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Robert  
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THE FASCIST  
MOVEMENT  
IN BRITAIN

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# Contents

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## 7. British Fascist Ideology

The publication of *The Greater Britain* marked the founding of the B.U.F. In order to understand how and on what terms the Fascists expected to gain power a number of considerations must be taken into account. First, the B.U.F. was founded to propagate a programme for economic and political reform. This was a departure from Fascist practice in that Continental movements came to power with only a series of projected goals. It was, however, in keeping with the British practice of requiring parties to state what they intended to do with political power, when and if achieved. A fundamental problem for the B.U.F. was how to make its programme palatable to a public which seemed to possess a high regard for the established institutions and traditions, or for the myths that sustained them, and yet whose commitment was not so fanatic as to foster a willingness to come out in the streets to defend them against real or supposed threats. Although the B.U.F. was articulating some genuine grievances, it was also handicapped by the stigma of Mosley's previous failure and by the exotic nature of the movement. B.U.F. policy was characterized by its duality. Mussolini had already capitalized on an ideological duality, engaging in myth-making to capture the loyalties of a mob and later relying on a more definite programme to secure the allegiance of sophisticated interests.<sup>1</sup> *The Greater Britain* was written for a politically educated minority, while particular themes in the movement's propaganda were emphasized in order to attract

support from possible sources of discontent. The most important were its appeals to youth, nationalism, anti-Communism, anti-Semitism and its attacks on the political *élites*.

Policy was often manipulated with a callous disregard for principles so that at least one of the themes, anti-Semitism, gained ascendancy over the B.U.F.'s proposals for reform. Policy was hinged to the likelihood of an impending economic crisis and attempts were made to locate the causes and to prescribe its resolution. As the probability of an economic crisis – and hence political power – grew remote, the possibility of an international crisis was stressed. At the same time, the reliance on explanations that allocated responsibility to individuals and groups increased in order to sustain the movement and rationalize its existence. Where the attacks on the 'old gang', the Communists and the Jews had once been seen as means to an end, they became ends in themselves.

Despite the ascendancy of Mosley's Fascist appeals, there were definable policy positions which were dominant at different stages in the development of the B.U.F. This was in response to the changes in the movement's political fortunes and to the dictates of a changing economic and political climate. If a particular scheme found little public support, which was true for all B.U.F. schemes, it was de-emphasized and another scheme was given prominence. This was justified on the grounds that Fascism was a dynamic movement adaptable to rapidly changing circumstances. B.U.F. policy can thus be divided into three loosely defined phases which overlapped in time. During the first phase, from the formation of the movement until the autumn of 1934, Mosley's policy was constructive in nature. The substance of the programme was at least as important as its propaganda. Despite the duality in B.U.F. policy, Mosley's analysis of Britain's economic difficulties was serious in its intentions. His solution was derived from his earlier Labour Party and New Party pronouncements and from Italian Fascism. The improvement in the economic situation and the loss of respectability caused by the B.U.F.'s own tactics were responsible for a change in direction.

During the second phase, political anti-Semitism with its theories of persecution and conspiracy characterized B.U.F. policy. Proposals for the corporate state and parliamentary reform were pushed into the background. Political anti-Semitism was more a weapon than a belief, although Mosley had become more a demagogue than a reformer. The Blackshirts maintained that the Jews were racially inferior, but they did not attempt to demonstrate it on biological grounds. Mosley often stated that he was against the Jews not for what they were, but for what they did.

From 1937 until June 1940, foreign policy was the most important consideration for the B.U.F. The idea of the corporate state was not discarded, however, and the Jews remained the chief Fascist enemy. The problem for the Blackshirts was to reconcile their support for Fascism abroad, while continuing to propagate an extreme form of nationalism. This led to a policy of selective pacifism which had three components: nationalism; opposition to war against a Fascist power, but not against Russia; rearmament and a willingness to fight if British interests were attacked, from whatever quarter. By this time, however, the Mosley movement was spent as a political force.

In tracing the changes in B.U.F. policy and the development of these themes, primary consideration must be given to Mosley's *The Greater Britain, Fascism, and Tomorrow We Live*, as he considered them his most important writings.<sup>3</sup> *The Greater Britain* was written in 1932 and revised two years later. *Fascism* was written during the second period and *Tomorrow We Live* at the end of it. Mosley's *The World Alternative* and *The British Peace* stated his position prior to the Second World War. The works of other Fascist writers and pamphleteers are referred to when appropriate.

## DOCTRINE

The *raison d'être* of the British Fascist movement was the crisis. According to the Blackshirts, the Government and the 'old gang' were bound to collapse. In the competition for power, the

Fascists and the Communists would clash. The Fascists would come to power and resolve the crisis. The only alternative was to give the Fascists power so that they could avert the crisis.

The duality in B.U.F. policy was reflected at the outset in its attempt to explain the causes of the crisis. Although Mosley tried initially to present a case, it was too involved for the unemployed, while those who feared Communism were not necessarily concerned with alternatives. Hence the Blackshirts interpreted their crisis at two levels.

First, Mosley attempted a serious economic analysis in *The Greater Britain* which, in fact, was marked by generalities and differed little from his earlier Labour Party and New Party pronouncements, despite the Fascist vocabulary. Mosley maintained that the faulty distribution of goods was at the root of Britain's economic troubles and that an excessive percentage of its energies and resources was expended on the production of goods for shrinking foreign markets to the detriment of the home market, which was still in need of development. This development would contribute to a more realistic solution to the unemployment problem. Parliamentary democracy was criticized for being outdated and inadequate. The structure of Parliament diverted attention from important issues to minor points which were endlessly debated. The M.P. was held to be too incompetent and ignorant to meet his responsibilities as a legislator. Finally, in addition to economic and political modernization, the moral social fibre of the nation was seen to be in need of regeneration.

The Fascists' second approach to Britain's economic difficulties and political shortcomings made no pretence to serious analysis. Instead blame was assigned to individuals and groups rather than to the policies, institutions and processes. The politics of conspiracy and persecution appealed for support not only to extremists but to those whose discontent was aggravated at a time of crisis. And, by placing the ultimate source of conspiracy outside Britain, prospective adherents were relieved of responsibility and the Blackshirts could hope to establish their 'British' credentials.

According to the Fascists, a certain group or groups, 'the old gangs', were undermining the interests of Great Britain for their own benefit or for the benefit of others. If the old gangs were today's enemy, they were preparing the way for tomorrow's Communism. Britain was not only being betrayed, but the Blackshirts, as the defenders of the national interest, were being persecuted. At its roots was a conspiracy which was at first described as International Finance, and later, as International Finance controlled by the Jews. The Jews also ruled Bolshevik Russia in the interests of a 'world conspiracy'. At times, the enemies of Fascism made strange bedfellows. *Black-shirt* quite early gave expression to this mentality, which should have served as a warning to many. It blamed pacifists, liberals, Jews, Communists, internationalists, capitalists, financiers, the British Press, unscrupulous propagandists, nasty hypocritical swine with axes to grind, for having supposedly conspired to conduct a war against Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The old gang was the political *élite* which, regardless of pronouncements and various party labels, carried out the same policies when elected.<sup>4</sup> This was essentially a 'policy of subservience to sectional interests and of national lethargy'.<sup>5</sup> The muddle-headedness of the old gangs had paved the way for Communist chaos. In order to resist change, the Tory old gang appealed to loyalty and patriotism, but Mosley charged that this was the reverse of true patriotism at such a time of crisis.<sup>6</sup> Where initially this may have been a genuine appeal to youth, it developed into a charge of conspiracy. One writer maintained that the Conservative Party was more dangerous than the Communist Party, because it was more insidiously international. It was described as the 'British Branch of the Financial International', which was controlled from Wall Street.<sup>7</sup> Later, it was claimed that International Finance was controlled by or was working in combination with the Jews and operating inside the Conservative Party.<sup>8</sup>

The Labour Party old gang did not profit from the past, according to Mosley. Moreover, it was aggravating its previous mistakes by stressing more committees, delegations, and talk-

Its leaders were mediocre middle-class intellectuals who bowed to the trade-union bosses.<sup>9</sup> In 1936 the Labour Party was fully identified with International Socialism, and International Socialism served only the interests of International Finance.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, if the Finance working with and within the Conservative Party was Jewish, so was the Finance behind the Labour Party and International Socialism.<sup>11</sup>

The B.U.F.'s attacks on Communism also developed into diatribes against an alleged Jewish conspiracy. In *The Greater Britain*, Mosley declared Fascism to be the opponent of Communism which pursued 'class warfare to the destruction of all science, skill, and managerial ability'.<sup>12</sup> Then, as a part of the B.U.F.'s anti-Semitic attacks, Russia was described as a state controlled by the Jews. In one policy statement, it was asserted that the Jews knew that capitalism was breaking down, and that they were anxious to be prominent in whatever system took its place.<sup>13</sup> One of Mosley's most prominent supporters, Major-General J. F. C. Fuller, wrote of this supposed vast conspiracy:

Because he [Mosley] struck at the Empire of Money, its satraps, conservative, liberal, labour and communist shoulder to shoulder formed rank against him; which goes far to show their common origin and their common spirit. As was only natural, behind this united front there stood the Jew, the originator of the usury system, which has as its object, the economic enslavement not only of individuals but of nations.<sup>14</sup>

The Fascist instrument for obtaining power was the 'movement' and it would resolve the crisis by 'action' through which the corporate state would be instituted.\* The concept of a

\* 'Action' was one of the most frequently-used B.U.F. slogans. Mosley, in retrospect, admitted that one of his great mistakes was that he had sacrificed too much to the desire for action. He maintained that it was justifiable in certain instances – such as the need for housing and the resolution of the unemployment problem. However, he thought that action could become a vice, especially if pursued at all costs, for it might treat a minority unfairly: 'You can't have action by violating human decencies.' Mosley concluded that he had been young and in too much of a hurry. *Interview*, 11 September 1959; see also *My Life* (1968), p. 293.

movement was to distinguish the B.U.F. from the old gang and the political parties since it implied an organization above parties and politics but pragmatic enough to use constitutional means, when and if necessary. At first, when Mosley was looking to Italy for inspiration, Fascism, according to Blackshirt propagandists, was the name by which the Modern Movement became known to the world. Hence, Mosley named his movement the British Union of Fascists. Mosley then looked to Germany, as well as to Italy, and the name was changed to the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists. He considered Fascism and National Socialism to be the same movement, explaining that they found different expression in different countries in accordance with national and racial characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Mosley reversed the emphasis at the stage when his followers had been deprived of their uniform and when his movement was little more than an anti-Semitic band. The Modern Movement now manifested itself in terms of National Socialism and Mosley expressed its creed: 'If you love our country you are National; if you love our people you are Socialist.'<sup>16</sup> He pressed the abbreviation, British Union, not only because of this change in emphasis, but also in the hope of making his doctrine more palatable to the British public.

Mosley's movement, his 'instrument of steel', was based on authoritarianism. In the first edition of *The Greater Britain*, he wrote:

Its leadership may be individual or preferably in the case of the British character, a team with clearly allocated functions and responsibility. In either case the only effective instrument of revolutionary change is absolute authority.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1934 edition the passage on leadership was significantly altered:

Leadership in Fascism may be an individual or a team, but undoubtedly single leadership in practice proves the more effective instrument. The leader must be prepared to shoulder absolute responsibility for the functions clearly allocated to him.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps no other passages revealed so clearly the development

of Mosley's character. Once the Fascists achieved power, the movement would be absorbed by the state. Mosley wrote:

. . . you will need no more the strange and disturbing men who, in days of struggle and of danger, and in nights of darkness and of labour have forged the instrument of steel by which the world shall pass to higher things.<sup>19</sup>

The symbols of the Fascist movement were the emblem, the salute, and the uniform. The original emblem of the B.U.F. was the fascis. Its use was justified on the grounds that the tradition of civilization and progress was derived from Rome and that the British Empire had become the chief custodian of that tradition.<sup>20</sup> Later it was maintained that the fascis had been used in Great Britain for two thousand years, and that it was a fitting symbol for the Empire that had succeeded and surpassed the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup>

Although the use of the fascis was never entirely discarded, its importance was gradually superseded by the flash and circle, which was irreverently referred to by the anti-Fascists as the 'flash in the pan'. Its use coincided with the Abyssinian crisis and with the B.U.F.'s peace campaign. The emblem represented the flash of action in the circle of unity. Although the B.U.F. maintained that the symbol belonged exclusively to British Fascism, it was similar to the Nazi emblem with the white flash substituted for the black swastika.

Two official salutes were sanctioned by the B.U.F. The first was a half-arm salute to be used by Blackshirts in uniform, while the full-arm salute was to be used in greeting royalty, the Leader, and the National Regimental and Fascist colours and during the performance of the last line of the National Anthem.<sup>22</sup> According to Mosley, the salute was neither Italian nor German, although the Germans had used it. He claimed that it was the oldest salute of 'European civilization and that it has been used in Britain many centuries before the founding of a Fascist party in Italy'.<sup>23</sup>

The black shirt was the symbol of Fascism. It was worn as an expression of faith and its colour was supposed to represent

the iron determination of Fascism in the fight against 'red anarchy'.<sup>24</sup> It was also asserted that the uniform broke down class barriers within the movement and enabled it to act as a disciplined body especially in times of stress.<sup>25</sup>

In the pictorial records of B.U.F. demonstrations the uniforms appear unimpressive. The Fascists on parade were not fully outfitted. The first divisions wore black shirts, belt and matching trousers. They were followed by Fascists in black shirts and trousers that did not match. The women wore black shirts and matching or unmatching skirts. In 1936, the distinction became more obvious. The B.U.F. adopted a full military uniform with coat, peaked cap, belt and buckle and jack-boots. But the number who actually wore this outfit was small. This uniform was virtually restricted to the National Headquarters officers and stewards.

The B.U.F. also developed its own '*kitsch kultur*'. Buckles, tie-pins, brooches, plaques, cuff-links, rings and arm-bands were marketed. Photographs, post-cards, song sheets, car stickers and slogans were printed. 'Greater Britain' cigarettes, 'a perfect blend of American and home-grown tobacco', were on sale. On Decca Records, one could listen to the Leader's speeches, 'Comrades in Struggle' and 'British Union'. One could sing 'British Awake' and 'The Marching Song' with the British Union Male Voice Choir and Orchestra. Finally, the uniforms, the flags, and the salutes were all part of the histrionics employed at the B.U.F. meetings, and especially at Mosley's demonstrations. Songs and chants were added. Mosley would appear, always a little late, and often announced by a fanfare of trumpets. He would march to the platform preceded by flags and flanked by stewards. Alone on the platform in his uniform, Mosley, the Leader, was British Fascism's most significant symbol.

The priority given to a paramilitary movement which forecast crisis, the provocative nature of its symbols and posturings and the tone of its propaganda suggested that the B.U.F. was prepared to take over the state by means of force. At no time, however, did the Blackshirts specifically state that they were

organized to do this, short of a crisis. In deference to British traditions, the political habits of the electorate and the actual social and economic conditions in Britain in the 1930s, this would have been an extraordinary admission.

Mosley sought to make the position clear at the outset. In the conclusions to *The Greater Britain* he argued that in the final economic crisis organized force alone prevailed, and that the struggle for the modern state in such circumstances was between Fascism and Communism. The normal instruments of state were deemed inadequate and those governments and parties that relied on them would fall to the forces of anarchy. If such a situation arose in Great Britain, the B.U.F. was prepared to meet the 'anarchy of Communism with the organized force of Fascism'.<sup>26</sup> Mosley went on to state that immediate action would avert the catastrophe, but that under the present set-up such action was unlikely. Only by the acceptance of Fascism would Great Britain avoid disaster.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the willingness to use violence to curb the disturbances that began to take place at B.U.F. meetings added weight to the accusations of the anti-Fascists. And in 1933 Mosley wrote:

We hope to secure our Fascist Revolution by peaceful and constitutional means. By one road or another we are determined that Fascism will come to Britain. . . .<sup>28</sup>

The opportunity to challenge the B.U.F. on this issue publicly was provided by Mosley when he brought a libel action against the Daily News Ltd, in which he was awarded £5,000 in damages. The case arose over a leading article in *The Star* about a public debate between Mosley and James Maxton in which it was alleged that Mosley had said 'that he and his Fascists would be ready to take over the government with the aid of machine-guns when the moment arrived'.<sup>29</sup> According to the short-hand notes of his secretary, which were produced in evidence, Mosley had stated that at a time of crisis, 'if and when he [the organized Communist] ever comes out, we will be there in the streets, with Fascist machine-guns to meet them'.

Mosley was subjected to a gruelling three-hour cross-examination in which he stressed that the Fascists would not use force to capture political office and that this was different from obtaining power after force had been used. The B.U.F. was ready to meet force against the state by the use of force. When asked what the B.U.F. would do in the event of a Communist Government which had the assent of the King, he reiterated that in no case would he use machine-guns against a constitutionally elected government in power on the invitation of the King.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the denials that the Blackshirts saw force as basic to their struggle and not as a last resort, offending pages were deleted from the revised editions of *The Greater Britain* and the following explanation substituted:

The British Union seeks power by the vote of the people alone as declared always in our Regulations. The pages cut out of this book have been omitted because they have been misrepresented by opponents who allege that we seek power by unconstitutional means. Such action is rendered necessary by the clear intention of the Government who passed the Public Order Act to 'frame-up' the British Union with any evidence they can distort for this purpose.<sup>31</sup>

The circumstances in which the controversy could be conclusively settled never arose, but the fact remained that the B.U.F. was organized on a paramilitary basis. It was therefore reasonable to infer that the Blackshirts were willing to resort to violence, if necessary, to gain power, even by constitutional means.

## THE CORPORATE STATE

The Blackshirt revolution was to be both radical and conservative. It was to be radical in that the Fascists advocated the corporate state, parliamentary reform and a 'new morality'. On the other hand, Mosley wrote that the Fascist revolution differed from 'Communist anarchy' in that Blackshirts aimed to accept and utilize the useful elements within the state and weave them

into the corporate state.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the B.U.F. slogan, 'We bring a saving revolution'.

The central feature of Mosley's constructive proposals was the corporate state. As used by the B.U.F., this was a broad concept which included not only the establishment of corporations but also many of the reforms suggested by Mosley in the Labour Party and the New Party. The corporate state was to be the machinery of central direction. It would set the limits within which individuals and interests would function. Within these limits all activities would be permitted and private enterprise and profit-making encouraged.

For the plans of the actual machinery of the proposed corporate state it is necessary to rely mainly on Alexander Raven Thomson's booklet, *The Coming Corporate State*. The booklet was an unofficial statement of policy, but it was the most ambitious attempt to work out the details of the corporate state. Moreover, Thomson, who was then Director of Policy, tried to work out these details in line with declared policy.\* The economic system was to be divided into twenty corporations, ranging from agriculture, iron and steel, textiles and public utilities to professional, domestic and pensioners' sectors. All twenty corporations would be represented in a National Corporation.<sup>33</sup> Each corporation would in turn be split into smaller groups to deal with particular industries. At the base, there would be district councils of employers and workers, local employers' federations and trade-union lodges.

The employers, workers, and consumers were to be equally represented in each corporation. No one group was to be outvoted by the other two. The employers in each industry would be obliged to become members of their particular employers' federation. Similarly, membership in the industry-wide trade unions was to be mandatory. Although both groups would elect their representatives to the corporation, political activities

\* In outline, it agreed with Mosley's proposals set out in *Tomorrow We Live* and those proposals credited to Mosley by Chesterton in his biography. Mosley in a later edition of *The Greater Britain* refers the readers to Raven Thomson's plan. For his reservations, however, see *My Life* (1968), pp. 332-4.

as such would be outlawed. The government, as representative of the nation, would nominate the consumers' representatives. The corporations were to be entrusted with the functions of planning, control and social welfare. Strikes and lock-outs would be forbidden. Instead, each corporation would regulate wages, hours and conditions of work. The employers' and workers' representatives would settle the question of prices, output and competition. The representatives of the consumers would be able to prevent any possible collusion between the employers and the workers. The corporation would plan production and the expansion or contraction of the industry. With the aid and advice of a National Investment Board, it would regulate investments, profits, interest and dividends. It would also be held responsible for welfare schemes, industrial insurance and pensions. A recreation programme modelled on the Italian Dopolavoro was envisaged.

The decisions of the corporations were to be binding and were to have the force of law. In the event of a dispute in the preparation of codes, the National Corporation could make suggestions, and failing that the disputes would go before a Labour Court for compulsory arbitration. Controversies within a single corporation and between corporations would be settled by the National Corporation. An industrial court would be set up to check unfair competition, and Labour was promised access to the courts as a substitute for the strike. As another gesture towards the workers, Raven Thomson included a 'Charter of Labour', dealing with working conditions and employee benefits.<sup>34</sup>

Although the corporate system was generally described in vague terms, if at all, attempts were made to apply the structure to problems that were peculiar to a particular industry. The retail and wholesale trades were a good example, for they were deemed vulnerable by the Blackshirts to Jew-baiting. Price-cutting in the grocery trade had precipitated anti-Semitic reactions in some quarters and this was exploited by the B.U.F. causing the Board of Deputies of British Jews to make representations to at least one grocers' association.<sup>35</sup>

A distributive corporation would be formed, which would protect and divide the market between the small shop-keepers and the cooperatives. All shops would be licensed to prevent cut-throat competition and every shop, with the exception of a strictly limited number of department stores and village shops, would be compelled to restrict its business to a particular line. The number of competitors in any line would be strictly controlled, and the places of business would be geographically distributed. The so-called 'alien multiple combines' would be liquidated and split into separate shops.<sup>36</sup> This was qualified in the *Fascist Quarterly*. British investors would receive compensation subject to Fascist review of past dividends earned at the shop-keepers' expense. Combines that were 'British' and did not sell foreign goods to the 'detriment' of home interests were to be dealt with less severely. However, steps would still be taken to prevent their further growth and to bring about their 'gradual' elimination. 'British' multiple shops that sold 'British' goods were to be allowed to remain open, but not to expand.<sup>37</sup> Other Fascist writers maintained that, in addition to the above functions, the distributive corporation would separate the retail, wholesale and manufacturing phases of trading and prevent any firm or combine from entering more than one of these fields. The corporation would limit excessive price discounts by law and would prohibit cooperatives from engaging in political activities. The cooperatives would also be split into smaller units and would only be permitted to trade with their own members.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the most significant clue to the role of the corporation was that stated by one Blackshirt propagandist who, after detailing most of the above functions, wrote that the corporation should be able only to modify the above rules, but that the Government should be able to transcend them.<sup>39</sup>

The foregoing doctrine provides some insight into how the Fascist thinkers reconciled Fascism and capitalism. Private property, enterprise and initiative would not be eliminated. Private property would be subjected to the widest 'possible' distribution.<sup>40</sup> The ownership of land would be a public trust with no reward without service. This principle also applied to the large

land-owner, in contradiction to the principle of 'widest possible distribution'. His land would be expropriated only for abuse of the public trust.<sup>41</sup> 'Services' and 'abuses' would be decided by the state. 'Thus,' Mosley wrote, 'most ownership of urban land will pass to the State, as that category of landlord is a great deal less likely than the leader of the countryside to justify his hereditary wealth by public services.'<sup>42</sup> Private enterprise would be regulated and private initiative controlled. The economic structure would be radically altered, but the foundation and the system itself would be preserved. The corporate state would be superimposed upon capitalism, rather than substituted for it.<sup>43</sup>

According to Mosley, the function of the National Corporation was 'to plan, regulate and direct the whole national economy, under the guidance of the minister, who himself would be ultimately responsible to Parliament'.<sup>44</sup> According to Raven Thomson, the first task of the National Corporation was to solve the problem of over-production. Several powers were to be vested in this body. The first was judicial in that the National Corporation would settle disputes that arose within and between the corporations. The second was the power of 'industrial planning on a national scale' which seemed to be defined as the adjustment of 'consumption to production by its control over wage rates throughout the industrial field'. In addition, the National Corporation was to exercise control over the Investment Board, a Foreign Trade Board and other corporate institutions. Third, 'all broad economic issues' would come before this body, but it would only sit as an advisory council to the Minister of Corporations, who would act as Speaker and control the deliberations of the assembly.<sup>45</sup>

The delegates to the National Corporation were to be elected on the same principle as in the individual corporations. Each corporation was to nominate equal numbers of employers and workers, although the number of representatives would be weighted in accordance with 'the importance of the industry to the national welfare'. It was not clear how this was to be done or on what basis. Nor was the position of the consumer representatives made clear. Finally, the subsidiary role of the National

Corporation was apparent in the proposal that it would be represented with other bodies and groups in the upper chamber that would replace the House of Lords.

Under Raven Thomson's plan, the National Corporation was to have a number of administrative organs. The Foreign Trade Board would regulate foreign trade under a policy of economic nationalism. The long-term objective would be to raise the standard of living in Great Britain and the Empire and hence build up adequate markets without relying on foreign trade. Until self-sufficiency could be reached, however, it would be necessary to import some raw materials and foodstuffs. Britain would buy only from those who would buy from Britain which would provide a balance of trade based not upon maximal but on minimal imports. This was in keeping with the idea of 'insulation' set forth by Mosley before he became a Fascist.<sup>46</sup>

An Investment Board would be created to control and regulate capital. Foreign investments without special sanction would be prohibited. The Investment Board would further regulate and control the responsibility for the planned development of Empire resources. Government officials, representatives of banking, insurance, the Stock Exchange and the Patents Office would sit on the Board. The role of the Investment Board, as explained by Raven Thomson, was more limited than that proposed in either *A National Policy* or *The Greater Britain*.<sup>47</sup>

Closely related to the problem of investment was that of finance, about which Fascist writers went on at great length because of its relevance to their persecution-conspiracy theories and because of Mosley's personal interests in the problems. Mosley, in *The Greater Britain*, discussed the need for financial control, but refrained from committing the B.U.F. to a financial corporation until his later works. The Bank of England, the joint stock banks and finance houses would be subject to the corporation. The export of capital and credit would be forbidden in contrast to proposals by Raven Thomson for licensing. Needless to say, the alien financier Jew would be deported.<sup>48</sup>

In order to implement these proposals an authoritarian political structure was deemed essential. Like the corporate state it

would be superimposed upon the existing system, not substituted for it. The Crown, Parliament and the Government would be retained as institutions, but their structure would be altered, and the functions of the latter two would be radically revised so that only a hollow shell of the Constitution would remain. This conception of the political system placed the B.U.F. on the defensive, for the intention of establishing a dictatorship had to be denied. In *The Greater Britain*, Mosley wrote that Fascism as understood by the B.U.F. was not a creed of personal dictatorship as on the Continent, nor was it a creed of government tyranny.<sup>49</sup> The people, through Parliament, would retain the right to dismiss and change the government of the day. Mosley argued that since this power was retained, dictatorship was absurd.<sup>50</sup>

Yet with that remarkable duality that characterized Black-shirt policy, the B.U.F. shortly thereafter published a pamphlet by William Joyce, who asserted the need for a Fascist dictatorship in the Continental manner. In answer to the question of who shall rule, Joyce employed the circular justification of Italian Fascism:

The men who make Britain Fascist are the men whom all Britain cannot rule; and hence they must rule all Britain. Strength is the test of effective dictatorship and victory is the test of strength.<sup>51</sup>

Neither Joyce's statement, Mussolini's tactics in Italy nor the rise of Hitler convinced the anti-Fascists of the possible benevolence of a Blackshirt dictatorship, despite Mosley's reassurances. Denials were obviously insufficient, and Mosley attempted to set out a formula for a Fascist dictatorship based on the principles of 'modern dictatorship' and 'leadership'. Mosley claimed that, under modern conditions, dictators were not dictators, but leaders. The difference was that leaders had popular support. Hitler was described as the 'leader of enthusiastic and determined masses of men and women bound together by a voluntary discipline to secure the regeneration of their country'.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, leadership was seen as the substitute of individual responsibility for the collective responsibility of a do-nothing committee system.<sup>53</sup>

Under the corporate state, as described by Mosley in *The Greater Britain*, the government must have power to legislate by Order, subject to the power of Parliament to dismiss it by a vote of censure.<sup>54</sup> In effect, this differed little from the declaration in *A National Policy*. Mosley, however, made no statement as to whether Parliament would have the right to debate the general principles or policies, or the right to interrogate ministers as had been previously suggested. The House of Lords would be superseded by the National Corporation as a Parliament of Industry. The majority of the members of this Parliament were to be elected on an occupational basis. The remainder would be elected by the electorate in general, and they would represent the national interest.<sup>55</sup>

The position of Parliament was altered more radically by Mosley in the second edition of the B.U.F. bible. Under Fascism, the first Parliament would be called together at regular intervals to review the work of the government. At the end of that Parliament, an election would be held on an occupational franchise. Thereafter, the life of the Parliament would be dependent on a direct vote of the people held at regular intervals, which would not exceed the lifetime of a 'present' Parliament. The elector would have two votes: a yes-or-no judgement on the government; and a separate occupational franchise. Parliament would lose its power to dismiss the government by a vote of censure, and would be limited to assisting the government with 'technical and constructive criticism'. In the event of a government defeat by a vote of the electorate, the Monarch would send for new ministers, in whom he believed the nation would show confidence in a second vote. However, these too would presumably be Fascists since opposition parties would not be tolerated after the second general election.<sup>56</sup> When questioned at the Oxford University Fascist Association, whether after ten years he would allow the nation to change its mind, Mosley replied that no Fascist nation ever changed its mind.<sup>57</sup>

The plan to elect members to represent the national interests was also dropped.<sup>58</sup> Members of Parliament would have a new role. In between sittings they would be employed as executive

officers in their local constituencies. They would be assisted by locally elected councils from which officers would be selected to head the departments in local government. The department heads would be responsible to the local M.P. who, in turn, would be responsible to the National Government. In this way, the leadership principle would replace the committee system. The fact that M.P.s would be elected on an occupational basis, rather than for a geographically defined constituency, never bothered Mosley. Raven Thomson and Major-General Fuller sought to correct this oversight. They argued that the corporations would assume the functions of local government bodies, and that the M.P. could carry out the executive work of his corporation.<sup>59</sup>

The National Corporation was no longer considered a suitable replacement for the House of Lords. Under the B.U.F.'s new scheme, it would be replaced by a second chamber of specialists and men of general knowledge. These would include representatives of the Dominions and Colonies, religious, educational, and military leaders, civil servants, foreign affairs experts, men who had rendered 'conspicuous service' to the state and representatives of a National Council of Corporations.<sup>60</sup>

It is necessary to turn to *The Coming Corporate State* to discover the nature of the Executive. According to Raven Thomson, Government office would be divorced from parliamentary representation, although Government ministers would be 'ex officio' members of both houses. Cabinet reform was based on Mosley's Labour Party and New Party proposals. An inner cabinet invested with supreme power would be formed with the responsibility of planning national policy. It would include the Prime Minister (Leader) and three or four Ministers without portfolio. In addition, the existing ministries would be consolidated into eight or so ministries. It was not clear whether they were to meet as a body or not, but the 'Administrative Ministers' would be called into the Executive Cabinet from time to time for consultation.<sup>61</sup>

## THE JEWISH CONSPIRACY\*

Mosley denied that he was ever an anti-Semite by offering his own definition of anti-Semitism. According to Mosley, an anti-Semite was a man who was opposed to all Jews because they were Jews '... I have never been against any man simply because he is a Jew'.<sup>62</sup> He repeated that the B.U.F. did not attack Jews because of their race or religion, but because of what they did.<sup>63</sup> The interpretation of 'what they did' was, of course, Mosley's own. Moreover, the Jews were not criticized because of their alleged acts, but because these acts were supposedly committed by them because of their Jewishness. In other words, Jewish landlords were not denounced as landlords, or even as Jewish landlords, but for being Jewish. In an interview given to *The Catholic Herald*, Mosley was alleged to have stated that it was impossible to differentiate between kinds of Jews, even those who were converted to the Catholic Church.<sup>64</sup>

According to John Strachey, Mosley's 'anti-Semitism was 100 per cent insincere'. He reasoned that Mosley used it to hold the allegiance of his followers and as the result of the influence of National Socialism.<sup>65</sup> Lady Cynthia Mosley's sister, Baroness Ravensdale, maintained that Mosley argued that Fascism would not survive without a scapegoat such as Jewry.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, the B.U.F. never really formulated an elaborate racial theory, although political racialism as distinct from biological racialism was exploited. Mosley had to construct a rationale to account for the failure of his movement, and at the same time to justify its continued existence and hold the allegiance of his followers. The Jews were a tangible object for projection and an outlet for frustration. Unlike the 'old gang' and the 'Communists', they could be located geographically, for many had settled together in particular sectors of urban areas. As far as the prejudiced and

\* This section appeared in a different form as an unsigned article by the author, 'Mosley's Anti-Semitism, 1933-1939', *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, Nos. 3-4 (1959), pp. 33, 41; for Mosley's recent statement of his position, see *My Life* (1968), pp. 336-43. The belief in a world conspiracy is seen as complete nonsense, p. 342.

the resentful were concerned, the Jews were also physically identifiable. And since they were conspicuous in some trades and professions, if only as a minority, malcontents whether working or middle class could focus their aggressions on them.

Whatever the motivation, the B.U.F. concentrated much abuse on the Jews, and political anti-Semitism dominated the activities, as well as the policy of the B.U.F., after 1934. For example, the Blackshirts fought the L.C.C. elections of 1937 largely on anti-Semitism, Mosley having declared, 'East London will have to choose between us and the parties of Jewry. . . .'<sup>67</sup> Although the Communists and the Blackshirts continued to clash in the streets, there was no identifiable stronghold of Communism into which the Blackshirts could march and shout provocative slogans, intimidate the population or even destroy property. This was what happened in some areas of East London where a large number of Jews lived.

Theories of conspiracy and persecution were central to the propagation of political anti-Semitism. The politics of persecution was based on the propositions that Jewry was organized in various ways and that it was not only unduly influencing Great Britain and the world, but persecuting the Fascists. The Fascists, as the persecuted and as the defenders of the traditions and character of the British, must protect themselves from organized Jewry, and hence must prosecute the Jews. Finally, this persecution identified the Fascists with their audiences and also projected an image of the movement as less exotic than its opponents. This is well illustrated by the following passage:

When we have unmasked the real power behind Conservatism and Socialism, and see the corrupt influences which really govern, we are not surprised that the press they control, the cinema industry which they own body and soul, and the whole force of their finance and power is loosed upon us, when for the first time in the history of the nation a patriotic movement challenges the great Jewish interest of International Finance.<sup>68</sup>

Mosley launched his anti-Jewish campaign at the Albert Hall on 28 October 1934. His anti-Semitic outbursts, however, predated this meeting at a time when the B.U.F. considered it

necessary to issue pronouncements that it was not anti-Semitic, and private orders that Jew-baiting would not be tolerated. In fact, anti-Semitism was tolerated as Mosley himself engaged in it, and since the B.U.F. was an authoritarian movement such utterances, regardless of their origin, were ultimately his responsibility.\*

The official line during the first phase was to deny the existence of a Jewish problem. Yet on the occasion of the first indoor meeting and Fascist parade in London, Mosley was reported to have said with reference to his questioners that, 'They are all from Jerusalem; they don't know any better.'<sup>69</sup> Following the meeting the Blackshirts marched to the Cenotaph where the police ordered them to disband following a shout, 'Down with Gandhi and to hell with the Jews.'<sup>70</sup> Early in December 1932, barely two months after the founding of the B.U.F., Mosley issued an order barring anti-Semitic activities and asserting the existence of a British race.<sup>71</sup>

On 1 April 1933, the entire front page of the fourth issue of the *Blackshirt* was devoted to an unsigned article on 'Fascism and the Jew'. The 'Jewish Question' was labelled irrelevant and the writer regretted, although later justified, the early Nazi attacks on the Jews. Meanwhile, Mosley, visiting Mussolini in the same month, went so far as to declare that British Fascism was in no way anti-Jewish, adding 'that Hitler had made his greatest mistake in his attitude towards the Jews'.<sup>72</sup> On his return to England, he announced that, although he disapproved of Jew-baiting, he would reserve judgement on Hitler's policy.<sup>73</sup>

From April until the autumn of 1933, the *Blackshirt* repeatedly assured its readers that the B.U.F. was in no way anti-Jewish.<sup>74</sup> Dr Robert Forgan, then second-in-command, said that there was no ban on Jews joining the B.U.F., although he did not say whether any Jews were actually members.<sup>75</sup> In an elaborate declaration of religious and racial tolerance published in *The Jewish Economic Forum* and in a Press interview – both in July –

\* Mosley records the difficulty in exercising effective control and argues that the persistent anti-Semites were dismissed. Yet Joyce and Beckett, to name only two, persisted until 1937. See *My Life* (1968), p. 342.

Mosley claimed that racial and religious persecution were alien to the British character, and hence alien to British Fascism.<sup>76</sup> Articles tinged with anti-Semitism, however, began to creep into the Fascist Press. In September 1933, William Joyce, writing as 'Lucifer', drew a distinction between good Jews and bad Jews, and good-money Jews and bad-money Jews. He went on to claim that the 'low type of foreign Jew together with other aliens who are debasing the life of the nation will be run out of the country in double-quick time under Fascism'. The better type of Jew, according to this writer, who had become 'thoroughly British in outlook' would be glad to see him go.<sup>77</sup> Mosley put forth the same argument in Manchester on 16 October, and went on to claim that the Jews and aliens were not only debasing British life, but were attempting to dominate it in the interests of other countries. They used the 'weapons of the ghetto', daggers and razors.<sup>78</sup> There were other warnings. Mosley wrote that Fascism alone could deal with the alien menace, for Fascism alone put 'Britain First'. Aliens competing for British jobs would be debarred from the country, and those who abused British hospitality would be deported. Finally, Fascism would deal with 'The Great Alien Financier of the City of London'.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, *Blackshirt* had printed various articles showing Germany and Italy, Hitler and Mussolini, in a favourable light.<sup>80</sup> In November 1933, one year before Mosley's official 'declaration of war' against the Jews, the latter were blamed for the mounting criticism against Germany. The *Blackshirt* on 4 November headlined an unsigned front-page article, 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?'. The author declared: 'We state deliberately that Jews are striving to involve Britain in war.' He continued: 'We do not fight Jews on racial or religious grounds. We oppose them because they have become an organized interest within the state pursuing a policy which threatens British lives and homes.' Mosley repeated the argument at a meeting in Ealing Town Hall that same week.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly thereafter, in the first issue of the *Fascist Week*, the Jews were attacked for taking over university posts. The Black-

shirts claimed that they did not object to them as Jews, but as unwanted aliens who had left Germany because they were extremists.<sup>82</sup> The criticism continued for another week and was then dropped as suddenly as it had been begun. Most likely, the attack was halted pending the negotiations which were under way with Lord Rothermere; and during the first four months of the Mosley-Rothermere alliance there was a moratorium on Blackshirt Jew-baiting.

In the spring of 1934 Mosley resumed his campaign. At a meeting in Liverpool, he admitted that the B.U.F. no longer, if ever, allowed Jews to join the movement, and claimed persecution at the hands of 'certain Jewish interests'.<sup>83</sup> He gained the approval of Julius Streicher, the Nazi Jew-baiter. After Streicher's paper, *Der Stürmer*, had accused the B.U.F. of being 'a Jewish catchup movement', the editor explicitly retracted.<sup>84</sup> Streicher later stated that he had obtained information about the B.U.F., 'from a person I sent to the spot', and went on to state: 'The fact that the Mosley movement has positively defined its attitude toward the Jewish problem suggests that Mosley has now realized that the tactical reserve hitherto observed by him in this question is no longer expedient.'<sup>85</sup> By the autumn of 1934 *Der Stürmer* was calling Mosley 'a great speaker, an intrepid fighter and especially a fine diplomat'.<sup>86</sup>

The notoriety gained as a result of the B.U.F. meeting at Olympia in June ushered in a new stage in B.U.F. policy. The sometimes brutal methods employed by the Blackshirt stewards in combating the organized interruptions had alienated many of Fascism's more responsible and influential adherents. The B.U.F. received a further set-back when, a month later, Lord Rothermere withdrew his support, allegedly over the issue of anti-Semitism. Mosley now attacked the Jews more vehemently.

In Sheffield, towards the end of June 1934, Mosley announced that it was not the Fascists who had started the row. A few weeks later, he declared that 'behind the Communist and Socialist mob is the alien Jewish financier supplying the palm-oil to make them yell'.<sup>87</sup> More anti-Jewish outbursts occurred at a Fascist meeting in Manchester. And then, Mosley, at the

Albert Hall, on 28 October, 'accepted the challenge of organized Jewry'. In his declaration, he utilized the conspiracy and persecution theories. He spoke about the power of organized Jewry in Great Britain, and how it was mobilized against Fascism. Mosley claimed that they were not attacking the Jews on racial or religious lines, but only because the Jews were fighting against them and Great Britain. The Jews had assailed Fascism in three ways: they had physically assaulted the Blackshirts; Fascists had been victimized by their employers; and the 'organized power of Jewry as a racial interest' was trying to drag Britain into war.<sup>88</sup> At Leicester, the following April, he announced a new crusade:

For the first time I openly and publicly challenge the Jewish interest in this country commanding commerce, commanding the press, commanding the cinema, dominating the City of London, killing industry with the sweatshops. These great interests are not intimidating, and will not intimidate the Fascist movement of the modern age.<sup>89</sup>

This speech considerably impressed Streicher, who congratulated Mosley in a telegram. The British Fascist Leader replied:

... I greatly esteem your message in the midst of our hard struggle. The forces of Jewish corruption must be overcome in all great countries before the future of Europe can be made secure in justice and peace. Our struggle is hard but our victory is certain.<sup>90</sup>

Three methods were vital to the politics of conspiracy and persecution. The first was political racialism – the Jews as a racial interest. In Mosley's policy statement, *Fascism*, the Jews were described as foreigners, and blamed for almost all Britain's economic troubles. Mosley also stated that it would be bad for the Empire to stigmatize by law the other races in it as inferior or outcast. But British Fascism stood for British racial purity, and Mosley claimed that certain racial mixtures were bad, although he did not explain which were bad or why. If legislation was necessary to preserve the race, Fascism would not hesitate to introduce it.<sup>91</sup> This was never developed into any-

thing that could properly be termed a racial theory, but new grounds had been found on which to attack the Jews.<sup>92</sup>

A second Fascist method attempted to demonstrate Jewish control of a particular industry or sector of public life. The Press, for example, was frequently cited, and one result of this was an expensive libel suit.<sup>93</sup> The Press was a particularly sensitive issue as, for the most part, it either attacked or ignored the Blackshirts. It was, therefore, not surprising to find that the B.U.F. blamed the defection of Lord Rothermere, in the summer of 1934, on the pressure exerted by Jewish advertisers. The usual argument was that the national Press was Jewish-owned and largely staffed by Jews. Where the Press was not owned by Jews, it was supposedly controlled by Jewish revenue.<sup>94</sup> A third method was that of derogatory or provocative reference to the Jew often accompanied by physical intimidation and violence. Attacks on the 'strong', 'ruthless' Jew were combined with attacks on the 'weak' Jew in the streets. It was a common practice for the Fascists to march through East London chanting, 'The Yids, the Yids, we gotta get rid of the Yids'.

As the Second World War approached, B.U.F. policy drew nearer to Nazi policy and the anti-Semitic campaign was intensified. A. K. Chesterton quoted a speech of Mosley's which gave the impression that the primary and sole purpose of the B.U.F. was to 'break for ever in Britain the power of the Jew'.<sup>95</sup> One speaker was alleged to have said that 'I am a disciple of Julius Streicher'.<sup>96</sup> In July 1937, twenty Blackshirts visited Streicher. His welcoming speech was full of admiration and praise for Mosley and his movement. He told his guests that he considered them 'as brothers and comrades in the fight' against Jewry.<sup>97</sup> The spokesman for the Blackshirts was reported to have said: 'We rejoice that we have seen the world leader in the fight against Semitism. From his *Stürmer* we forge the best weapons for our fight in England.'<sup>98</sup> The visitors raised a three-fold 'Sieg Heil' for Hitler and Streicher and sang the 'Horst Wessel Lied' in English.<sup>99</sup>

It was not enough to attack the Jews. The B.U.F. had to find a solution to their problem. Raven Thomson stated, 'Our prob-

lem must be to get the Jewish genii back into the bottle of the ghetto in which our forefathers in their wisdom kept him, before his money power strangled the world.<sup>100</sup> Mosley's first plan was to stop immigration and deport those Jews guilty of 'anti-British' conduct. By this, he meant those Jews who had allegedly organized themselves as a nation within a nation, and set their interests before those of Great Britain. Jews who were considered innocent of those charges would be allowed to remain, but only as foreigners; they would not possess the full rights of British citizenship.<sup>101</sup>

The initial solution created a problem. If the Jews were really a sinister conspiracy, no other nation would accept those Jews whom Great Britain deported. Mosley eventually recognized this. In *Tomorrow We Live*, he suggested that a suitable territory would have to be found, where the Jews could escape the 'curse of no nationality', and have the opportunity of becoming a nation. Mosley maintained that, if the Jews had been sincere in their pronouncements, and did want to become something more than 'the parasite of humanity', they would accept the offer.<sup>102</sup> The new territory would evidently be found by a conference of European nations.

## NATIONALISM

Nationalism was also a major theme in B.U.F. policy. In *The Greater Britain*, Mosley wrote that the B.U.F. was 'essentially a national movement' and, if policy could be summarized in two words, they would be 'Britain First'.<sup>103</sup> This, however, was not intended to mean 'Britain alone'. At first, Commonwealth development and Anglo-Saxon cooperation were advocated and later the creation of European unity based on a Fascist power bloc. A problem for the B.U.F. was how to reconcile the contradiction between its nationalist appeals and the defence of Fascism on the Continent. When foreign policy became an important consideration, the B.U.F. adopted a position of selective pacifism which set the tone for the third phase much in the same way that the corporate state and anti-Semitism had

dominated the previous ones. The Blackshirts were not against war, but against war with the Fascist powers. Selective pacifism did not stand for disarmament for this surely would have conflicted with Britain First, which also stood for Britain First in defence. Mosley called for a vigorous defence policy when the B.U.F. was founded and later advocated an alliance of Fascist powers to include Britain.

Alfred Rosenberg, the philosopher of the Nazi movement, recognized the error of the duality of loyalties in B.U.F. policy. He considered it a psychological mistake for Mosley to have called his movement 'British Fascist'. He felt that the use of a label of foreign origin conflicted with the pride that England possessed for her own traditions. More important, he considered a Fascist party unsuitable for England. Rosenberg maintained that the B.U.F. had damaged its moral position during the Italian-Abyssinian war. The British Government, he argued, had taken a decidedly anti-Italian position and probably had the support of a majority of the British. Yet the Mosley movement, even though it stood for 'British interests exclusively', by supporting the Fascist cause could not help but be suspected of being in league with Mussolini. This discredited the B.U.F. from the very first.<sup>104</sup>

Blackshirt foreign policy developed along three lines during the first policy phase: a Fascist plan for peace; the promotion of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes; and a 'British First - Empire First' campaign. Mosley devoted four pages to foreign policy in the first edition of *The Greater Britain* but he had a good deal more to say in the second. The preservation of European peace was given a high priority. He argued that the existence of Fascist governments in all great countries and the resulting cooperation between them would be the surest guarantee of peace.<sup>105</sup>

Mosley wanted a reconstructed League of Nations so that the 'effective leadership' of the great powers could be established and not obstructed by the small powers. In this way European reconstruction could be undertaken. A Fascist Europe would be responsible for removing the causes of war which were deemed largely economic. The desire for universal disarmament

was expressed, but until that time a review of Britain's defence was urged, along with an immediate build-up of all the services. This, in fact, differed little from the policy set forth in *A National Policy*, minus the Fascist trappings and with the exception that here Mosley demanded special attention for the air force.<sup>106</sup> The emphasis on national security was directed towards the 'patriot' and the ex-serviceman to whom Fascist propaganda frequently made special appeals.<sup>107</sup> During the third policy phase, the B.U.F. attacked the Government for the ill-preparedness of the army and, at the same time, attacked Leslie Hore-Belisha, the Secretary of State for War, for trying to modernize it.

Meanwhile, B.U.F. publications continually paid homage to National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy. Both Hitler and Mussolini were portrayed as the messengers of peace. The *Blackshirt* claimed that jingoism in Germany and Britain had been restrained by the 'moderate' and 'pacific' utterances of Hitler.<sup>108</sup> The same paper asserted that after Hitler had remodelled Germany 'the so-called atrocities and harshness' would end. It insisted that three-quarters of the reports were not true and those that were true were the result of the uncontrolled exuberance of the revolution and could not be avoided, for the Reds had begun the violence.<sup>108</sup> Mussolini was described as 'the one skilled architect' of European peace for he had proved that Fascism stood for world peace, although it was not explained how.<sup>110</sup>

Emphasis was also placed on Empire development. Joyce defined Fascism as imperialism, while Mosley was anxious to reassure the public that the Fascists were interested in Empire development, not expansion.<sup>111</sup> According to the Blackshirts, the main Empire priority was economic unity which would be fostered by the corporate state.<sup>112</sup> A British Fascist government would be pledged to raise the standard of living for the native populations of the Colonies, but it would not permit self-government nor grant independence. The Blackshirts argued that, if independence was granted, the new nations would fall prey to foreign capitalist exploitation. Moreover, these newly

independent races would be unwilling or unable to develop their economic resources. Mosley wrote:

The earth can and will be developed by the races fitted for that task and chief among such races we are not afraid to number our own.<sup>113</sup>

The B.U.F. peace campaign began during the second policy phase. It was motivated by the aggressive actions on the part of the Continental Fascist powers. Nationalistic appeals were utilized to advocate non-intervention against the Fascist powers and to advocate cooperation with them in order to preserve peace. Blackshirt propaganda, which had formerly served to promote admiration for Italy and Germany, was now used to defend them. A campaign which was summed-up in the slogan, 'Mind Britain's Business', was announced in August 1935 as a result of the Italian-Abyssinian war.<sup>114</sup>

Mosley altered his earlier plan for the maintenance of world peace. The Empire was seen as a key factor, a United Fascist Europe was to replace the League, and his analysis of the problem was in terms of his conspiracy and persecution theories. First, the B.U.F. would protect Great Britain by removing the causes of war, which were described as the struggle for markets. This would be done by the establishment of a self-contained Empire. Mosley concluded, 'When other nations follow our example, there will be nothing left to fight for.'<sup>115</sup> Second, the maintenance of world peace was to be secured by the material and spiritual union of Europe led by a *bloc* of four Fascist powers - Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain. If, despite this, war occurred, Great Britain would be saved, for a Fascist Government would 'Mind Britain's Business'.<sup>116</sup> Third, the threats to peace were described as International Finance and International Communism with the Jews lurking in the shadows behind both. The current manifestation of International Jewry was Russia, but with a united Europe on the West and an allied Japan on the East, it would be kept in place.<sup>117</sup>

After Hitler consolidated his power, Mosley switched his primary allegiance from Italy to Germany. At the time, the B.U.F. did not abandon the Italian Fascist cause, but instead

there was a shift in emphasis most marked by political anti-Semitism.<sup>118</sup> The Blackshirts praised Hitler and championed Nazi Germany far more than they did Mussolini or Italy. The Blackshirts also emulated the Nazi uniforms, their songs and their salute. Mosley referred to the Germans as 'Our Blood Brothers',<sup>119</sup> and could 'say without any hesitation . . . from the bottom of my heart, "Heil Hitler"'.<sup>120</sup>

Much of the Blackshirt propaganda was devoted to condoning the aims of German foreign policy. B.U.F. speakers and pamphleteers argued that Germany should be allowed to expand in order to unite the German people. Their objective was motivated by a 'natural' and 'irresistible' force. It was not the Germans who were responsible for the state of Europe, but Financial Democracy and International Socialism. There was no conflict between Great Britain and Germany, for Britain's 'world mission' was Empire-centred, while Germany's was a European union of German people. The British Fascist movement tried to reassure the public that the Germans did not want a world-wide Empire, for that could lead to 'racial deterioration'.<sup>121</sup>

The Spanish Civil War, which overlapped the second and third B.U.F. policy phases, provided the movement with additional scope for propaganda. Mosley summarized the B.U.F. position in a speech in London, when he stated that, although his whole sympathy was with Franco, the whole of Spain was not worth one drop of English blood.<sup>122</sup> Franco was portrayed as the bulwark against the corrupt government of anti-religious forces of Soviet atheism. The governments of the West that wavered or even considered the possibility of intervention were labelled, along with the individual volunteer, tools of International Finance and Jewry.<sup>123</sup> Even after non-intervention was announced, the Blackshirts were dissatisfied. The *British Union Quarterly* declared the Government's policy a 'shoddy cloak' for intervention of a 'moral kind'. Non-intervention, according to the Blackshirts, was in order to allay the Socialists and to afford the opportunity for 'Mr Eden to strike once again at the enemies he has so gratuitously made for Britain on behalf of international finance'.<sup>124</sup>

Selective pacifism was the outstanding feature of the third B.U.F. policy phase. The principles had been formulated, and they were moulded to the particular circumstances and propagated with the limited resources that the movement could command. Hitler was defended, and at the same time Mosley acclaimed his movement's allegiance to the Crown. An enemy conspiracy had been found, but eventually the Hitler-Stalin pact confused the Mosleyites just as it did the Left.

German troops crossed the Austrian frontier on 10 March 1938. The following week *Action* described their march:

The advance of the Nazis was like a symphony; the Saar was the allegro, the Rhineland the andante, Austria the scherzo, there remained the finale to be played.<sup>125</sup>

Mosley launched a 'Stop-the-War' campaign. *Action* told its readers that the politicians backed by International Socialism were sending them to war. It concluded that no British interests were involved in Austria, and millions of Austrians were celebrating the 'new brotherhood of the German people'.<sup>126</sup>

Munich was next. On 29 September 1938, the Munich conference opened and on 1 October German troops moved into Czechoslovakian territory. On the same day, *Action* came out with a 'crisis special' in which Mosley proclaimed, 'This is no war for Britain. This is a war dictated by the enemies and oppressors of the British people'.<sup>127</sup> In Manchester two days later, Mosley described Chamberlain's journey as an act of courage and common sense.<sup>128</sup> Munich was seen as the possible prelude to a four-power peace pact leading to the union of Europe.<sup>129</sup> The subsequent failure of the Munich Agreement was not blamed on Hitler, but on the 'democrats' who destroyed 'the spirit'.<sup>130</sup>

The Hitler-Stalin pact caught the Blackshirts unprepared. Mosley ignored the fact that Hitler was also a party to the agreement and analysed Russia's motives. He set forth four possible explanations involving the conspiracy theory. First, Mosley argued that Russia may have 'rid herself of Jewish control', and under Russian leadership was primarily interested

in a national revolution concerned with the Russian people. Mosley's second speculation was that the 'Jewish leaders of Russian Communism' were trying to promote a world war, between the axis powers and Financial Democracy, to bring about the destruction of the Western world. Third, Mosley thought that perhaps Russia was simply in no position to wage a war. He warned that if they did so, the system 'left by the Jewish commissars would collapse'. Finally, Mosley asserted that if the 'Jewish influences' were still in control in Russia, they must be seeking to destroy the British Empire in the Far East.<sup>121</sup>

On 1 September 1939, Mosley issued a message to all B.U.F. members and supporters requesting them to do nothing to impede the war effort or to help an enemy power. At the same time, he announced that the British Union continued to stand firmly for peace. Since neither Britain nor the Empire was threatened, the Government had intervened in an 'alien quarrel', a war of 'Jewish Finance'.<sup>122</sup> Mosley continued to campaign for a B.U.F. Government and for a social revolution on the grounds that British democracy would never dare to come to terms with Germany, which had outstripped her domestically.<sup>123</sup> Finally, on the eve of his internment under Defence Regulation 18B, he declared that he was campaigning in the hope of providing an alternative Government, if and when the present Government desired to make peace, 'with the British Empire intact and our people safe'.<sup>124</sup>

#### NOTES

1. A. Rossi, *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (1938), p. 36.
2. Oswald Mosley, *Interview*, 11 September 1939.
3. *Blackshirt*, 10 November 1933.
4. They were indeed old. For a breakdown by age see Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution* (2nd edn, 1965), p. 252; W. L. Guttsman, *The British Political Élite* (1963), p. 202.
5. Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932 edn), p. 147.
6. Oswald Mosley, *Ten Points of Fascism* (1933), pp. 2-3.
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82. *Fascist Week*, 10 November 1933.
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## 8. Olympia

The B.U.F. demonstration at Olympia on 7 June 1934 was the watershed for British Fascism. It was also important in terms of the controversy it aroused over political violence and public order. Olympia was not only Mosley's largest meeting to date, but it was also the Communist Party's first large anti-Fascist demonstration. Anti-Communism was an important theme in B.U.F. propaganda and the Communists had been actively denouncing the 'Blackshirt Menace'. B.U.F. pageantry had been tried and rehearsed. The pattern of violence had been established, although on a smaller scale. In a similar fashion, Communist plans and techniques had been tested.

The Commissioner of Police had received information that the Communist Party intended to demonstrate against Mosley by organized heckling inside the meeting and by a mass demonstration outside the hall. In fact, the Communist Party issued a Press statement to that effect.<sup>1</sup> They printed illegal tickets. Groups of hecklers were stationed at strategic points inside the meeting, and Press interviews with their members were organized outside. First-aid stations were set up in near-by houses, and there were the inevitable parades, banners, placards and slogans. It was unlikely that weapons were officially authorized, but this would not have prevented anyone from carrying them. Philip Toynbee has described how he and Esmond Romilly selected their knuckle-dusters.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, one anti-Fascist demonstrator was found by the police to be in possession of an