parliamentary 'betrayal' of the 1914-18 veterans, were capable of reviving the 'classless' social model of the battlefield, with its emphasis on duty, self-sacrifice and a collective sense of purpose. Chesterton concluded that fascism was the purest expression of the war generation's hopes for lasting peace and economic security: "...those of the war-generations who believed that they fought for some other purpose than to make Britain a paradise for financial wolves and political jackals feel that they owe Mosley a debt of gratitude which not even the staunchest service can ever quite repay".[13]

Mosley concurred with the views expressed above, but envisaged fascism principally as a movement of generational revolt against an outdated and bankrupt

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12 James Drennan (pseud.), B.U.F., Oswald Mosley and British Fascism (London: John Murray, 1934), p. 22.
13 A.K. Chesterton, Portrait of a Leader (London: Action Press, 1937), p. 167.

party system.[14] The ageing political establishment, he contended, had drifted into war, failed to build a 'land fit for heroes' after 1918 and, finally, had stumbled into depression. For the B.U.F.'s founder, the 'old gangs' lacked both the will and the imagination to tackle Britain's post-war economic problems. Mosley endeavoured to persuade a disillusioned and frustrated younger generation to join the B.U.F., since he was convinced that only a fascist youth-ex-service alliance would possess the vision and tenacity needed to sweep away discredited institutions and create the elusive 'new society': "...the enemy is the old gang of our present political system. No matter what their political label, the old parliamentarians have proved themselves to be all the same. The real political division of the present decade is not a division of parties but a division of generations".[15]

However, in his memoirs, Mosley appeared to suggest that the trappings and spectacle of fascism also garnered support:

> Most of them were very like members of the Labour Party in the days when I was first a member, when it still suffered ostracism and persecution. They liked dressing up and having bands and banners, just as the miners did at the Durham gala; symbols which were then anathema to the shy middle-class with its public school inhibitions, though recruits from their ranks were soon infected with the gay panache of which, in England, East London is the spiritual home.[16]

Outside the B.U.F. ranks too, a diverse range of contemporary ideas circulated on the issue of fascist motivation. In 1934, the right-wing Saturday Review explained that many youthful Tories were becoming Blackshirts because they had lost faith in both Baldwin's staid Conservatism and the National Government's policies relating to defence and imperial affairs. Consequently, the "wholesome and manly reaction of young Conservatives from official Conservatism is sweeping our youth into this form of protest".[17] Labour presumed that young people in particular were being deceived

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[14] See for example Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1932).
[15] Ibid., p. 15.
[16] Oswald Mosley, My Life (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970), p. 306.
[17] 'Portent of the Blackshirts', Saturday Review, 5 May 1934, p. 499.

"by the assurances of the Fascists that they were aiming to obtain power by constitutional means, and by the concern they expressed for decisive measures to combat economic depression".[18]

Several left-wing commentators of the 1930s also sought to locate the attractions of fascism in an economic context. Writing for The New Statesman and Nation in 1933, Kingsley Martin identified the failure of capitalism to create employment and distribute goods as vital preconditions for fascist success. In his view, fascism served a middle class agenda by resorting to crude nationalism, authoritarianism and violence in defence of propertied interests.[19] W.A. Rudlin in The Growth of Fascism in Great Britain speculated that, as the crisis of capitalism deepened, different social groups would go over to the B.U.F..[20] One by one, unorganised labour, skilled workers, the petit bourgeoisie and the professional middle class would succumb due to economic vulnerability and disenchantment with the faltering political system. In the final phase, according to Rudlin, industrialists, financiers and landowners would seek to use the Blackshirt movement to prop up the capitalist system, defend their privileged position and combat the 'menace' of socialism.

H.N. Brailsford's analysis indicated that three trends favoured the growth of fascism in England.[21] Firstly, he sensed that, as the young were losing their Puritan inhibitions, they might embrace "the externalism, the drama, the pageantry, the shoddy emotionalism of fascism".[22] Moreover, the present generation, raised under coalition and minority governments, had no experience of, nor any respect for, the tradition of stable two party parliamentary government. Finally, the capitalist middle class had abandoned its free trade beliefs and was now demanding firm state action to secure

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18 National Council of Labour and the Co-operative Union, Statement on Fascism at Home and Abroad (London: National Council of Labour and the Co-operative Union, August 1934), p. 16.
19 K. Martin, 'Can England Escape?', The New Statesman and Nation, 13 May 1933, pp. 592-593.
20 W.A. Rudlin, The Growth of Fascism in Great Britain (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), pp. 116-136.
21 H.N. Brailsford, 'Fascism in England', New Republic, 22 August 1934, pp. 42-43.
22 Ibid., p. 42.

profits, prices and debt repayments. Taken together, Brailsford thought that these changes were encouraging a fascist atmosphere in the country.

Some contemporary observers singled out a perceived link between the young and the B.U.F.. In January 1934, a Spectator article entitled 'Youth and the Politicians' propounded that a key aspect of Mosley's appeal derived from his ability to tap the support of the frustrated young in a society dominated by the old and middle-aged.[23] The B.U.F. offered a disciplined corporate lifestyle at a time of contracting job opportunities for school-leavers and university graduates and held out the 'exciting' prospect of physical confrontation with communists and socialists. It was also claimed that Mosley's determined bid to mobilise British youth stood in stark contrast to the indifference exhibited by the mainstream parties. Neglected by the political establishment, younger people were prepared "to lend a ready ear to any leader who shows himself conscious of youth's existence and proclaims that it has a part to play in the construction of a better world than the one it was born in".[24] Three months later, an eye-witness account of Mosley's April 1934 meeting at the Albert Hall, noted how younger males, who may not have clearly understood the fascist programme, were fired by the B.U.F.'s stirring call to action.[25] Such devotees joined Mosley's organisation because "they saw in it something to which they could dedicate themselves and which, above all, would redeem life for them from its terrible tedium".[26]

Journalistic surveys which appeared in the mid-1930s often focused on the relationship between fascism and anti-Semitism. An article on this subject in The New Statesman and Nation in 1936 maintained that the B.U.F.'s hostility to Jews could win over "politically uneducated and unaffiliated people in the East End [of London], including a large body of Catholics, who are particularly easy victims of anti-Semitic propaganda..."[27] A month later, the same publication aired the views of Harry Roberts,

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23 'Youth and the Politicians', The Spectator, 26 January 1934, pp. 108-109.
24 Ibid., p. 108.
25 R. Bernays, 'Fascism and the Answer', The Spectator, 27 April 1934, pp. 652-653.
26 Ibid., p. 652.
27 K. Martin, 'Fascism and the Jews', The New Statesman and Nation, 10 October 1936, pp. 496-497.

a doctor living in the Mile End. Roberts discerned that, in east London, both the Jew's determination to preserve a distinct 'code of etiquette' and their links with the region's communist movement gave the Blackshirts the chance to exploit the prejudices of local Gentiles.[28]

Another approach was to stress the heterogeneous nature of the B.U.F.'s appeal. Round Table's assessment of the Blackshirt movement commented that "Something had been included for every palate, however jaded" to ensure that members "should be drawn from all parties and from none".[29] Thus, recruits included small shopkeepers and pensioners, who saw fascism as a means of holding socialism in check, young people seduced by the B.U.F.'s novelty, admirers of Mosley's leadership, who were disgusted by the corruption and lethargy of the party politicians, and those wishing to protest against the radical left-wing plans advocated by Sir Stafford Cripps. From the vantage point of 1936, Robert Bernays also portrayed the B.U.F. as a 'catch-all' organisation.[30] Lacking parliamentary constraints, Mosley was able to gain adherents because he effectively articulated the concerns of various discontented groups including tithe-payers, east London Gentiles and those living in distressed areas. One source of the Blackshirt leader's success, Bernays alleged, was his tactic of personalising problems in terms of "the sweating Jewish employer, the international banker, or the crafty politician on the make".[31]

According to Lionel Birch's 1937 analysis, most Mosleyites fell into one of four categories - the ex-officer, the pugilist, the public school/university 'hearty' or the altruist.[32] Given this broad range of recruits, it followed that the attraction of the B.U.F. operated at several levels:

> The Fascist movement...starts by appealing to young men and women to give, to serve, to sacrifice, to dedicate

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28 H. Roberts, 'Jew and Blackshirt in the East End', The New Statesman and Nation, 7 November 1936, pp. 698-699.
29 'The Blackshirts', Round Table, September 1934, pp. 717-731.
30 R. Bernays, ' The Future of British Fascism', The Spectator, 18 December 1936, pp. 1075-1076.
31 Ibid., p. 1075.
32 L. Birch, Why They Join the Fascists (London: People's Press, 1937), pp. 9-10.

themselves to the duty of restoring the honour of their country. In return it offers them a uniform plus the feeling of unity and strength, the opportunity to be disciplined, and the right to discipline, the licence to boss others, the privilege of living close to the Holy of Holies of a new God. It offers to women riddance from the advice of feminists and intellectuals, and to men it promises removal from them of all tedious responsibility so that they may devote their whole time to the business of looking virile. To its non-uniformed supporters the Fascist movement offers a simplified solution for the bewildering problems of the present day, i.e. love, honour and obey Mosley. Be strong. Get rid of Jews.[33]

In 1946, Frederick Mullally, an anti-fascist journalist, created the fictional character of 'Peter Fletcher' to personify a stereotypical Blackshirt.[34] Fletcher, the seventeen year old middle class son of a Catholic civil servant, was educated at Clapham Academy and now had a job at the Britannia Electric Works. He opted for the B.U.F. because of the uniform, the gang mentality and the romantic lure of belonging to a political movement which challenged many British traditions. Fletcher's parents and friends had also contributed to his decision by passing on their negative attitudes towards the Jews and the working class. Nevertheless, Mullally conceded that Fletcher epitomised only one kind of young fascist and that disparate groups were drawn to Mosley's organisation.[35]

3. The Motivations of the Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Sample

Just as interested commentators of the 1930s were unable to agree on the reasons why people turned to Mosley, the East Anglian sample also presented an array of motives to rationalise their fascist allegiances.

(a) 'Britain First' and Empire patriotism

The twin patriotic themes of 'Britain First' and defence of the Empire proved irresistible for some regional adherents, including Frederic ('Eric') A. Ball, who

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33 Ibid., p. 17.
34 F. Mullally, Fascism Inside England (London: Claud Morris Books, 1946), Chapter 1.
35 Ibid., 'Author's Note' opposite p. 7 and p. 25.

co-founded the Chingford B.U.F. Branch as an eighteen year old in October 1933.[36] The son of a Bank of England employee, Ball enjoyed a comfortable middle class upbringing at 42, King's Head Hill, Chingford and was educated locally at St. George Monoux Grammar School. After matriculating at seventeen, he took up a clerical position at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia in the capital.

Heeding the example of his staunch, though non-active, Conservative family, Ball first developed Tory political leanings. During the 1931 General Election, he had delivered leaflets on behalf of Winston Churchill, the sitting M.P. for the Epping division. His Conservatism, however, did not amount to much more than a personal admiration for Churchill's 'die-hard' stance on imperial issues. Ball eventually disassociated himself from the Tory Party in 1933 because he felt that Baldwin and the Conservative leadership were resigned to the break-up of the British Empire:

"The Tories had no idea how to preserve the Empire. They just seemed to let it go bit by bit. They had no backbone, no vision. They just washed their hands of it. I couldn't agree with this at all. Baldwin and the rest of the 'high-ups' were giving away India and were cold-shouldering Churchill over the Indian issue".[37]

Shortly afterwards, a conversation with the B.U.F. newspaper seller in Chingford, Oliver Mathews, the first local Branch Organiser, convinced Ball that only Mosley's policies could protect the British Empire from disintegration. A visit to Germany in September 1934 strengthened his attachment to the fascist creed. The teenager returned full of praise for the way in which the Nazis had cut unemployment and raised the standard of living.

Ball quickly became a Blackshirt activist and was subsequently appointed District Treasurer (1935) and District Leader (1936-1938) at Epping. In 1938, he twice stood as a B.U.F. candidate in the local elections at Chingford and was also made County Volunteer Transport Organiser for the movement. His other official duties included auditing B.U.F. accounts and serving as County Propaganda Officer for

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36 F. Ball. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
37 Ibid.

Essex. Ball's public identification with the Blackshirt cause led to his internment in July 1940. Following his release in September 1941, Ball served in the Royal Navy until 1946 and was then re-employed by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. Anxious not to jeopardise his job in the early post-war period, he decided against joining the Union Movement, despite remaining sympathetic to Mosley's ideas.

For the Norfolk-born footman, Francis Jermy, then aged 22, becoming a Norwich Blackshirt in 1937 reaffirmed the patriotic values he had absorbed as a child.[38] Jermy's Conservative voting parents had moved from Pulham St. Mary in Norfolk to Walton in Suffolk during his formative years to take over as the tenant proprietors of a small hotel. In his new surroundings, Jermy was influenced by an ex-naval schoolmaster who constantly extolled the virtues of patriotism and the British Empire to his pupils:

> I went to the local council school and the schoolmaster there was an ex-naval man and he [espoused] nationalism. On Empire Day, he used to walk by and salute the flag. We would have a naval commander come along or some army officer come along and talk to us about the greatness of the British Empire. We were always drummed in that when we were at school, and I liked it. It sounded good to me.[39]

Jermy remained politically uncommitted until the mid-1930s when the Italian invasion of Abyssinia brought the B.U.F.'s 'Mind Britain's Business' platform to his attention. He began buying fascist literature on a regular basis and, over a period of months, came to endorse the Blackshirt programme. The nationalistic viewpoint instilled in him at school underlay his decision to enrol:

> I thought well this is for me. It speaks my language, the language that I was brought up at school with. Mosley did not make me a Blackshirt. I was born a Blackshirt before Mosley ever came...All he was doing was pedalling my thinking. Yes it's true. My schoolmaster...brought me up with the Union Jack and the flag waving and the

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[38] Francis Jermy. F.O.M. taped interview, 1989; Francis Jermy. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1985.
[39] Jermy. F.O.M. taped interview.

> great British Empire and all the rest of it. When I looked round in life the only man I could find who was doing what I wanted to be done was Oswald Mosley.[40]

In 1938, Jermy obtained a butler's post in Kidderminster and transferred to the local B.U.F. formation. He eventually became District Leader at Kidderminster, a position he retained until he was conscripted into the Royal Army Medical Corp in 1940. Shortly afterwards, in the June of that year, Jermy was interned under DR 18B (1A). He was not released until June 1943. This experience did not dampen his commitment to Mosleyite politics, however, since he joined the Union Movement as soon as it was launched.

Schoolboy patriotism also made the young Chingford Catholic, A.D., receptive to fascism.[41] As a ten year old in 1936, A.D. became a B.U.F. sympathiser, and, although he was too young to join the Epping District, he was allowed to perform small tasks in a semi-official capacity, such as leafleting and setting up pitches for street meetings. A.D. enlisted in the army in 1942 and was demobilised five years later. His faith in Mosley survived the Second World War, and, after enrolling in the Union Movement in 1948, he later sat on several of its policy-making committees.

Predictably, given his age, A.D. had little understanding of the B.U.F.'s social, economic or political aims during the 1930s. Rather, his fascist tendencies were the product of an idealised view of the British past: "...my interest came from my schoolboy history, of being proud of the Empire, things like that...History in those days was really the glories of the British Empire. That was the period that was mostly taught..."[42] This youthful pride in Britain's imperial heritage was nurtured at local Blackshirt meetings, where fascists often played the patriotic card: "Somebody glorifying in British history and in British traditions. I found history fascinating - [those that] built the Empire...The speakers would often go on about the Empire and the

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40 Ibid..
41 A.D.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
42 Ibid..

glories of the Empire...The economic implications didn't really strike me then. It was more romanticism than actual politics at the time".[43]

A.D.'s family background reinforced his B.U.F. loyalties by promoting strong anti-war feelings. His father, a printer by trade, had been wounded twice when serving in the South Staffordshire Regiment during the First World War and thereafter received an army pension for the injuries sustained. To A.D., the personal recollections of the events of 1914-1918 passed on by his father seemed to justify the B.U.F.'s 'Peace Campaign' and added an extra dimension to his fascist outlook:

> My father wasn't afraid of war, but he respected what happened in that war....he was patriotic in that sense, but he was really deeply disturbed by the death and suffering of the First World War. I think that probably rubbed off on me, and I did get caught up on the anti-war feeling. I should think [that] was probably as big a motive as anything eventually, after, like, the glamour. But listening to them [B.U.F. speakers] so much the international politics was a greater emphasis then rather than the economic in a way because [of] the Munich Crisis and things like that. I think that's why I didn't like other parties. I did regard them as war parties...pro-war rather than anti-war.[44]

(b) The Peace Campaign

Indeed, as a number of scholars have noted, in the later 1930s the B.U.F.'s determination to avoid any 'unnecessary' European entanglements which could lead to war provided the organisation with a fresh appeal.[45] Mosley argued that peace and imperial security could be preserved by giving Germany a free hand in eastern Europe and returning her former colonies (because British interests were supposedly unaffected) and by negotiating a disarmament pact between the four major West European nations.[46]

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[43] Ibid..
[44] Ibid..
[45] See for example R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 332; G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 19 (1984), pp. 597-598.
[46] Oswald Mosley, Tomorrow We Live (London: Abbey Supplies, 1938), pp. 61-69; Oswald Mosley, The British Peace: And How to Get it (London: Sanctuary Press, 1939).

Many, like Kenneth T. Dutfield, who were anxious to prevent a rupture in Anglo-German relations, saw Mosley's movement as the only political force capable of achieving this objective.[47] The son of a radio wholesaler, Dutfield was born in 1909 and studied modern languages at London and Hull Universities. He had originally joined the B.U.F. in Berlin, where he was engaged as a film scriptwriter, but, after returning to England to work as a clerk in the foreign department of a London insurance company, he transferred to the Epping District in the spring of 1937. Dutfield's fascist proclivities were attributed to his "Germanophile inclinations" and his belief that "there was no other political party as concerned to prevent war with Germany".[48] As an Essex Blackshirt, he advertised a German-English translation service from his home at 9, Grove Road, Woodford.[49]

(c) Economic and social issues

Several of the Blackshirts under scrutiny adopted fascism because it appeared to offer remedies for a range of economic and social problems at local and national level. The Suffolk Mosleyite, Arthur Swan, who was born in 1909, became a founder member of the Lowestoft B.U.F. specifically because of the extent of unemployment in Britain.[50] After leaving school at fourteen, he was eventually employed as a Prudential Insurance agent and built up a round of 200 policy holders in the town. Swan was set thinking about economics by the onset of the depression in 1929. Coming from a long line of Lowestoft fishermen, his political conscience was pricked by the plight of the local fishing industry:

> Hundreds of drifters being pulled up on the hard, never to go to sea again, abandoned because there was no market for the fish when they brought it in. A cran of herrings [fetched] only five shillings. It didn't pay to cart them away for manure. As the fishing was abandoned and hundreds of men were unemployed and were subjected,

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47 Kenneth T. Dutfield. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985.
48 Ibid..
49 Blackshirt, 28 October 1937, p. 7.
50 Arthur Swan. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

> year after year, to the indignities of the means test...That was the beginning of my political awareness as such.[51]

An active Conservative in the early 1930s, Swan undertook electoral work for Pierse C. Loftus, who became the Tory M.P. for Lowestoft in 1934. Loftus was highly critical of the pattern of British foreign investment, which, he asserted, was a main cause of the domestic jobless problem. Swan was so impressed by this analysis of the unemployment issue that he formed a twenty-strong discussion group to debate Loftus's arguments.

One of the members of this group, George Surtees, a local garage owner and car dealer, invited Swan to the annual dinner of the Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft Chambers of Commerce in 1934. The guest speaker at this function was Mosley, who used the occasion to advocate the fascist regeneration of Britain. Listening to the Blackshirt leader, Swan discerned views on unemployment that were almost identical to those of Loftus and was persuaded that only the B.U.F.'s approach would put the country back to work: "When he [Mosley] started the British Union of Fascists, it was obvious that that was the only place I could go because all the others had proved they could do nothing about it [unemployment], and they never did do anything about it".[52]

Surtees and Swan decided at this point that their political future lay with the British Union, and they formed the Lowestoft B.U.F. in 1935, becoming District Organiser and District Treasurer respectively. Both men retained their posts until they were interned under DR 18B(1A) in June 1940. After the Second World War, Surtees joined the Union Movement, but Swan declined to do so primarily because he had no enthusiasm "for the new idea of getting entangled in Europe".[53]

The Blackshirts' direct involvement in the 'tithe war' attracted a number of agricultural recruits from across the eastern counties, including George Hoggarth, the

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51 Ibid..
52 Ibid..
53 Ibid..

District Treasurer of the Eye B.U.F. (1936-1940).[54] Hoggarth was born in 1910 in Hong Kong, where his father worked for the colonial police. The family came back to England in 1914 to take up farming, first in Kent and then, from 1920, at Eye in Suffolk. Completing his education at sixteen, Hoggarth worked as a plough boy on the family farm and subsequently ran it in partnership with his brother after their father's death.

Early on in his working life, Hoggarth joined the Agricultural Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union in the hope of improving the wages and conditions of farm labourers. When the impact of the slump on the farming community in the 1930s was compounded by the economic burden of the tithe, Hoggarth also became a committee member of the Suffolk Tithepayers' Association, which campaigned against tithe extraction, distraints and the compulsory auction of farmers' property. His anti-tithe activities took him to Wortham in 1934, where a fascist contingent converted him to the B.U.F.'s agricultural policy:

> When Wortham Manor, a farm on the border of Norfolk and Suffolk, was under threat of distraint, I went along to lend support. This was the farm of Mr. Rash, husband of the well-known East Anglian novelist, Doreen Wallace. There I came across a group of Blackshirts, who, under the command of Dick Plathen, had come down from London to give us a hand. I got into conversation with these men, found their policy for overcoming the agricultural depression sensible and bought their literature. Dick Plathen and his colleagues had taken legal advice before coming down to Suffolk and had been told that if they were present at an enforced sale with the farmer's permission and hindered the bailiffs without using force, they would be within the law. So they felled trees across the private road leading to the farm buildings, dug trenches and put up barbed wire. All this attracted nation-wide attention, and many newspaper reporters and photographers arrived on the scene. Then police reinforcements were brought in, and the Blackshirts were arrested under a long-forgotten statute. They were taken to Mousehold Heath prison, Norwich,

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[54] George Hoggarth, 'The Essex Farmworker', pp. 42-45; private information supplied by Hoggarth's sister. Hoggarth was interned in June 1940 and later joined the Union Movement.

> and found themselves in the Assize Court, where they were bound over. I was extremely indignant about these arrests and with others, including my brother decided to join the local branch.[55]

The west Hackney resident and one-time Walthamstow West District Leader, P.F. opted for Mosleyite fascism because he was disenchanted with the economic record of the liberal-democratic system in Britain.[56] P.F. worked as a bricklayer and was also a minor official of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers. Originally, he had been coaxed by two socialist workmates into supporting the Labour Party but was quickly repelled by what he considered to be its unpatriotic and pro-Russian attitudes. Personal experience of unemployment further undermined his fading belief in the political mainstream. After being made redundant in 1929, P.F. had to rely on state aid to support his wife and young daughter for six months, during which time he spent up to twelve hours each day walking the streets of London with his trowel and lines searching for work.

In 1933, he began buying Blackshirt, attending B.U.F. street meetings in east London and talking to local members. As a result of these contacts, P.F. came to admire the organisation's clear-cut policies, nationalist tone and stress on leadership. Consequently, P.F., then aged 30, joined the Hackney Branch in the same year. His recruitment owed much to the B.U.F.'s nationalist economic agenda, which promised to safeguard the 'British' labour force against 'foreign' competition:

> Well, I thought that if they got to power there would be no more of this monkey business, bringing in of aliens and all that sort of thing, who were no good to the country, who were all coming here to live upon us. And Oswald Mosley always said that while there is one job that's needed by an English person, no alien will be employed. Those were the sorts of things that I wanted because I'd suffered in 1929 quite badly. We were starving...[57]

An enthusiastic Blackshirt activist, P.F. held a number of posts in east London and Essex. In the mid-1930s, he served as Propaganda Officer and a registered speaker

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55 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
56 P.F.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.
57 Ibid.

for the Central Hackney B.U.F.. Then, at the request of Captain Hick from National Headquarters, he took over as District Leader of the Walthamstow West formation in 1937 for a six month period. Following a house move to Chingford shortly afterwards, P.F. conducted Blackshirt street meetings in his new area of residence and also stood as a local election candidate for the Epping District B.U.F..

F.T., a native of Forest Gate, also cited socio-economic reasons for joining the West Ham B.U.F. as a fifteen year old Greyshirt in 1935.[58] He remained an active local adherent until he received his army call-up in October 1939. F.T. finished his schooling at fourteen and was working as an office boy for a Southwark iron and steel company when a friend, who had already enrolled, introduced him to Arthur Beavan and Millicent Bullivant, the Blackshirt leaders at West Ham. Beavan and Bullivant outlined the B.U.F. programme to F.T., and he became a member.

His preference for Mosley's organisation was motivated chiefly by a conviction that the established parties had failed to alleviate the country's economic and social problems. F.T.'s view that there was an urgent need to improve job prospects and welfare provision stemmed partly from his own austere upbringing. His father, a commercial traveller-cum-draughtsman, had died in 1925, leaving a widow and three children to manage on a small pension and food vouchers. The B.U.F.'s radical programme to tackle unemployment and implement social measures supplied F.T. with his first political outlet:

> I studied the policies and listened to the speaker...and I came to the conclusion that it was a good alternative to the government that was in power, which actually wasn't getting anywhere [with] high unemployment, very poor living conditions etc....I thought these people with their policies, they seem to have an answer, and, you know, let's go for it.[59]

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[58] F.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.
[59] Ibid..

(d) Rejection of parliamentary democracy

Other Blackshirts, echoing Mosley's demand for a generational revolt against the 'united muttons' of the liberal democratic 'old gang', saw the B.U.F. as the vehicle for fundamental political change in Britain. L.B., the Epping District Leader between 1938 and 1940, slotted squarely into this 'anti-parliamentary' category.[60] A south Woodford cabinet maker who worked for his father's upholstery manufacturing business in south-west Bethnal Green, L.B. joined the Leyton B.U.F. as a 24 year old convert in 1934 but then transferred to the Chingford Branch a few months later. His fascist loyalties were engendered by a detestation of the 'confrontational' and regimented nature of the country's parliamentary party system. In L.B.'s opinion, only the introduction of the B.U.F.'s major proposed reform, a Corporate State based on the Italian Fascist model, could forge a genuine national consensus by moderating and synthesising British politics:

> I actually became involved in it because I didn't like the quarrelsome attitude of politicians. I didn't like this adversarial attitude of British politics. They had to be against somebody because he was of a different party. I thought fascism would be a mellowing influence on British politics. I was very concerned about the individual freedom of M.P.s. I very strongly disapproved of the whip system, and I felt that M.P.s would be more independent if we had a Corporate State. That was really how I figured it all out. I thought it was launching [us] into a more modern form of politics, which would dissolve this constant aggravation between one political party and another...Mosley said 'Why pay a man to be Prime Minister and then pay another man to be Leader of the Opposition, so as to oppose him?' That very much impressed me with Mosley because I've always [been] and I still feel now that I'm absolutely disgusted with politics...because it's all adversarial really. You can't advance the lot of mankind at all really.[61]

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60 L. B.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
61 Ibid..

(e) 'National Socialism'

The B.U.F.'s attempt to fuse elements of nationalism and socialism in a coherent political programme also brought in recruits who were attracted by the notion of a movement founded on the ideals of patriotism and social progress. One such convert was Richard Reynell Bellamy, a pioneer of the East Anglian movement, who became a Norfolk Blackshirt in August 1933.[62] A Liverpudlian born in 1901, 'Dick' Bellamy was the son of a former rancher in South America, who later retired to Norfolk. He left his Cumberland public school during the First World War and, in quick succession, worked as an office boy for a firm of chartered accountants, a clerical assistant in a Manchester textile warehouse and an agricultural labourer on a Cheshire farm. Having visited France with the British Red Cross after the cessation of hostilities, Bellamy then signed on as a deck boy, but his hopes of gaining a Second Mate's ticket were thwarted by the post-war slump in shipping. Following unsuccessful applications to various imperial police forces, he joined the Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) in 1921. His one year period of service convinced him that the R.I.C. had been made a scapegoat by the 'treachery' of the English press and the politicians at Westminster. By this stage, Bellamy possessed a few rudimentary political views. He applauded Mussolini's fascist experiment in Italy, and his nationalistic bearing was buttressed by an anti-communism which had originally been fostered by the harrowing tales he had heard as a child about the Paris Commune.

Unable to find suitable employment in the early 1920s, Bellamy and his brother James left for Australia to work as sheep farm apprentices or 'jackaroos' in New South Wales. It was here that Bellamy met and married a British woman. Two years later, the trio set up their own 500 acre cotton plantation in Queensland. However, economic depression and the state government's political expediency in withdrawing a pledge to maintain the cotton bounty reduced the value of their crop to around £40. Facing financial ruin, the Bellamys abandoned their cotton growing venture and moved to

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[62]Richard Reynell Bellamy. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1985. After World War Two, Bellamy wrote the 'official' unpublished history of the B.U.F., entitled 'We Marched With Mosley' (Unpublished unabridged manuscript, 1958-1968).

New Caledonia, where they founded a 300 acre coffee plantation, but this enterprise fared little better. Drought destroyed both the crop and hopes of a permanent future on the Pacific island. Shortly afterwards, the young couple embarked on the long sea voyage back to Britain. Bellamy's arrival in March 1931 was a traumatic experience:

> When I got home I was absolutely horrified. When we had gone abroad there had been a million unemployed and that was looked up on as the limit. And I came back to three million unemployed...Things were absolutely shocking. The thing was...everybody was prepared to accept it. I don't think the unemployed were accepting it, but middle class families like mine, oh [were saying] 'Very bad but things were bound to get better'.[63]

Without a job and angered by the smug indifference of his middle class family in Norfolk, Bellamy looked to continental fascism for political guidance. In his opinion, the national situation could only be retrieved by emulating Mussolini's 'revolution' in Italy. At first, he was wary of Mosley's movement because an early newspaper report had described the B.U.F. as an upper class organisation. Nevertheless, in 1933, a meeting with G.S. Gueroult, a local Blackshirt officer, allayed Bellamy's fears by reassuring him that the B.U.F. stood for peaceful radical-reform. Much to his listener's delight, Gueroult's discourse on the benefits of fascism seemed to be unsullied by the sort of party political machinations that had dogged the R.I.C. and the Queensland cotton planters. Bellamy was finally won over by the B.U.F.'s programmatic amalgamation of left- and right-wing tenets:

> And what sealed me was when he said, quoting O.M. [Oswald Mosley], 'We seek to combine the patriotism and good order of the right with the progress and social reform of the left.' Well, that obviously clinched it for me because previously if you belonged to the right you believed in keeping the workers down and, if, on the other hand, it was 'up to the workers', you wanted to do in the other classes.[64]

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63 Ibid..
64 Ibid.

Hearing Mosley speak at King's Lynn in November 1933 cemented Bellamy's allegiance, and, as the local Branch Organiser, he began recruiting at Downham Market. In February 1935, he was appointed the B.U.F.'s full-time Political Organiser for the South-West Norfolk Division. Seven months later, after successfully staging large-scale Blackshirt meetings in the county, Bellamy was made Assistant National Inspecting Officer for East Anglia. His connection with the eastern counties was broken in 1936 when he was further promoted to Administrative Officer for Northern Meetings, a post which covered the region from Birmingham to Newcastle. During this period, Bellamy was also selected to be the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for the Manchester constituency of Blackley. In 1939, he moved to Canterbury as a Blackshirt Political Agent to help Lady Pearson organise the division for a fascist election campaign and then became the local District Leader. After internment, which lasted from June 1940 to July 1941, Bellamy not only joined the Union Movement but also became the B.U.F.'s 'official' historian.

Mosley's synthesis of left and right wing policies also prompted E.G., then a thirteen year old schoolboy, to join the organisation at Leytonstone in October 1934.[65] He applied for membership after spending several months reading B.U.F. literature. In view of his age, E.G. was summoned to the National Headquarters in London for a formal interview with Captain B.D.E. Donovan, a senior official, to demonstrate his knowledge of the movement's policies before being given special permission to become a Blackshirt. His mother, a laundry office supervisor, renounced her Conservative sympathies in order to accompany her son into the Leytonstone B.U.F.. E.G.'s father, a disabled First World War veteran who experienced thirteen years of unemployment before opening a tobacconist's shop in 1936, had no interest in politics and therefore declined to take the fascist road.

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[65] E.G.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

The young recruit concluded that the Blackshirts, by blending patriotism and order with social reform, offered the alluring prospect of a 'radical Right' programme to rejuvenate the country:

> Like many I was very attracted by the vigorous radical programme calling for an occupational franchise, military preparedness, the revival of British agriculture - then in a parlous state - and a huge public works scheme which would systematically wipe out the slums and provide work for the unemployed...The present day political label of 'Radical Right' suits the B.U.F. quite well. My own description of us would be: 'Traditionalists who advocated a root-and-branch reform of the economic system.' We were economic revolutionaries rather than political ones.[66]

His fascist ideology was sustained by a belief that Britain's existing political institutions were hopelessly out of date and incapable of meeting the challenges of the modern age: "...we felt that science was transforming society and that we were stuck with a system of government established in about 1830 that was making no allowance for the fact that we had moved from an age of scarcity to an age of plenty".[67]

Between mid-1935 and the end of 1936, E.G. served as an Organiser for the Greyshirt Cadets, the B.U.F.'s Youth Movement. His duties included arranging Cadet contingents for B.U.F. street marches and visiting Districts in east London and Essex. For a time, he also regularly contributed a youth feature on home and world affairs which was published in the Blackshirt press. Once E.G. had left school in March 1936, his fascist activities had to be combined with a full-time job as a shipping clerk for a central London firm. Early in 1938, he transferred to the Epping B.U.F. owing to a family move from Leytonstone to Loughton, where he led a B.U.F. Unit for the next twelve months or so. The following year, with financial help from his father, E.G. acquired a tobacconist's shop in Forest Gate and rejoined the Leytonstone formation. In October 1939, he became Acting District Leader for Leytonstone but relinquished the post in the spring of 1940 in order to concentrate on his business. E.G. was another

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[66] E.G., 'The East London Shopkeeper' in Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts, p. 1.
[67] E.G.. Taped interview.

interviewee detained under DR 18B (1A), and, on his release in the autumn of 1942, he served in the R.A.F. for four and a half years. Although he remained a Mosley loyalist after the war, E.G.'s attachment to the Union Movement lasted barely twelve months since it "hadn't got the same appeal" as the B.U.F. and "no-one was listening to what we had to say".[68]

Another Blackshirt converted by the organisation's ability to fuse nationalism and socialism was T.M., the District Treasurer at East Ham between 1938 and 1940.[69] Born in Bethnal Green in 1915, T.M. was one of six children raised by a widowed mother. His father, an upholsterer, had been killed serving in the army during the 1917 Turkish campaign. In the early 1930s, after completing his education at sixteen, T.M. moved with his family to a new home in Manor Park and began his working life as an upholsterer for a company in Shoreditch.

Coming from a working class background, T.M. first flirted with socialism. His rejection of the class divisions and financial interests associated with Conservatism led him briefly, as a teenager, into the Labour League of Youth. However, T.M.'s anti-capitalist attitudes were offset by a number of reservations about the 'internationalism' of the political left. The Communist Party's devotion to Soviet Russia, in particular, offended his patriotism. Moreover, he was also alienated by the sight of 'foreign' communists:

> Whenever I saw any communists, they were nearly always Jews, funny enough. It was a fact. Being in east London, I used to listen to the communists and I thought some of it doesn't seem a bad idea but it was the people who seemed to be around. They used to be quite different to the ones I used to mix with. Those who surrounded it were usually a scruffy, untidy looking lot. Then the speakers were invariably foreign types of people - not always but quite often.[70]

Over a two year period, T.M. was able to overcome his original aversion to the B.U.F., which had been cultivated by reading hostile press reports. In 1935, he

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[68] Ibid..
[69] T.M.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
[70] Ibid..

witnessed a B.U.F. speaker at Hastings being showered with stones as he tried to conduct an open air meeting. T.M.'s admiration for this Blackshirt's courage in the face of such unstinting opposition encouraged him to examine B.U.F. publications and to talk to East Ham members. The enthusiasm, dedication and discipline of the local fascists T.M. encountered made a lasting impression, but he was ultimately won over by the movement's nationalistic brand of socialism. For T.M., who was "naturally something of a nationalist, a patriot", the B.U.F.'s determination to put Britain and the Empire first was complemented by a commitment to socio-economic change: "...the distribution of wealth and so forth - that's what I was concerned about...That was the general idea of the British Union - a wider equation of productive results".[71]

By the beginning of 1937, T.M. was intellectually convinced of the merits of Mosley's programme and became an active East Ham Blackshirt. Two of his brothers, who both worked as local cabinet-makers and french polishers, also enrolled at the same Branch in the late 1930s.

(f) Mosley's leadership

Mosley's dynamic 'hands on' approach to leadership tipped the scales for Arthur Beavan, the central fascist figure at West Ham.[72] Beavan, an ardent Blackshirt during the 1930s, gravitated towards the B.U.F. from the left of the political spectrum. He was born in Cardiff in September 1900, the son of a Fabian socialist, who worked as a senior statistician for the Cooperative Wholesale Society. At the age of twelve Beavan ran away from home in search of a seafaring career and within two years had entered the merchant marine. After spending part of the First World War in the United States Navy, he lived in Texas for a time before returning to Britain in the 1920s.

Throughout the first post-war decade, Beavan fluctuated between unskilled casual work and periods of unemployment. His political response was to become a

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71 Ibid..
72 A.R. Beavan. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988; A.R. Beavan. Taped interview with Stephen Cullen, 1986; A. Beavan, 'The Welsh Security Officer' in Wise (ed.), Mosley's Blackshirts, pp. 56-59.

communist, but this attachment proved fragile for two reasons. Firstly, he sensed that his fierce patriotism, encouraged by military service and his step-mother, who came from a staunch army family, was not shared by the Communist Party. Furthermore his doubts about the integrity of the communist leadership were apparently confirmed at Hyde Park in 1933: "That was where I made my first break with them...We used to have meetings at Hyde Park, which always ended in trouble, but our so-called leaders were all sitting in Lyons Cornerhouse at Marble Arch taking it easy. They weren't in the scrap. Their leadership was only verbal".[73]

With his faith in communism waning, Beavan attended a B.U.F. meeting in Piccadilly, where he heckled the speakers and traded blows with 'Charlie' Watts, a young Blackshirt activist who later organised the B.U.F.'s London Cab Drivers Group. The following day, he met Watts and another fascist called Hussey to discuss Mosley's programme. Beavan was struck by the "patriotic yet revolutionary" aims of the movement and felt an immediate affinity.[74] Fascism appealed not only to his nationalism but also to his belief in social reform, which had been inculcated by his father. The premium placed on discipline, uniforms and organisation by the B.U.F. was an additional incentive given Beavan's pronounced 'military' outlook. Nevertheless, in the last analysis, his transition to fascism hinged on the question of leadership. Beavan frankly admitted that he was not wholeheartedly won over to the Blackshirt cause until he had seen Mosley 'lead from the front' at a rowdy London public gathering in 1933:

> ...it didn't all convince me until I went to a meeting...where Mosley was speaking and that ended in trouble. But, there the leader, instead of sitting down and having a cup of coffee somewhere, he got down off the van and came in [to the crowd]. He proved that he could not only lead with his mouth, he could lead with his good left hand...I think that that was the last thing that changed the balance - the matter of leadership.[75]

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[73] Beavan. F.O.M. taped interview.
[74] Ibid..
[75] Ibid..

Beavan initially joined the Mayfair Branch in central London but was soon recruited to the 'I' Squad, an exclusive B.U.F. Unit which acted as Mosley's personal bodyguard when the leader undertook speaking engagements. In 1935, after exposing corrupt officials at the West Ham Branch, Beavan was appointed District Organiser for the area and handed the task of reviving the fortunes of the local movement. He retained this pivotal role in West Ham until his internment under the Defence Regulations in 1940, a period of detention which was to last about two years. From the late 1940s, Beavan served as the Area Administrator for the No. 1 London Area of the Union Movement but subsequently became disillusioned with Mosley's post-war organisation, since it was "wishy-washy" and a mere "shadow" of the B.U.F..[76]

Mosley's platform oratory exerted a powerful influence on Ralph Ratcliffe, a resident of Dersingham, Norfolk, when he first heard the B.U.F.'s founder speak at King's Lynn in November 1933.[77] Ratcliffe, the 28 year old son of a Liberal-voting brewery director, was employed as a commercial traveller for a Sheffield firm and had no previous political affiliations. He became Propaganda Officer (1934) and Branch Organiser (1935) for the King's Lynn B.U.F. before moving first to Eye and then Birmingham as a non-active member. Ratcliffe's vague notion that Britain would have to undergo a "great change" in order to surmount the "world crisis" of the early 1930s was brought sharply into focus by Mosley's rhetoric: "I heard Sir Oswald Mosley speak at the Corn Hall, King's Lynn and joined at once as he put a flame to my thoughts which were similar to his programme".[78] A member of the Home Guard during the Second World War, Ratcliffe was another former fascist who followed Mosley into the Union Movement.

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[76] Ibid.; Ilford Guardian, 20 October 1949. Press cutting in Board of Deputies of British Jews (B.D.B.J.) C6/9/3/2. Arthur R. Beavan.
[77] Ralph W. Ratcliffe. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1986.
[78] Ralph W. Ratcliffe. Letter to John D. Brewer. 22 January 1975.

(g) Anti-Semitism

In some cases, the British Union's 'anti-alien' line played upon and channelled personal antipathy towards Jews. R.W., who enrolled in the Walthamstow West B.U.F. as a seventeen year old in August 1935 , became a committed Blackshirt mainly because of his anti-Semitism.[79] Raised in an upper middle class Tory household in Walthamstow, R.W. worked as a junior manager for the Victoria Brewery, the family-owned local firm, which manufactured a variety of consumer items ranging from soft drinks to boot polish. His basic political ideas were shaped by a traditional well-to-do Conservative family background, which lauded the virtues of paternalism and Britain's imperial 'mission', and also by his stridently anti-Communist grandfather, who maintained that 'Bolsheviks' were chiefly responsible for the nation's problems. These sentiments were powerfully overlaid with R.W.'s own hostility to the perceived effects of Jewish economic activity in Walthamstow:

> ...as the district had gone down after the war years [1914-1918]...the Jewish immigrants came into the area and took over all the small businesses and shops - just the same as in later years the Pakistanis and all the rest have done to Britain ...Those people owed no allegiance to our country. All they could think of was how much money [could be made]. To me, the things that I saw them doing were absolutely thoroughly dishonest because I was brought up...[with] the idea that an Englishman didn't do things like that. You were a cad and all this sort of thing, you know. This is my family background coming out. This was the sort of thing, say, from the beginning that made me start thinking.[80]

His respect for the bravery of an undaunted local Blackshirt newspaper seller, who was regularly subjected to left-wing taunts and, on occasion, physical violence, led R.W. to purchase the organisation's publications. Anxious not to offend his family, he then secured the permission of his father, an ex-army captain, to join the Walthamstow West movement. He responded positively to the B.U.F. since he considered that it served a vital function in the defence against an 'alien take-over': "I felt a need because I could see what was happening to even the market on the streets and the shops and

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[79] R.W.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988.
[80] Ibid..

everything were being taken over. We seemed to be losing our grip on everything".[81] For a time, R.W. was the District Propaganda Officer, and he continued as an active member in the area until his army call-up in 1940. A devoted Mosley loyalist, R.W. later joined the Union Movement Drum Corps.

Anti-Semitism also induced M.G., the 21 year old son of a Post Office telegraphist, to enlist in the Southend District B.U.F. between 1936 and 1938.[82] M.G., who lived at Leigh-on-Sea, became interested in fascism in the mid-1930s, when he noticed two of his fellow clerical employees in the publicity department of E.K. Cole Ltd., a radio manufacturing company, donning black shirts as they were leaving work one evening. With his curiosity roused, M.G. perused the movement's literature for a few days and then signed up as an activist at the Southend District headquarters in London Road. In 1937, he married a locally-employed German domestic servant, who belonged to the N.S.D.A.P.. Although he left the Southend formation the following year, after accepting a new job at the Wembley administration offices of Great Universal Stores Ltd., M.G. remained a member of the B.U.F. until 1940 and subsequently stood as a local election candidate for the Union Movement at Harrow.

Raised in a Liberal voting lower middle class family, M.G. became a Blackshirt partly because of Mosley's proposed social and economic solutions. Yet, the B.U.F.'s strongest appeal was to his anti-Jewish instincts, which were fortified by the atmosphere at the Branch. In particular, Dennis Higgs, the local District Leader and an open anti-Semite, set the tone. Higgs worked as a furrier in Southend and resented Jewish competition in the trade. His shop windows carried the uncompromising slogan '100% English - not naturalised or unnaturalised!'. M.G. remembered:

> I was a bit anti-Jewish at the time. I'll give you one reason why. The first job I got was in Bishopsgate. During my lunch hour I used to go for a walk round and I didn't know the district very well and there were all these Jewish sweatshops. You could see all the people slogging away. And not only that, all the streets were littered with chicken feathers. It was filthy.

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81 Ibid..
82 M.G.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1988.

> In fact, I got lost one day and it took me twenty minutes to find my way back to the office [because] all the road signs were in Yiddish. So I didn't take to them very much, the Jews, I'm afraid, I must admit, whatever the movement obviously says, there was a lot of anti-Jewish feeling. I remember the first thing almost we learnt when we became members, and this was down out at Southend, was you'd approach another member, stop, click your heels more or less, put your arm up and say P.J. which meant 'Perish Judah'...Well there was a lot of that but whether there was much personal agitation against the Jews, I don't recall any, apart from the District Leader's shop window, you know, '100% British' and all that.[83]

(h) Anti-communism

For Derrick Millington, the middle class son of a London businessman, becoming a Walthamstow Blackshirt in 1934 was primarily an anti-communist statement.[84] A 28 year old dispensing optician, Millington had previously conformed to family tradition by voting Conservative but confessed to "never being happy with any of the old parties".[85] His main worry was that "Communism was getting too strong in Great Britain", and he viewed the B.U.F., with its endorsement of the "Corporate State, King, Country and Empire", as an effective barrier to the growth of the extreme left in domestic politics. [86] Millington was an active member from the outset and, by November 1935, had risen to the rank of District Organiser for the Walthamstow East Branch, a post he held briefly. Although he continued as an active local Blackshirt during the second half of the decade, he severed his B.U.F. ties at the outbreak of the Second World War and eventually joined the Home Guard.

(i) The B.U.F. Programme

Another Essex Mosleyite, D.T., represented the type of fascist who was attracted by the overall sweep of the movement's programme, rather than by specific

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83 Ibid...
84 Derrick Millington. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985.
85 Ibid..
86 Ibid..

policy initiatives or single issue campaigns.[87] An eighteen year old London stockbroker's clerk, D.T. joined the B.U.F. in late 1936 following a lengthy period of persuasion by his friend 'Dicky' Boughton, a member of the Leytonstone District, employed by Smart's Furniture Company to trace hire purchase debtors. At the time, D.T. lived with his pro-Labour parents in East Ham. His decision to enrol in the West Ham B.U.F. "appalled" the family, particularly his father, who worked in Silvertown as the senior storekeeper for a firm manufacturing plywood and metal foil, but D.T. was not deflected from making the Blackshirt movement his first political home. He was drawn to Mosleyite fascism because of its broad package of reforms, which aimed to stimulate national and imperial revival:

> I think it was pretty general. I don't think there was one particular part. In those days in the thirties, there was unemployment and we seemed to be denigrating a lot of things we had previously believed in...We seemed to be neglecting the Empire for one thing, not developing the potential that we had in the British Empire in those days and generally becoming the 'poor man' of Europe...I felt we could get people to wake up from their lethargy and realise what was happening to the country - that it was going downhill...[and] raise the country up to what we thought was its proper status.[88]

D.T. stayed at West Ham for a few months, often helping the District Leader, Arthur Beavan, with routine propaganda activities, such as newspaper selling. In 1937, he switched to the Epping B.U.F. and remained there until August 1939, when he was conscripted into the army for six years. Immediately after the war, D.T. was instrumental in establishing the Mosleyite Epping and District Book Club, which later became the local formation of the Union Movement. D.T. was appointed the Epping Branch Organiser and, in 1949, stood as a Union Movement candidate for the Snaresbrook ward.

The B.U.F.'s extensive critique of the 'failings' of British liberal democracy also elicited the support of B.M., a Catholic born in Dovercourt in 1922.[89] His father,

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[87] D.T.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
[88] Ibid..

a Tory-voting customs and excise officer, who worked at Bishopsgate, moved the family to Chingford in 1934, and, for the next three years, B.M. attended St. Egbert's College, a nearby private Catholic school. The Essex teenager was subsequently employed as a junior clerical worker by a local building and civil engineering company.

His fascist leanings developed in 1937, moulded by the oratory of Blackshirt street speakers in the Chingford area. The Epping District Leader, Frederic Ball, approached B.M.'s mother to seek permission for her son to join the B.U.F. Cadets. However, Mrs. M. refused to let her offspring become formally involved with the local fascist movement, a decision which left the young sympathiser "rather disappointed at the time".[90] Nevertheless, B.M.'s interest in the B.U.F. continued until 1940, fuelled by reading Mosley's Tomorrow We Live and by becoming a weekly subscriber to Action.

B.M. recalled that his fascist inclinations were underscored by an entrenched patriotism, a desire for social betterment, a liking for the 'politics of action' and a belief in the economic benefits of a self-sufficient imperial bloc:

> Well, I was always something of a nationalist, very patriotic, chauvinistic, very proud of Britain and the British Empire. Also, even at that age, I had a passion for social justice. I was aware of the inequalities in society. There seemed to be extremes of wealth and poverty. When I used to travel up to London you could see the back-to-backs, these little houses, you know, wretched places. I knew there were lots of slums in our big cities and nothing seemed to be done about it. I felt some new system was necessary to do away with all that and create a decent new society for everybody. Mosley seemed to me to have the answer...The emphasis was on action. A government should have the power to act ...instead of having an opposition which only seemed to obstruct the business of government. It seemed to me that what was needed, you know, was a government with the right policies and with the mandate to put those policies through. The B.U.F. policy itself, this concept of a closed economy, Britain and the Empire, as Mosley said, we had all the raw materials we needed within the Empire. We were primarily a manufacturing

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89 B.M.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.
90 Ibid..

> nation so that a natural balance of exchange existed. We could export our manufactured goods...[to the Empire] in exchange for their raw materials and thus make ourselves independent of world markets. Within such autarchy it should be possible to raise the standard of living for everybody. That made great sense to me.[91]

Judging that the conflict with Germany was not in Britain's interests, B.M. registered as a conscientious objector during World War Two and was granted conditional exemption. Between 1942 and 1945, he was assigned to the Civil Defence's Light Rescue Service in Woolwich. For a brief period afterwards, he was seconded to land work in Loughton and Waltham Abbey. At the end of the war, B.M.. joined the Union for British Freedom and quickly fell under the political influence of its leader, Victor Burgess, a former B.U.F. member. Subsequently, both men entered the Union Movement in 1948, and together they went on to found the Kensington Branch. Initially, Burgess led the local formation with B.M. acting as Sales Organiser. When Burgess departed in the early 1950s, his protege took over the Kensington leadership, a position B.M. was to occupy until 1962.

Ronald Creasy, a Suffolk landowner, embraced the B.U.F.'s programme after a protracted and comprehensive intellectual conversion to Mosleyite fascism. He became the founder member and District Leader of the movement at Eye in 1936 and, in 1938, was elected to the local council as a British Union representative. Creasy was also adopted as the B.U.F.'s prospective parliamentary candidate for the Eye division. His high profile and fascist credentials ensured that he was interned under DR 18B (1A) in June 1940.[92]

Creasy's ancestors held a lordship between Dieppe and Rouen dating from Norman times, and the family possessed significant landholdings in Norfolk from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Up to 1931, the family had a financial stake in over 80 farms in Norfolk and Suffolk. His parents, upper middle class land-owning Suffolk Conservatives, had their son privately tutored and, in 1930, the 21 year old Creasy

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91 Ibid..
92 Ronald N. Creasy. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

took over the running of the estate at Cranley Manor, near Eye, on the county border with Norfolk.

As an important member of rural society responsible for many tenanted employees, he was able to witness at first hand the deteriorating agricultural conditions in East Anglia during the early 1930s. In 1933, Creasy's father reportedly declined the offer of almost an entire village, which the Church Commissioners had seized as a tithe debt, on condition that he paid off the outstanding arrears which had accumulated over five years. Creasy also recalled that his father, who had loaned capital to many local farmers, sustained personal financial losses in order to alleviate their economic suffering at this time. His observation of rural hardship in inter-war East Anglia bred a profound sense of disillusionment with the prevailing political and economic system:

> The state of agriculture was completely in the doldrums - a dismal struggle for existence in the 1920s and 1930s. To such an extent that it was utterly deplorable. Imports from cheap sweated countries poured in, making the 'democratic' speculators rich at the expense of the British farmer. Misery and bankruptcy were rife. First class agricultural land lay dormant. No-one could afford to buy it at £5 an acre. It would have been an encumbrance. At the time we were large landowners. No-one better than myself to fully understand the deplorable position of the defenceless farmers as well as the Tithe iniquity framed in the name of 'God'.[93]

For Creasy, it was the liberal democratic party system, through its slavish devotion to the policies of 'international finance', which had betrayed the interests of both the agricultural community and the nation. In particular, he felt that the Conservative Party had become little more than a vehicle for speculative financiers who put the pursuit of quick overseas profits above the long-term needs of British farming. By presiding over the 'ruin' of the agricultural sector, the Tories, in Creasy's estimation, no longer had a legitimate claim to be regarded as the 'farmers' party'. He concluded that Toryism preserved the privileges of the few at the cost of widespread poverty.

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93 Ronald N. Creasy. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 15 December 1992.

It was also apparent that many of the aspects of the cosseted lifestyle of the East Anglian land-owning class alienated Creasy. He disliked the gatherings and 'at homes' and regarded the social round as empty and trivial. This sense of dissatisfaction with leisurely pursuits was strengthened by several visits made to areas in London and Paris frequented by the destitute. The harsh conditions endured by the homeless further exposed the shallow complacency of their social 'betters' and convinced Creasy that such glaring inequalities could have no place in a civilised society.

His experiences also caused him to reject religious orthodoxy. Raised as an Anglican from an early age, Creasy became aware of how class distinctions were mirrored and condoned by mainstream religion. The reserved pews at the front of the local church denoted the family's social position as well-to-do landowners. Less prominent inhabitants of the region were expected to sit behind them. These seating arrangements seemed to symbolise orthodox religion's broader defence of the inequalities of the class system: "I could see our privileges and their lack of privileges and so on. To me, I could also see...that [orthodox] religion was always for those who have against those who have not. 'The poor man at his gate, the rich man in his castle' - that sort of thing".[94]

Creasy reacted by rejecting the Church of England and all other forms or orthodox religion in favour of Pantheism. He considered that his acceptance of natural religion had some bearing on his decision to follow Mosley's lead: "A pantheist is humbled by his littleness with Nature. Is more realistic, more sensitive to culture and the true order of being. Thus more concerned with the welfare of others, as was the B.U.F.".[95]

Having relinquished many of the traditional social and political values of his class, Creasy's transition to fascism was prompted by two significant events. In the mid-1930s he travelled to Italy and Germany, where he met Mussolini, Goering and Goebbels. He was deeply impressed by fascist political and economic methods on the

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94 Creasy. Taped interview.
95 Creasy. Letter.

continent, which only increased his contempt for what he saw as the inefficient, corrupt and vacillating British party system of government:

> ...Hitler [was] a great man...[in] what he achieved for Germany...If you knew Germany as I knew it up to 1939 ...If you'd have known Germany as I've known it - the happiness, the contentment, the wealth, the prosperity. God! The worship of that man! Man, woman and child ...What a man! From poverty, from nothing he built up a great nation of people...You'd have been like me if you had been old enough and had gone and seen the marvellous prosperity and happiness and contentment of those people and the worship of their leader because he had brought it all to them.[96]

After expounding his views in the correspondence columns of the provincial press, Creasy received a parcel containing a selection of Mosley's fascist writings from William Sherston, the District Leader at Woodbridge. On reading this literature, Creasy detected not only a mutual line of thought but also a kindred spirit. The Suffolk landowner's predilection for the B.U.F. was reinforced by his identification with Mosley as a privileged man, who had abandoned the 'good life' in order to embark on a selfless political mission to improve the lot of ordinary British people:

> As a result of my own writings [in the local newspapers] Mosley's writings came to me...and therein I saw the very shaping of my own mind. Therein lay everything that I wanted to do myself. Everything that I felt would at last be of some importance - to stop the quarrelling...of party politics. Someone who could ultimately say 'I will do this' and it would be done - for the people. I recognised that he was a man of very sound background. I recognised all his privileges in life as indeed I had privileges. I realised clearly that he was sacrificing all that for the people, for future generations and that that should be the object of living... It was therefore important for me to get in touch, which I did, and then I dedicated my life from that moment on in full support of Mosley and his policy.[97]

Typically, as a 'born' leader, Creasy had firm ideas about his role in the movement. At his request, Sherston arranged a personal meeting with Mosley in

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96 Creasy. Taped interview.
97 Ibid..

London, an encounter which confirmed Creasy's sense of mutual understanding. One of his conditions was that he should enter the organisation in a manner befitting his social status - as a leader. The B.U.F.'s emphasis on leadership struck a responsive chord in Creasy, because it underpinned his place at the apex of a paternalistic rural order bounded by the traditional ties of kinship, duty and obligation:

> The fascist idea suited me remarkably well because fascism means leadership and I was prepared to be a leader. I don't think I had ever been anything else, socially and so on. I was born to leadership. We were given it at a very early age, almost as children...Therefore that also encouraged me to leave the old behind and, for the sake of the people, to go into the B.U.F., but as a leader.[98]

(j) Non-Ideological Reasons

Some fascists joined the B.U.F. for reasons that had little to do with Blackshirt policy or ideology. Eric Pleasants, for example, entered the Norwich B.U.F. in 1936 principally because of the local movement's 'external' attractions.[99] Born in 1913, the son of a Norfolk gamekeeper, Pleasants excelled at wrestling and boxing from an early age. He left school at thirteen but was later awarded a diploma in physical education and physiotherapy by Loughborough College. After a succession of short-lived jobs, Pleasants earned his living by combining his work as a physical fitness instructor at gyms in Norwich and Lowestoft with professional wrestling.

Pleasants dabbled with communism in his youth but formulated no firm political ideas until he had taken up the fascist banner at the age of 23. Although he welcomed the Blackshirts' "good honest patriotism", his combative instincts were especially drawn to the uniform and the movement's dynamic image.[100] Pleasants relished the opportunity to use his physical prowess to maintain order at fascist meetings in the city. Shortly after joining, he was assigned to the Norwich B.U.F.'s 'defence force', an informal protection squad which guarded local and visiting Blackshirt speakers.

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98 Ibid..
99 Eric Pleasants. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.
100 Ibid..

Furthermore, membership afforded access to female fascists: "Of course, there was another consideration. I treated the local Branch much as other people treated joining amateur dramatic societies - as a way of meeting good-looking women. There were plenty of 'good-lookers' at the Branch, unattached I mean. So I thought there's only one way to meet them. Not a very noble reason to join, I know, but it got me with the girls".[101] Once in the movement, however, Pleasants educated himself politically by reading a wide selection of B.U.F. pamphlets. He left the organisation in the autumn of 1939 and travelled to Jersey to work as an agricultural labourer for the Peace Pledge Union because he had no wish to fight in the war. By then, Pleasants disapproved of the B.U.F., since the movement was now "just copying Nazi Germany".[102]

Similarly, political or ideological motivation played no part in N.B.'s decision to back the B.U.F..[103] She became a Chingford Blackshirt in 1934 simply because her future husband, L.B., who later became the Epping District Leader, was a local member. A Lancastrian, N.B. was born at the turn of the century into a middle class family headed by her protective father, an industrial chemist. In 1930, she moved from Middleton to London in search of work and, by 1932, was employed as an assistant in a Bethnal Green baker's shop, where L.B. was a regular customer. Like Eric Pleasants, N.B.'s turn to fascism was then followed by a serious attempt to become fully acquainted with the Blackshirt programme. After the couple were married in 1937, N.B. became Women's District Leader for Epping (1938-1940) and twice stood as a B.U.F. local election candidate.

4. The National Sample

The life histories of 75 Mosleyites (69 Blackshirts and six B.U.F. sympathisers) from outside the three counties, compiled for comparative purposes, tend to mirror the motivations of the East Anglian group. Yet, since neither sample can purport to be a

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101 Ibid..
102 Ibid..
103 N.B.. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1991.

representative cross-section of the local or national movement, it would be extremely unwise to make far-reaching claims about the attractions of Mosleyite fascism. The most that can safely be deduced is that certain facets of the B.U.F.'s appeal in eastern England seemed to resonate nationally.

TABLE 1
'NATIONAL' SAMPLE OF 75 MOSLEYITE RESPONDENTS

A. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

AREA	NUMBER
London and the surrounding region (excluding the East End)	28
East London	16
Northern England	14
Central England	6
Eastern England (excluding Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex)	1
Western England	1
Southern England	6
Not known	3

B. REASON FOR SUPPORTING THE B.U.F.

REASON	NUMBER
Socio-economic	19
Patriotism	11
B.U.F.'s general programme	11
'National Socialism'	6
Mosley	6
Anti-communism	5
Non-ideological factors	5
Poor national leadership	4
Anti-Semitism	4
Peace	4

Approximately one quarter of the 75 people surveyed gave socio-economic reasons for their fascist beliefs. As with the four East Anglian members discussed earlier, a range of concerns relating to the slump, unemployment, working conditions and poverty propelled them towards the B.U.F.. For example, H.E. a seventeen year old electrician's mate, joined the Central Hackney Branch in 1937 because he thought fascism would end the economic depression which had ruined his parents' hotel

business.[104] Others were recruited through B.U.F. regional campaigns, such as T.R., the Assistant District Leader at Middleton and Prestwich, who enlisted in 1935 at the age of sixteen.[105] A junior clerk in a cotton spinning mill, T.R. was impressed by Blackshirt plans to revitalise the Lancashire textile industry:

> I was attracted by the Movement's policy for Cotton. Living in Lancashire and having just commenced work in the Office of a Spinning Mill I was acutely aware of the neglect the present and previous Governments had shown towards the Cotton trade. The results of this neglect were to be seen everyday then, in the Dole queues, the silent Mills and many other conditions.[106]

Sometimes, a general unease about social and economic conditions was enough to ensure a commitment to fascism. This was the case with I.E., an eighteen year old Finchley member and trainee hairdresser, who enrolled in 1938, since he endorsed the B.U.F.'s schemes to create jobs.[107] Intellectual convictions could also stimulate an interest in British Union. The Sussex-based Catholic, A.R., then a publisher's assistant in his early twenties, became a sympathiser due to the overlap between his Distributist views on the desirability of small-scale economic organisation and the B.U.F.'s antipathy towards combines and chain stores.[108]

A further eleven members of the sample were captivated by the Blackshirts' patriotic image. Here again though, individual motives varied. At one end of the spectrum an instinctive, unfocussed nationalism acted as the catalyst. Thus, S.G., a nineteen year old Leeds grocery shop manager, and R.S., a Streatham hairdresser, aged 27, were short term 'Rothermere recruits', influenced by the Daily Mail's vision of the B.U.F. as a robust patriotic adjunct to the Conservative Party.[109] Conversely, the District Leaders at Bromley (late 1930s) and Limehouse (1936-1938) were long-term members, encouraged to join by the fascist nationalism enshrined in Mosley's 'Britain

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104 H.E.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1985.
105 T.R.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.
106 Ibid..
107 I.E.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1994.
108 A.R.. Letter to Andrew Mitchell. 15 January 1994.
109 S.G.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985; R.S.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.

First' policy.[110] B.U.F. loyalists like V.H., a founder member at Weymouth in 1933, responded to Blackshirt pronouncements on imperial affairs.[111] After spending much of his childhood in Canada, V.H. formed the impression that Britain's territorial possessions were not being developed to their full potential, and the twenty year old clerk seized upon the autarchic remedies contained in The Greater Britain as signalling a "completely new attitude to the Empire".[112]

Eleven other respondents put their fascist allegiances down to the B.U.F.'s broad policy objectives. Robert Row, a nineteen year old clerk, who served as the District Treasurer at Lancaster, succumbed in 1934 because fascism reflected his "patriotism, revulsion against unemployment; low opinion of the parties".[113] Along the same lines, P.T. and J.R., District Leaders at Watford and Birmingham respectively, found that British Union ideology ended their search for a political creed which was dynamic, nationalistic, virulently anti-communist and would tackle both the jobless problem and the shortcomings of the parliamentary system.[114] On occasion, this identification with the B.U.F.'s general programme was infused with a youthful romantic idealism. An ex-Slough Blackshirt offered the following reasons for signing up as a teenage schoolboy in 1933: "...deep sympathy for Germany; distaste for gutter press' and films' strident anti-Germanism...; in love with beautiful blue-eyed blonde; distaste for left-wing oafs and louts; sense that Britain was a sick nation with a shaky

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110 E.F.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985; Arthur Mason. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985. E.F., then a 23 year old shop manager at Clerkenwell, joined the Bromley B.U.F. in 1936 and subsequently became District Leader. 21 year old Arthur Mason was employed as a doctor's manservant when he joined the B.U.F. at Welwyn Garden City in 1933. After a period at National Headquarters, he was appointed District Leader at Limehouse in 1936.

111 V.H.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d. V.H. became the District Leader at Weymouth.

112 Ibid..

113 Robert Row. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.

114 P.T.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985; J.R.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985. P.T., a twenty year old metal turner, joined the Watford Branch in November 1933. J.R., a twenty year old salesman, became a Blackshirt at Maidenhead in 1934 and moved to the Whitstable Branch the following year. In 1936 he relocated to Birmingham where he was appointed District Leader and District Inspector.

empire; love of Kipling, Rupert Brooke, Wagner, Vaughan Williams, Cavaliers - all that was gallant, elegant, chivalric and antithetical to democracy and oafishness".[115]

Mosley's synthesis of nationalism and radical social and economic reforms was another feature of the B.U.F.'s appeal which transcended regional barriers. The Lincoln garage director, O.I., joined the local District in October 1937 because, in his view, only the Blackshirt movement could revive agriculture and protect the Empire.[116] An eagerness to fight social deprivation and maintain the country's patriotic traditions first led Y.K., a seventeen year old female Mosleyite, into the New Party and then into the B.U.F..[117] Y.K. became a Battersea fascist in 1932 while working as a junior clerk for a central London firm. This Blackshirt variant of 'national socialism' also enabled C.S., the District Leader for the North-East Leeds formation in the later 1930s, to reconcile his patriotic, middle-class, Tory family background with the perceived need for radical measures to counteract the type of grinding poverty he had witnessed as a Stoke-on-Trent schoolboy a decade earlier.[118] Dorchester's leading fascist, Robert Saunders, a 23 year old farmer in 1933, was also persuaded by the B.U.F.'s "logical" economic reforms and its "emotional" glorification of Britain and the Empire.[119]

Others opted for the B.U.F. because of their dissatisfaction with the performance of the government. One such member was P.H., a twenty year old Branch speaker at Leicester.[120] He chose fascism in reaction to what he considered to be an impotent national leadership. The Assistant District Leader at Richmond, H.A., and A.N., an out of work seventeen year old Wood Green member, were similarly motivated by the feeling that the Tory-dominated coalition lacked direction.[121] These opinions were neatly summarised by J.Y., who, after becoming a teenage fascist in

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115 S.W.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1986.
116 O.I.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.. O.I., who took over as District Leader at Lincoln in 1939, had an agricultural family background. Both his father and grandfather had been farmers.
117 Y.K.. Interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1993.
118 C.S.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.. C.S. worked as a clerk in a wholesale warehouse and joined the Leeds B.U.F. as a nineteen year old in 1934.
119 Robert Saunders. Taped interview with Andrew Mitchell, 1992.
120 P.H.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..
121 H.A.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.; A.N. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.

1933, was taken on to the permanent staff at National Headquarters.[122] J.Y's fascist beliefs were based on the assumption that he was "helping the country to get rid of misgovernment by sad old men".[123]

British Union's pronounced anti-communism accounted for the fascist affiliations of five East London residents in the sample. For some, fascism originally provided a means of protesting against local communist violence. The physical 'wrecking' tactics employed by the extreme left at the 'Battle of Cable Street' in October 1936 prompted B.T., a 30 year old timber porter, to support the movement in Bethnal Green.[124] H.V., the Limehouse Women's District Leader in 1939-1940, was also converted to the B.U.F. cause after observing the disturbances at Cable Street.[125] The 24 year old factory worker from Stepney was shocked to see left-wing demonstrators using strong-arm methods against the police: "We saw for ourselves the communists with their clenched fists, rolling marbles under the horses' feet, stuffing glass in their noses to bring the police down, and we were really disgusted. I made up my mind from then on to be an active member no matter what".[126]

More reasoned opposition to communism could breed Mosleyite sympathies as well. The Poplar sixth-former, L.C., fraternised with the fascist leadership at East Ham in 1933-1934 because he wished to see "the extirpation of Marxism throughout the world".[127] He looked upon the B.U.F. as an anti-bolshevik force, which would challenge the communists' denunciation of nationalism, disregard for Britain's heritage and reliance on subversion. However, L.C. was not an uncritical admirer and was never tempted into the movement. His Church of England family background and his reservations about the Blackshirts' '*fuhrerprinzip*' orientation and 'Action Press'

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122 J.Y.. Completed questionnaire for Andrew Mitchell, 1994.
123 Ibid..
124 B.T.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.
125 H.V.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..
126 Ibid..
127 L.C.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..

uniform made certain that L.C.'s deeply-held anti-communist opinions did not culminate in formal B.U.F. membership.[128]

Anti-Semites, of course, also found the B.U.F. an attractive proposition. In some cases, hostility towards Jews rested on perceptions at the work place. John Wynn, a Birmingham manufacturer of film and sound equipment was recruited in 1938, chiefly because he resented the alleged Jewish 'stranglehold' on the British cinema industry.[129] Moreover, K.F. joined the Blackshirts as a twenty year old in 1934 since he was "fed up with the Jews".[130] A well-known fascist figure in the Willesden and Harlesden areas, K.F. later became the District Leader at West Willesden. His job as a London shipping clerk, which brought him into regular contact with Jewish immigrants, fostered his anti-Semitism:

> There were so many Jews coming into the country... Shipments of their belongings came through [the company]...So many Jewish properties, so many Jewish things all went to...north-west London...They brought their goods and sold them here [to] make money, always making money...Unfortunately, I was in the part of the company that dealt with the Jewish population coming here.[131]

Such negative attitudes were not always related to a person's occupation. The former District Leader at Marylebone originally enlisted in the B.U.F. as a 23 year old apprentice coach trimmer in c.1933 after reading, and taking at face value, anti-Semitic tracts such as *Mein Kampf*.[132] B.J., a Croydon member first approached the Blackshirts in 1938 after convincing himself that Jews wielded excessive influence in the local business community.[133] For the eighteen year old junior engineer, this proved that the 'hidden hand' of the Jewish economic lobby was operating in Britain: "I noticed a tremendous amount, in the business field, of shops which were mainly

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128 Ibid..
129 John Wynn (Untitled unpublished autobiography, n.d.).
130 K.F.. F.O.M. taped interview, 1994.
131 Ibid..
132 G.P.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.. G.P. joined the B.U.F. at Kilburn and served as Assistant District Leader at East Willesden before taking charge of the Marylebone formation.
133 B.J.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..

Jewish-owned in my high street, all Jews. I felt this was wrong, that...people who were not native to this country...should be having such a widespread influence in commerce and industry. This, I felt, was not right".[134]

In addition, several respondents revealed that their interest in fascism was first aroused by the B.U.F.'s anti-war stance of the late 1930s. These reminiscences lend weight to the available evidence which suggests that Mosley's 'Peace Campaign' between 1938 and 1940 mobilised a new wave of support.[135] For example, M.M., then a seventeen year old shop assistant, joined the B.U.F. in 1938 rather than any other party since she was "afraid of war and felt that this one at least talked peace".[136] A corresponding desire to prevent European conflict in 1939 also turned F.G., a 22 year old bakery worker, into a Blackshirt sympathiser at Welwyn Garden City.[137] Mosley's anti-war policy was the crucial factor too in N.P.'s decision to sign up at the Hull Branch in 1938.[138] The nineteen year old storeman who had known various local fascists for a number of years was increasingly perturbed by the deterioration in Anglo-German relations:

> I'll be quite honest, I'm not particularly interested in Mosley. I never was. I was, however, always pro-German for various reasons...The only great attraction B.U. had for me [was that] it was the only political organisation in the country that was genuinely opposed or seemed capable of offering resistance to this trend to war. It was the 1938 Czech crisis that gave me the push to actually join the B.U.F..[139]

The British Union's most valuable asset was, or course, Mosley himself, not least because the B.U.F. leader could command allegiance through the sheer force of his dynamic personality and platform oratory. A.V.'s membership was a testimony to

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134 Ibid..
135 See for example Robert Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), pp. 331-333; G.C. Webber, The Ideology of the British Right 1918-1939 (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 43-46; R. Thurlow, Fascism in Britain: A History 1918-1985 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 122-130.
136 M.M.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.
137 F.G.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, 1986.
138 N.P.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..
139 Ibid..

Mosley's ability to fire an audience with enthusiasm.[140] A door-to-door salesman-cum-chimney sweep, A.V. joined the Leeds B.U.F. immediately after hearing the founder of the Blackshirt movement make an address in the city in 1934. The young northerner was particularly struck by Mosley's 'Errol Flynn' image and his direct style of public speaking.[141] A.V. did not acquire more than a basic understanding of the B.U.F. programme until he attended speakers' classes some months later. The Anglo-Italian Blackshirt, M.B., then a fourteen year old schoolboy, was recruited in much the same way at the beginning of 1937.[142] He joined the B.U.F. at Camden, where his parents ran a small cafe, after witnessing Mosley hold a street meeting in London. M.B. recalled being "very impressed" with the B.U.F. founder's "absolutely...brilliant" speech on the problems facing England at that time.[143]

Even when potential adherents tended to endorse Blackshirt aims, the leader's charismatic appeal could tip the scales in favour of active involvement. Mosley provided the impetus for G.L., the District Leader at Huddersfield, to become a fascist in 1935 at the age of 29.[144] With his engineering apprenticeship punctuated by periods of unemployment and low paid casual work, G.L.'s belief in patriotism and the need to eradicate poverty was sharpened by his disdain for the 'failure' of the mainstream parties to tackle existing social problems. Yet, although this made him more susceptible to Blackshirt propaganda, G.L. stressed that it was hearing the B.U.F. leader on the speaker's podium which sealed his commitment. Before becoming the District Leader at Hull (1935-1940), John Charnley underwent a similar conversion process at Southport in 1933.[145] Having been temporarily laid off from his job in the baking trade, 23 year old Charnley found the B.U.F.'s economic proposals persuasive but,

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[140] A.V.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d..
[141] Ibid..
[142] M.B.. F.O.M. taped interview, n.d.. M.B later became a B.U.F. Sales Organiser in Islington and also belonged to the Italian Fascist Party's Youth Movement
[143] Ibid..
[144] G.L. (Untitled unpublished autobiography, n.d.).
[145] John Charnley. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.

ultimately, was won over by Mosley's "obvious sincerity" in trying to reduce unemployment.[146]

Finally a small number from the sample entered the B.U.F. either as 'non-ideological' adherents or literal social fascists. Two members automatically accepted the political preferences of a parent. Sid Bailey was a thirteen year old schoolboy when he followed his father, an unemployed east London manual worker who had lost his faith in Labour's capacity to raise working class living standards, into the Bethnal Green movement in 1934.[147] Paternal influence also rubbed off on P.G., an eighteen year old trainee theatrical costume maker.[148] She enrolled in 1932 merely because her father, a rubber manufacturer, was already a member. For a short time, P.G. acted as an assistant to Lady Maud Mosley's secretary but resigned from the organisation in 1935, since she was "sickened" by the B.U.F.'s anti-Semitism.[149] The Manchester Blackshirt, Tom Pickles, was fleetingly seduced in 1933 by pro-fascist friends and the local movement's sporting facilities.[150] Within three months though, the 24 year old woodworker had abandoned the B.U.F. for good. Another Manchester member adopted fascism in 1934 specifically to pursue a romantic interest. Agnes Barlow was attracted to a uniformed fascist and joined the Moss Side Branch to get to know him.[151] Once the couple were engaged, Barlow and her fiancé held official positions in the local formation, but after their wedding she continued only as a non-active member until 1940.

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146 Ibid..
147 Sid Bailey. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.
148 P.G.. Completed questionnaire for Stephen Cullen, c.1985.
149 Ibid..
150 Tom Pickles. Transcript of taped interview with Stuart Rawnsley, 1977.
151 Agnes Barlow. Transcript of taped interview with Stuart Rawnsley, 1976.

CONCLUSION

Having examined the emergence, development and ultimate demise of the B.U.F. in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex between 1933 and 1940, it remains only to review and draw together the central findings of this thesis. The present investigation has concentrated on five key issues to facilitate a deeper understanding of the Mosleyite fascist presence in the three counties, namely (1) the extent and consequences of the B.U.F.'s intervention in the East Anglian 'tithe war' in 1933-1934, (2) the provincial dimension to the B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign from 1938 and the local impact of Defence Regulation 18B (1A), (3) local levels of recruitment and the nature of the B.U.F.'s social base in the region, (4) the considerations which motivated individuals from the area to join or support the movement, and (5) the factors which prevented the 'East Anglian' B.U.F. from making significant political progress.

Blackshirt involvement in the 'tithe war' formed a crucial element in the movement's campaign to establish itself in Norfolk, Suffolk and provincial Essex. In part, fascist intervention at particular farms under notice of distraint certainly represented an opportunistic bid for rural support, but the B.U.F.'s objections to rent charge also had a more principled aspect. For example, fascist literature condemned the anachronistic nature of the tithe and put forward proposals to fund the Church of England from general taxation. The arrival of B.U.F. detachments at Hall Farm, Fincham in Norfolk and Delvyns Farm, Gestingthorpe in Essex also indicates that, contrary to the impression given by earlier studies, Suffolk was not the only local arena for this type of fascist activism.

Up to a point, the Blackshirts' interventionist strategy was successful. The B.U.F.'s anti-tithe activities generated much publicity and, taken together with other factors including the Rothermere press campaign, helped to boost the eastern counties' membership to approximately 2,500 by mid-1934. It is evident that the fascist affiliations of some East Anglian farmers, such as Arthur Barker and George Hoggarth, stemmed directly from Blackshirt involvement in local tithe disputes. A B.U.F.

formation was also set up at Diss in south Norfolk, apparently in response to the presence of 'imported' Mosleyites who were protesting against rent charge. The sources available suggest that the B.U.F. was invited to participate in the Wortham tithe affair by a member of the family concerned, and that during this particular distraint there was a degree of collusion between the Blackshirts and the tithepayers. The reasons for the overall failure of the B.U.F.'s anti-tithe campaign will be discussed later.

The regional B.U.F.'s Peace Campaign from 1938, based on conventional and clandestine propaganda methods, partly substantiates revisionist arguments about the impact of the fascist anti-war platform. Impressionistic evidence suggests that some local Districts, such as those at Norwich, Eye, Leytonstone, East Ham, West Ham and Walthamstow West, witnessed an increase in recruitment due to the Blackshirt peace policy but this was far from a uniform trend. Similarly, it would appear that, during the late 1930s, certain formations in the area, including the Epping B.U.F., attracted the allegiance of disaffected pro-appeasement middle class Conservatives who concurred with Mosley's anti-war line. Once again, though, many local Districts did not experience an influx of alienated Tories and, in any case, the numbers involved were relatively small.

A detailed examination of the impact of Defence Regulation 18B (1A) on local Districts has shown that the government round-up of regional Mosleyites in mid-1940 proceeded in an inconsistent manner. Several factors account for the rather haphazard nature of the operation. Many local B.U.F. formations were locked into a process of constant change at this time owing to the agitation over barley and peace, members' reactions to international developments, and the impact of the military call-up. The prevailing 'fifth column' mentality added another dimension to the problem. Furthermore, the authorities did not possess up-to-date information on the B.U.F.'s provincial membership and some police recommendations for arrest appeared to be both arbitrary and indiscriminate. Circumstantial evidence relating to a number of local

cases also suggests that enlistment in the services or establishment connections could prevent Blackshirts from being interned.

Using the assumptions and methodological frameworks underpinning Webber and Linehan's work on the B.U.F. membership, this thesis was able to draw several important, if tentative, conclusions about the local Mosleyite following.[1] Firstly, the assembled evidence indicates that membership levels in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex followed Webber's projected national recruitment trends between 1934 and late 1938. After peaking at around 1750 members in mid-1934, the local movement shrank to just 175 or so by late 1935 before mounting a modest but steady recovery to c.578 by the end of 1938. Impressionistic evidence provided by ex-Blackshirts from the area suggests that women constituted between ten and 30 per cent of the local membership, again broadly in line with informed academic estimates of national recruitment patterns. Secondly, detailed consideration of a regional sample of 230 Mosleyites from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex indicates that most local members and supporters came from the lower and intermediate levels of the middle class. Within this social class category the three largest occupational groups represented in the sample were junior or middle-ranking white collar employees, self-employed merchants and farmers. A significant minority of the 230 Mosleyites examined were manual workers.

Research conducted for this thesis also endorses earlier accounts which found that dissident Conservatives were joining the B.U.F. at various locations across the country. Within the three counties, numerous identified local fascist officials had previous connections with the Conservative Party and impressionistic evidence obtained principally from the local press and former Blackshirts indicates that disaffected Tories provided the regional movement with a significant proportion of its recruits and supporters. The middle class bias of the Mosleyite sample examined reinforces this conclusion.

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[1] G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 19 (1984), pp. 575-606; T.P. Linehan, East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40 (London: Frank Cass, 1996), Chapter Six.

The oral and written testimonies of 22 regional and 75 other Mosleyites were consulted to investigate the highly subjective issue of why individuals either joined or supported the B.U.F.. On the basis of the memoir material gathered, it seems plausible to contend that the Blackshirt movement in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex possessed a multifaceted appeal. In this respect, the 'East Anglian' sample confirms Rawnsley's observation that adherents joined the B.U.F. "for a variety of reasons" and illustrates the fundamental weakness inherent in explanations based on supposedly 'stereotypical' Blackshirts.[2]

Some local recruits and sympathisers were attracted by the patriotic tone of the B.U.F.'s 'Britain First' policy and pro-Empire orientation. Other adherents gravitated towards the movement because of its campaign to preserve peace in Europe. Blackshirt remedies for social and economic problems, including unemployment and the tithe, also brought in members and supporters, as did the fascist rejection of parliamentary democracy. The B.U.F.'s variant of 'national socialism', with its synthesis of patriotism and social progress, engendered Blackshirt loyalties and Mosley's 'dynamic' leadership acted as a further inducement to develop fascist affiliations. Conversion to the B.U.F. could often be prompted as well by personal antipathy towards Jews and Communists. Moreover, other Mosleyites from the region were drawn to the organisation by the general Blackshirt programme which aimed to safeguard Britain's imperial interests and implement radical economic and political reforms. Conversely, some interviewees maintained that 'non-ideological' factors, such as the availability of female company or a husband's attachment to a local formation, were the prime considerations.

The diverse justifications for following Mosley given by those in the 'national' sample add weight to the argument that fascist motivation was complex and could not be reduced to a small number of categories. In addition, the fact that the 'East Anglian' and 'national' samples exhibited similar motivational characteristics would seem to

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[2] S. Rawnsley, 'The Membership of the British Union of Fascists' in K. Lunn and R. Thurlow (eds.), British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 164.

indicate that various aspects of the B.U.F.'s appeal transcended regional barriers. An examination of the two samples also makes it clear that the decision to enrol in, or support, the B.U.F. was not always related to interests and perceptions arising from an individual's occupation or social class.

Finally, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that the absence of key determining factors in the Griffin-Copsey conjunctural model prevented a Blackshirt 'take-off' in the three counties. Crucially, socio-economic conditions in the region were distinctly unfavourable. The depression in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex did not develop into the type of major structural dysfunction which eroded the legitimacy of the liberal democratic system, fostered widespread political and personal disaffection and made sections of society responsive to the fascist message. As discussed in Chapters Three-Five, three features of the economic downturn militated against the creation of such a crisis in this predominantly rural area. Firstly, the gradual onset of the slump lessened its impact and helped to marginalise radical economic and political solutions. Secondly, the depression's lack of uniformity meant that many districts and types of farming operation survived relatively unscathed. Finally, the modest recovery from 1933 helped to raise farm income and ease the producer's cost-price ratio. This economic context also compromised the B.U.F.'s anti-tithe campaign.

The extent and experience of unemployment in the three counties further stifled the emergence of a 'subjective sense' of crisis. For most of the 1930s, unemployment levels in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex remained below the overall rate for Great Britain. Moreover, after peaking in 1932-1933, local unemployment began to fall. It also seems to be the case that, across the eastern counties, most of those without work responded passively to their predicament, an attitude which was more likely to encourage apathy rather than political agitation. Certainly, research has shown that in areas such as Norwich, where the unemployment rate remained comparatively high for much of the decade, the operation of the relief system, together with the conservatism and modest aspirations of the bulk of the unemployed, prevented the mass radicalisation of the jobless.

Lacking the fundamental precondition of a destabilising crisis or conducive socio-economic context, the B.U.F. was further handicapped by its inability to 'open up' significant political space and thus establish a solid constituency of support. The National Government's agricultural policy, based on tariffs, deficiency payments and market regulation proved a key obstacle to the recruitment of the B.U.F.'s hoped-for 'farming legions'. By protecting, organising and subsidising the farming sector, the government undermined the appeal of the Blackshirt agricultural platform and kept defections to a minimum. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, eastern England was the prime beneficiary of this type of state support. The importance of wheat and sugar beet subsidies to the area can be gauged from the fact that, at this time, almost 50 per cent of the wheat and 80 per cent of the sugar beet produced in England and Wales came from East Anglia, the East Riding and Lincoln. Farmers in other areas of the country "looked askance at the subsidies paid on these two crops".[3] According to calculations made by J.A. Venn, a contemporary authority on agriculture, in 1934 Norfolk producers received "appreciable" state support consisting of £436,000 in wheat payments, £666,000 in sugar beet subsidies, £650,000 in rating reliefs, and £200,000 in other forms of assistance. In total, this amounted to a net gain of £1 8s. per acre.[4]

Similarly, government legislation to reform the tithe rent charge system in 1936 effectively closed down what political space was left for the B.U.F. on this issue. Several concessionary features of the Tithe Act, such as the 60 year redemption period and the low annuity redemption rate, satisfied non-farming landowners in particular, and dampened anti-tithe agitation. The personal liability provision also permitted the use of legal procedures to recover annuity arrears directly. In this way, the publicity which often accompanied the more public methods of forced sales and distraints could be avoided.

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[3] E. Whetham, The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1914-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 245.
[4] J.A. Venn, 'The Financial and Economic Results of State Control in Agriculture', The Economic Journal, Vol. 45 (1935), p. 656.

Blackshirt efforts to create a sizeable working class following were thwarted by the ideological and moral pressures exerted by the labour movement (together with other factors). The relative strength of agricultural trade unionism in East Anglia imposed an obvious political barrier to the B.U.F.'s recruitment of farmworkers, not least because the National Union of Agricultural Workers took a strong anti-fascist line in its journal The Land Worker. Enduring working class loyalty to the Labour Party in urban socialist strongholds, such as Plaistow and Silvertown, also meant that Blackshirt calls for manual support went largely unheeded. Local labour figures used the speaker's podium and the regional press to warn of the dangers fascism posed for the working class, and constituency Labour Party organisations urged their members to stay away from B.U.F. events. Furthermore, Blackshirt speakers were rarely permitted to address left-wing bodies.

The Suffolk Tithepayers' Association (S.T.A.) and the Suffolk County Branch of the National Farmers Union also played central roles in denying the B.U.F. political space during the 'tithe war' of 1933-1934 and the 'barley crisis' of 1938-1939[-] respectively. Led by respected local farmers, both organisations had been established before the arrival of the B.U.F. in the county and provided recognised channels for agricultural protest. These bodies also adopted a 'non-partisan' approach in their pragmatic law-abiding campaigns for change and firmly rejected Blackshirt offers of cooperation. Consequently, the B.U.F. could neither supplant these pressure groups nor act in formal alliance with them.

Other external and internal factors made it impossible for Mosley's movement to construct any semblance of political legitimacy in the area. The denial of council (and private) halls, particularly in Labour-controlled Boroughs such as Norwich, Walthamstow and Leyton, removed valuable indoor venues for high-profile political campaigning. As a result, the Blackshirts were forced to rely heavily on open-air meetings which meant that the B.U.F. was not only more vulnerable to the disruptive tactics of anti-fascists but also less likely to attract 'respectable' support, given the movement's association with street politics. The disturbances and violence which

accompanied anti-fascist 'direct action' methods at Canning Town, Braintree, Great Yarmouth and elsewhere served to discredit the B.U.F. further by identifying it with disorder and physical confrontation. Instances of fascist violence and disruption merely compounded the problem. Regional newspapers reinforced negative public perceptions of the B.U.F. through their coverage of disturbances at Blackshirt events and the excesses of British and continental fascists. Editorials and regular columns were often highly critical of Mosleyite efforts to gain local recruits.

Internal deficiencies deprived the 'East Anglian' B.U.F. of the dynamism and organisational coherence which was also required to establish Blackshirt political credibility. Frequent personnel changes and the appointment of inadequate officials prevented a number of local Branches, including those at King's Lynn and Ilford, from developing a sense of stability and continuity. Furthermore, political and personal conflicts within the regional movement led to the departure of much-needed activists, such as Will Smith and John Smeaton-Stuart, which brought unwelcome publicity and hampered fascist propaganda initiatives in the eastern counties. The socially conservative nature of much of the local membership also had adverse consequences since these recruits possessed neither the activist mentality nor the ideological conviction to commit themselves openly to the B.U.F.. Entrenched notions of social and commercial respectability ensured that most Blackshirts in the three counties were reluctant to participate in any form of political work for the movement. This type of support base tended to be transient and precluded the creation of a long-term stable membership.

Campaign and organisational initiatives revealed other serious shortcomings. For example, the Blackshirt strategy adopted during the 'tithe war', which was based on unsolicited interventions and imported detachments of mainly urban fascists, was hardly designed to win over the agricultural community. The May 1935 decision to remodel the movement along parliamentary constituency lines exposed additional weaknesses. Across the three counties, the resulting rudimentary B.U.F. Divisional structures were starved of personnel, finance and regular District-N.H.Q. contact.

Inevitably, they failed to develop into viable electoral machines and political organisations.

This lack of 'favourable contingency' was compounded by the reaction of the state. The authorities played a central role in monitoring and then terminating B.U.F. involvement in the 'tithe war', following fascist intervention at Wortham in February 1934. Official concern that the fascists were engaging in illegal activities led to the arrest of nineteen Blackshirts at Rash's farms and the removal of other Mosleyites from the area before the impounded stock was collected. State management techniques were also employed to minimise the publicity value of the subsequent legal proceedings for the movement. The fascist connection was played down at the committal hearing by counsel for the Director of Public Prosecutions and the case was transferred to the Old Bailey to prevent the trial of the nineteen defendants being held in Suffolk, where it was more likely to be exploited by the B.U.F. as an anti-tithe propaganda platform.

Ultimately, of course, the implementation of Defence Regulation (DR) 18B (1A) in mid-1940 destroyed the regional B.U.F.. The authorities, confronted with the Nazis' rapid military advance, a press-fed fifth column panic, the possibility that Mosley might become a British 'Quisling' and the implications of the Tyler Kent affair, perceived British fascists to be a threat to national security. DR 18B (1A) was used to detain hundreds of B.U.F. members between May and July 1940. In the process, a number of Blackshirt officials and activists from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were interned, and the organisational base of the regional movement was effectively dismantled. Under the terms of DR 18B (AA), the government banned the B.U.F. on 10 July 1940.

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