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ILLUSIONS of GRANDEUR

MOSLEY,
FASCISM and
BRITISH SOCIETY,
1931-81

D. S. LEWIS



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- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 909.
 48 Nicolson Diaries, MS, 17 July 1931.
 49 *Ibid.*, 23 July 1931.
 50 *Action*, 19 November 1931, p. 29. Nupa was not designed to reach full structural maturity until the middle of the 1930s and, therefore, much of its organisation remained at this point, if not theoretical, then certainly embryonic.
 51 Letter from Nicolson to Mosley, 29 June 1932, Nicolson papers.
 52 Nicolson Diaries, MS, 28 September 1931.
 53 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
 54 *Action*, 15 October 1931, p. 29.
 55 *Ibid.*, 8 October 1931, p. 10.
 56 *Ibid.*, 31 December 1931, p. 1.
 57 O. Mosley, 'Old parties or new?', *Political Quarterly*, III, 1, January–March 1932, pp. 28–9.
 58 Nicolson Diaries, MS, 28 September 1931.
 59 *Ibid.*, 1 October 1931.
 60 *Action*, 15 October 1931, p. 3.
 61 Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
 62 The CP polled a total of 70,844 votes spread over twenty-six constituencies: Skidelsky, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
 63 *Action*, 5 November 1931, p. 2.
 64 *Ibid.*, 5 November 1931, p. 1.
 65 *Ibid.*, 29 October 1931, p. 1.
 66 Skidelsky, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
 67 *Action's* weekly circulation plummeted from 165,000 to 20,00 between October and December 1931: *Action*, 31 December 1931, p. 4.
 68 *Ibid.*, 24 December 1931, pp. 1–2.
 69 Nicolson Diaries, MS, 5 January 1932.
 70 *Ibid.*, 5 April 1932. See also letter to Dr Forgan dated 15 April 1932. H. Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930–39*, Collins, London 1966, p. 114.
 71 *Ibid.*, 19 April 1932, p. 115.
 72 The British Fascists had been founded originally as the British Fascisti in 1923 by Miss Rotha Linton Orman.
 73 Skidelsky, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
 74 Inevitably many of the crew would leave the vessel or be thrown overboard before the journey ended. In the case of the New Party this included not only Strachey and Young, but also Nicolson, and even Peter Cheyney.
 75 In the autumn of 1931 Mosley was still undecided as to the exact shape of the instrument which he desired. The decision was made for him effectively by the total destruction of the credibility of the electoral side of the party as a result of the general election disaster.
 76 *Daily Express*, 26 April 1933, p. 3.
 77 *90 HL Debs*, 28 February 1934, c. 1018, as quoted by R. Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain*, Penguin Press, London 1972, p. 31.
 78 Strachey, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–6.

Corporatism: the philosophy and programme of the BUF

The main object of a modern and Fascist movement is to establish the Corporate State. In our belief it is the greatest constructive conception yet devised by the mind of man.

O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, BUF, London 1932, p. 26

The appeal of fascism purports to be directed towards all the most noble majestic aspirations of a man. Its apparent effect is to bring out all that is most primitive and savage in a man and to make him, in the vital matters of his relations with other men, indistinguishable from the animals.

L. Birch, *Why they Join the Fascists*, People's Press, London 1937, p. 21

**In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west. . . .
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by.**

W. Shakespeare, untitled sonnet

The BUF's origin at the centre of the political spectrum was reflected within the philosophy and economic analysis which underpinned its proposed transformation of British society. Furthermore, as the BUF was a movement of the authoritarian rather than the liberal centre it contained a far greater range of elements from left and right than did other political parties.

Although it frequently dissociated itself from the traditional left and right by claiming to 'despise them equally',¹ at first sight its philosophical position appeared firmly in the tradition of the right. It stressed nation rather than class as a focus of loyalty; elitism rather than egalitarianism; and tended to analyse individual motivation in terms of irratio-

nality rather than a more humanistic approach. But significant elements of fascist elitism were new in that they were based upon service to the party and nation rather than the mere possession of wealth, land or other relics of past plunder. Similarly, the BUF did not share entirely the right's traditional view of the innateness of human nature. For whilst rejecting humanist ideas of man as a rational organism fascism did accept, in some instances, that man's nature was a product of his environment. Also, in regard to populism, fascism was very much in the tradition of the left in seeing a mass movement as the vehicle for change, whereas the right distrusted popular action, equating it with deep-rooted fears concerning anarchy and the mob.

Thus, by temperament the BUF belonged exclusively neither to the right nor the left, but tended to combine elements of each or alternate between them. This was essential, for it allowed fascism to portray itself as a movement separate from and above the squalid squabbles of the other political parties. As Mosley wrote, 'The enemy is the 'Old Gang' of our present political system. No matter what their party label, the old parliamentarians have proved themselves to be all the same . . . their policy when elected is invariably the same. That policy is a policy of subservience to sectional interests and of national lethargy.'² For Mosley there was nothing illogical about a synthesis of the philosophies of right and left. Conservatism, he argued had for centuries tried to achieve stability and yet had undermined this desire by its reluctance to make necessary reforms. Alternatively, the left had sought progress but had rejected the necessary tools such as authority, loyalty and discipline because they were believed to be the inheritance of the right. The unification of these two philosophies was for Mosley the 'basis of Fascist faith and Fascist organisation' in that it could produce the ideal of a society, orderly and stable and yet unafraid to change.³

Alexander Raven Thomson, the primary philosopher of the BUF, developed further this idea of fascism as a higher third arising from the combination of apparent incompatibles. He gave the process a dialectical basis, arguing that Hegel's use of the dialectic was the observation of a natural process. Thesis led to anti-thesis, which in turn produced synthesis. This was a natural law of development, it was argued, which Marx had corrupted by applying it to the evolution of materialism. The Marxian belief that socialism would arise from the capitalist thesis and proletarian anti-thesis was rejected by Thomson because of the existence of an alleged corrupt alliance between capitalists and trade union leaders designed to preserve their own privileged positions within the status quo. This thesis of corrupt privilege, predicted Thomson, would lead eventually to the anti-thesis of popular reaction and this would be the prelude to the triumph of fascism, for 'irresponsible power challenged by national revolt creates the true synthesis of national

authority'.⁴

Whatever the philosophical justifications advanced by Thomson, synthesis represented a method through which the BUF could attempt to reconcile some of the conflicting aims and interests of its adherents. The centrist nature of the movement made this a pressing necessity. Similarly, centrism ensured some degree of oscillation as there existed simultaneously within the movement attitudes which were directly antithetical to each other. The most striking example of this oscillation, observable in all fascist movements, was the tendency to look forwards and backwards simultaneously – to draw inspiration from the past whilst claiming to be the vanguard of the future.

The BUF promised vigorous government action to increase the total acreage of cultivated land and thereby double Britain's agricultural yield within five years of taking power.⁵ This policy was justified by reference to the fascist belief in autarchy, and the perils of British dependence on foreign nations for any raw material as vital as food. The earnestness of the BUF's promise to regenerate Britain's agricultural sector also illustrated fascism's fundamental belief in the need for a society to replenish itself from ' . . . the steady virile stock which is bred in the health, sanity, and natural but arduous life of the countryside'. Such a process, argued Mosley, would return to Britain the traditional yeoman upon whom her past greatness had been largely based.⁶ This belief that the land was the natural repository of national values, culture and heritage involved the construction of an idealised vision of pastoral society. A. K. Chesterton condemned the growth of industrial towns which had come ' . . . to sprawl over the once fair face of Britain, denying sun and air and health to generations after generations doomed to inherit them'.⁷ In so doing he ignored the disease, the famine, and the premature death endemic within pre-industrial society. Others went further than Chesterton and waxed lyrically on the attributes of 'merrie' Tudor England, or mourned the passing of the English peasantry, who

. . . were born and bred in the open country, and who, before they were driven by the blighting tyranny of modern capitalism to seek their livelihood in the sterile cities, knew the joy of working each morning in pure air to the song of the birds, or the voice of the wind in the trees, to the glow of the sun, the sting of the frost, or the soft patter of rain on the grass.⁸

In the three centuries since the English revolution had established a capitalist dictatorship, it was argued, the interests of the land (and later of industry itself) had been sacrificed to the avarice of finance capital. Consequently the nation had been reduced to a legion of spiritually nomadic city dwellers so effete that eventually they would prove incapable even of maintaining a rate of reproduction consistent with the survival of their race.⁹ Thus, it was predicted darkly, 'the death of the

countryside portends the death of the nation, for from the soil springs all life, physical and spiritual'.¹⁰

Such romantic notions of pastoral society have often been features of reactionary movements, providing a source of inspiration for those who have suffered through the process of modernisation. But rather than simply proposing a return to the pre-capitalist era, Mosley's economic programme was designed to restore prosperity to capitalism. Far from condemning science and technology as the destroyers of the past, Mosley saw them as the potential liberators of mankind, and predicted that 'not until man has mastered the machine and the machine has mastered material limitations will the soul of man be free to soar beyond the fetters of materialism'.¹¹ Indeed, Mosley became convinced that science had a unique and vital role to play in the establishment of a successful fascist regime. Although he subscribed to the Spenglerian analysis of European civilisations doomed from the moment of their creation to pass through evolutionary stages ending in collapse, he came to believe that science was the crucial factor overlooked by Spengler. For the first time in history, he argued, science could provide an alternative through its immense productive power which could be harnessed and used not only to improve the quality of life for many millions, but also to deny the course of destiny. Through science fascism '... could evolve Faustian man; a civilisation which could renew its youth in a persisting dynamism'.¹²

Fascism then could attract those whose attitude towards science and technology was nothing short of reverential as well as those who believed in the innate virtue and spirituality of the land. The tension within a movement which at once looked back to an idealised agrarian past and forward to a future of high consumption made possible by the machine, is too obvious to be laboured. It developed from fascism's centrist perspective and its inclusion of revolutionaries impatient to usher in a new and dynamic age, and reactionaries longing to return to the security of the past. Genuine fascists advocated neither the retrospective nor the progressive attitudes of fascism to the total exclusion of the other, and although the emphasis laid upon each varied for reasons of opportunism, both the forward and backward-looking aspects of fascist philosophy were retained simultaneously, and where possible synthesised. Thus, fascism could portray itself not only as the instrument which would create a humanity released from poverty and disease, in a world reborn through science, but also as the mechanism through which the world could return to those values and traditions of a bygone age which were perceived to have arisen from man's affinity with the soil.

Aspects of fascist philosophy assisted also in minimising or camouflaging the basic inconsistencies within party and ideology. The

extreme nationalism of the BUF illustrated this in that it provided a basic common denominator between the nation's otherwise disparate elements and was consequently vital to all fascist movements. Class, it was argued, was essentially meaningless because through social mobility a person's class could easily change during the course of a lifetime. Nationality through birth never changed and therefore, by virtue of its greater permanence, nationality should always supersede class affiliations. The importance of this premise cannot be overemphasised. Once accepted, it allowed fascism to substitute for class conflict the idea of a nation united in its desire to destroy its own unsavoury elements regardless of their class. This internal war by the whole nation against those few traitors and wreckers lurking within its ranks could include the destruction of capitalists who placed profit before patriotism, as well as workers who sabotaged national prosperity through unfettered greed. The question, claimed Mosley, was whether Britain could '... recapture the union of 1914 and that rapturous dedication of the individual to a cause that transcends self and faction, or are we doomed to go down with the Empires of history in the chaos of usury and sectional greed?'¹³

Nationalism, even when defined as '... the idealisation of the nation as the supreme synthesis of a group of individuals with a communion of linguists and historical traditions and of regional and economic interests ...',¹⁴ has an inbuilt tendency to produce racism. The more extreme the nationalism then the greater is the proportional ingredient of racism within it. Therefore, inevitably, fascist movements included racism and frequently became the receptacles for racial theories and social Darwinist ideas which had emerged from the nineteenth century. The work of several British philosophers and scientists was distorted by the Nazis to this end. Similarly, Benjamin Kidd, a vigorous advocate of social Darwinism, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, one of the most notorious of the pre-1914 racist writers, were both British.¹⁵ Chamberlain believed implicitly in the superiority of the Aryan race, and in particular in its Teutonic or German branch. He even envisaged government control over reproduction in order to avoid random genetic mixing which weakened the race because '... a mongrel is frequently very clever, but never reliable; morally he is always a weed'.¹⁶

In the light of this rich national heritage of racial theory it is interesting to observe the BUF's reluctance to exploit it fully. It was suggested that one of the important aspects of any nation should be its 'common blood',¹⁷ and there were half-hearted attempts to analyse history in racial terms. But when referring to the British race the party refrained from using terms such as 'Aryan', which were the common currency of racial theorists, preferring instead vague references to 'Britishness' or 'Anglo-Saxon'. Owing to the inherent superior qualities

attributed to the Anglo-Saxon, of course, this represented a real form of racism nevertheless. Having established that the superior British character was racially derived, it followed naturally that this character must be protected from genetic corruption. To achieve this the measures suggested ranged from sterilisation of the unfit, to the ending of immigration and the expulsion of all foreigners (including those already naturalised) unless they were proved to be worthy British citizens. Above all the dilution of the genetic essence of Britishness through random propagation would be avoided '... by education and propaganda, to teach the British people what racial mixtures are bad ... this is a matter for the teacher rather than the legislator, but if legislation was ever necessary to preserve the race, Fascism would not hesitate to introduce it'.¹⁸

As war approached and after it began there were attempts to create racial links between Britain and Germany by claiming that their peoples belonged to the same Nordic race. The mass murder of the finest of the race's young through war was condemned as madness which would lead to the Nordics being overwhelmed by the faster-breeding Slav or Negroid races, and would therefore amount to 'race suicide'.¹⁹ This was the closest that the BUF ever came to emulating the racism of the pre-1914 racist writers such as Chamberlain and Gobineau. It was a far cry from the obsession with Aryan racial purity displayed by Nazis such as Streicher who warned the German nation that only a single act of intercourse was necessary between a Jew and an Aryan woman to result in the latter's blood becoming poisoned irreparably.²⁰ In comparison to such pronouncements, exhortations by the BUF to place British interests before those of foreigners, and even the Nordic racial nonsense of the late 1930s appear rather tame. In fact the striking feature of the BUF's pronouncements upon race is their complete lack of sophistication. They included no formal hierarchy of racial groups, and on the rare occasion that terms such as 'Nordic' or 'Aryan' were used, there was never any real attempt to define them. Indeed the BUF's racism owed far more to its extreme nationalism than to the work of the pre-1914 geneticists, even though some of the most prominent of these were British.

The explanation for this was twofold. Firstly, the inhabitants of modern Britain were obvious racial mongrels derived from genetic stock as diverse as Norse, Celt, Roman and Norman. Racial theorists such as Chamberlain had recognised this and accordingly categorised the British as inferior to the pure Aryans from north-central Europe. Such a label of inferiority was unacceptable to a movement as overtly patriotic as was the BUF. Secondly, whilst such racial theories provided Nazi Germany with a justification for seeking *lebensraum* in Eastern Europe at the expense of lesser races, they were hardly the best cement for the decrepit, multi-racial British empire. By the 1930s British imperialism sought to appear in a rather more benign and paternalistic garb as the

head of a mutually supporting group of nations, rather than as masters destined to triumph over their racial inferiors through innate genetic superiority. Moreover the empire was crucial to Mosley's formula for economic recovery because it represented an economic unit large enough to insulate itself from the world economy. Thus, the empire was more than the supreme symbol of nationalism and the embodiment of glories past; it was also an integral part of BUF economics. It was too important to be undermined through the propagation of tendentious racial theories.

Another aspect of fascist philosophy which had the effect of obscuring inconsistencies was a heavy emphasis upon the leadership principle which involved discipline, loyalty, and unquestioning faith in the leader. Under the party's constitution the leader was empowered to appoint and dismiss officers at will, was able to alter the constitution as he chose, and was the party's ultimate authority on all questions of policy, organisation, administration and discipline.²¹ A leadership cult was encouraged within the movement and Mosley became the object of eulogistic praise and often obsequious pandering by those around him. He was seen as a figure of omnipotence whose mystical vision of the road which lay ahead and the promised land which waited at the journey's end led to his portrayal as a '... leader among the leaders, man amongst men, dauntless and inspired crusader who shall not rest until the battle has been won'.²²

This concept of leadership permeated the entire movement as at every level the BUF (like its predecessor, the New Party youth movement) adhered to the principle of strict discipline. For Mosley voluntary discipline and strong leadership were essential because it was only through the absolute authority which they provided that significant change could be effected. Such unquestioning discipline, whilst helping to prevent the exposure of ideological differences, also maximised scarce manpower resources and was of particular value in the stewarding of meetings. It was recognised that a highly disciplined body of men which acted in unison and whose constituent elements trusted each other implicitly could control crowds and defeat unorganised opponents, even though heavily outnumbered. BUF members were trained accordingly.

It was precisely this discipline which liberalism lacked, argued Mosley, and this shortcoming was the cause of its general inability to act decisively and its total paralysis in the face of a crisis. Obsessed with materialism and torn by class conflict, liberalism was doomed to follow the dictates of short-sighted majorities in pursuit of sectional greed. It is ironic that the BUF has been criticised retrospectively by liberal historians for being similarly obsessed by national values, pursued at the expense of the traditional freedoms of liberal democracy. It has been

suggested that Mosley's conception of freedom in economic rather than political terms was an indication of the strength of the influence of the economic crisis upon his attitudes. Rather than assisting an understanding of Mosley, however, this reflects more the attitude of the liberal towards the sacrosanct freedoms of press, speech, association, and the naïve belief in equality before the law. Mosley's criticisms of liberal Britain were often sharp and accurate, retaining their validity regardless of the overall legitimacy of the corporate vision which was to supersede liberalism. Mosley recognised that a basic desire of the citizens of any society is to secure food and shelter. Those to whom these essentials for survival are not guaranteed (and there were many such in inter-war Britain) care little for the freedom of rich men to print newspapers, or the freedom to use an expensive and esoteric legal system to defend non-existent privileges. The freedom which allows a man who cannot afford food to own a newspaper or initiate a legal action is less meaningful; the society which boasts to the hungry man that he is thus free is obscene. For the hungry, concepts such as liberal freedom have always been inedible.

The BUF's unconcealed contempt for liberalism and the kind of democracy with which it was associated gave its opponents an easy target at which to aim. It felt the sting of such attacks, and its response was confused and ultimately contradictory, for it included the denunciation of democracy and the justification of dictatorship on a theoretical level whilst also claiming that fascism would end liberalism's corrupt parliamentary plutocracy and replace it with a real people's democracy. This confusion illustrates the difficulty faced by a movement attempting to justify overt dictatorship to a nation with the world's longest unbroken history of parliamentary democracy, and to a society in which many believed that such parliamentary democracy was a real and meaningful manifestation of democratic liberty. It was also indicative of the incompatible elements of fascist ideology and of the BUF's membership. For although the dictatorship principle could in some respects shield fascism's inconsistencies, in practice the attitude within the movement which reflected these inconsistencies expressed themselves frequently on the subject of dictatorship and democracy in such a way as to express these very differences. Not content with justifiable criticism of the clearly undemocratic nature of the parliamentary system and an aggressive elucidation of the merits of dictatorship, there were many within the BUF who redefined freedom in terms of economic security and service to the community as a whole through the corporate state, thus enabling them to claim that a fascist government would give its citizens a greater degree of freedom than they received under parliamentary democracy. There were also those who took this reasoning a stage further by redefining democracy to mean a system of government

where the individual is given the maximum possible freedom. Having redefined freedom it could therefore be argued that dictatorship and democracy were complementary rather than contradictory concepts (as were liberty and service), as only through the former could the latter be achieved. Even for a movement as ideologically flexible as fascism, however, such a synthesis was difficult and hence the BUF's overall attitude in this area appeared inconsistent and frequently unconvincing.

Other aspects of fascist philosophy were better suited to welding together the diverse elements of the BUF, or at least could serve to disguise the conflict arising from such elements. Prominent amongst these was the concept of action. There were many within the BUF who boasted freely of fascism's lack of a '... long pedigree of theory like socialism, Liberalism, and Communist, and other products of the intellectual laboratory', and were proud to see it as '... an insurrection of feeling – a mutiny of men against the conditions of the modern world'.²³ Fascism appealed to its supporters using emotional rather than rational criteria, and they were discouraged from thinking too deeply about its internal logic. Faith was deemed more important than rational analysis. This belief in the inherent worthiness of action as opposed to reasoned thought gave rise to a deep suspicion of 'academic sterilities'.²⁴ The only justification for thought was when it served as a prelude to action.

This attitude in its turn encouraged a cult of struggle. Blackshirts were inspired by Mosley to believe that

... the slow, soft days are behind us, perhaps for ever. Hard days and dark nights ahead, no relaxing of the muscle of mind and will. It is at once our privilege and our ordeal to live in a dynamic period in the history of man. The tents of ease are struck and the soul of man is on the march. Do we envy those who have lived in the lotus moments of the past? Do those of my generation regret their own short youth; that brief bright moment between storm and storm? No! we regret nothing, not even our own past. Those who have lived in the happy valleys of blissful, peaceful periods in the history of the world have never known our depths, but they have also never known our heights.²⁵

Struggle was seen not only as the means of capturing political power but also as the noble duty of those in whom there existed innate worthiness. Rather than a means to an end, struggle became the proof of nobility as Mosley exhorted his followers to ever greater feats of sacrifice. This idealisation of the concept of struggle was concerned more with romantic notions of heroic valour than with the belief that struggle is the most effective educative medium. Nevertheless it had obvious practical advantages for the movement, not least of which was the maximisation of a small membership.

The BUF's commitment to the virtues of struggle, combined with

the strict hierarchically imposed discipline, produced an organisation which often conceived of itself not as a political party but as '... an Order dedicated to the service of a great ideal. ...'²⁶ Initiates to the order received instruction concerning '... the immense vision of service, of self-abnegation, even of self-sacrifice in the cause of the world'.²⁷ Simultaneously this desire for action and struggle encouraged the BUF's tendency to idealise the vigour of youth and the virility of the machismo man. Youth with its innocent strength and '... cleanness, like a white flame',²⁸ was conceived as the very foundation of the dawning fascist era. The virility of young males was to provide the cutting edge of fascism's advance through an effete civilisation, degenerate with rampant feminism and unchecked matriarchy.

This desire to weld together incompatible elements or to camouflage their points of conflict, which was so visible within the principle areas of the BUF's philosophy, emerged even more clearly in the blueprint of the BUF's corporate system. That this system was to be founded upon the nation state was, as already suggested, indicative of fascism's need to find a common denominator which could supersede class. Unlike the far left, which viewed the state as a means of institutionalising and maintaining the inequitable nature of non-socialist society, fascism's view was founded on the liberal concept of the state as a regulative mechanism. But whereas liberalism advocated a minimum of state interference in the affairs of its citizens, fascism sought to regulate and control almost all spheres of human existence. Therefore it would tolerate none of the inalienable rights of the individual endemic to liberalism, and demanded a total acceptance of the principle that the corporate state was superior to any of its constituent elements. The state and its needs were considered paramount and the BUF adhered to the maxim: 'All within the State: none outside the State, none against the State.'²⁹ The state was held in equal esteem by Mussolini, who in 1929 had declared

It is the State which educates citizens for civic virtue, which makes them conscious of their mission, calls them to unity, harmonises their interests in justice, hands on the achievement of thought in the sciences, the arts, in law, in human solidarity. It carries men from the elementary life of the tribe to the highest human expression of power, which is Empire. . . . When the sense of the State declines, and the disintegrating tendencies of individuals and groups prevail, national societies move to their decline.³⁰

This attitude illustrates fascism's tendency to move beyond the concept of the state as a machine by ascribing to it qualities of an almost mystical nature. In addition to its regulative functions the state was perceived as a repository of national culture, an expression of civilisation, and a barometer recording the health of a society. Above all fascism considered the state as an organic composition, '... an organism

endowed with a purpose, a life, and means of action transcending those individuals, or groups of individuals, of which it is composed'.³¹ Thus could the state be seen as an independent biological entity in which its citizens were cells and its institutions were internal organs of varying importance. The most frequent analogy used by the BUF, was that of the human body, where '... every member of that body acts in harmony with the purpose of the whole under the guidance and driving brain of Fascist Government'.³² The analogy was continued through claims that the nation needed surgery rather than political reform, concluding that '... the poison of class conflict can only be countered by the drastic anti-toxin of centralised autocratic power'.³³ Just as the organs of a body each had different, but important, tasks, so also would the citizens of the corporate state have different functions. Although there would be differences of wealth and living standards, under fascism 'social class' would be eliminated. Consequently, it was argued, although '... the Managing Director of a business will perform a different function from that which the charwoman performs in sweeping out his office . . . the difference will be functional and not social'.³⁴ The naivety of such a view which disregarded the economic foundations of class distinction was self-evident. To what extent the charwoman or her dependants would take comfort from the knowledge that her distinction from the managing director was functional and economic but not 'social' was a subject upon which Mosley was wise not to dwell.

The concept of an organic state was not new. It had existed in some form in the work of philosophers from Aristotle and Plato, to Machiavelli and Hegel. In the nineteenth century the work of Malthus had argued the existence of inherent regulative mechanisms in human society, and Darwinism showed how the organism evolves as a result of competitive pressures in its environment. Work of this nature was used to give the idea of the corporate state a pseudo-scientific basis, as in the case of Benjamin Kidd's work on social evolution published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which pre-empted the relationship between the individual and the fascist state. Working from the premise that an organism is more efficient than the mere sum of its parts and that natural selection leads to the evolution of more efficient organisms, Kidd argued that history, like nature, was the gradual architect of more efficient and more organic types of society. Therefore, it was natural that evolution would '... inevitably render the interests of the units subordinate to the interests of corporate life'.³⁵

The BUF acknowledged little of this legacy, however,³⁶ preferring to portray the corporate state as a form of organisation which would facilitate the simultaneous existence of socialist planning and capitalist free enterprise, and through which class conflict could be obliterated. It was, then, a framework in which the capitalist policies of fascism would

be able to operate, and was designed to fulfil two main functions. Firstly it was conceived as the necessary cure for the decadence which afflicted inter-war British society, for it was argued that '... decadence, an affliction of the spirit, is a collective disease exactly as bubonic plague is a collective disease'. The atomisation of society caused by democracy, and the personal self-seeking encouraged by liberalism had produced decadence, a form of mass neurosis, which resulted in the loss of spiritual values and national pride and honour. Such problems, it was predicted, indicated '... a strongly entrenched neurosis which is the spirit's cancer and the trumpeter of death'. The only cure lay with the disciplined order of the corporate state, for

fascism, recognising the human necessity to serve a social purpose and the fact that in a very real sense man lives only in so far as he is related to others, provides the citizen ... [with] ... the corporate activity which his soul's health demands. ... Herein is both the meaning and the mechanism of the Corporate State and Fascism - ... the solvent of neurosis and the conqueror of decay.³⁷

It was recognised that many of the ills of society, as fascism perceived them, were rooted in class conflict, but this could be eliminated, it was argued, when the corporate state fulfilled its second main function, which was to restore health to Britain's ailing economy. The prohibition of strikes and lock-outs would disarm each side of industry, and would be a prelude to the establishment of a series of interlocking corporations representing workers, employers, and consumers equally, which would replace conflict with harmony through co-operation. Issues concerning conditions of work would be settled within each industry's corporation, and as existing trades union and employers' organisations were '... to be woven into the fabric of the Corporate State. ... Instead of being the general staff of opposing armies, they will become joint directors of national enterprise under the general guidance of corporate government.'³⁸ Whilst eliminating class conflict these corporations would also have had the task of adjusting consumption in line with demand and potential production, by raising salaries and wages uniformly in line with production increases. The establishment of minimum wage rates backed by law would prevent the raised wage levels from being undercut by domestic employers. Similarly the exclusion of all foreign goods which could be produced within Britain would ensure that wages were not undercut by '... sweated competition from abroad'. With the purchasing power of the British consumer thus increased in line with productive capacity, full employment and full production would be achieved, and with them a concomitant rise in living standards.³⁹ Under such circumstances the class war would become merely '... a grisly relic of the age of scarcity'.⁴⁰

Private enterprise, the liberty to profit from the appropriation of

the surplus value of the labour of others, was to be 'encouraged',⁴¹ subject to only one proviso. The capitalist would be

... required to consider the public welfare as well as his own private interest in using his property and developing his enterprise. Liberal atomism, which held that in serving his own interests the individual automatically advanced the interests of the community has been discredited long since, and we must now turn from the laws of the jungle to the laws of man.⁴²

As long as such cooperation was forthcoming then the ownership of capital would remain largely outside the hands of the state. Nor was this co-operation necessarily a retrogressive step for the capitalist. Mosley's corporate vision promised him a stable and expanding market, a labour force stripped of its most important defensive weapons, and a strong government committed to '... protect genuine private enterprise'.⁴³ Thus, although it rejected *laissez-faire* economics, demanded the allegiance of property-owners and industrialists, and threatened the nationalisation of some public utilities, the corporate state was never a threat to the essence of the capitalist system.

Both in its attempt to purge the spiritual malaise of the nation and its formula for revitalising the economy, the corporate state was an attempt to achieve co-operation and harmony - if necessary, through coercion. The existence of the permanent machinery of compulsory arbitration inherent within the corporate system, backed by the government and the law, was considered sufficient to overcome any industrial problems which might arise, and thus corporatism was conceived as a means of ensuring national unity as well as precipitating economic recovery. The centrist nature of fascism was never more clearly illustrated than in its own portrayal of the corporate state as the harmonious and prosperous unification of workers '... by hand, or brain, or capital',⁴⁴ in short, the producers' state.

The supreme instrument of executive authority within the corporate state was to have been a small cabinet of three or four fascists under Mosley. The immense power of this government was subject only to the partial restraint of parliament or the people, who were to review its work periodically and vote to accept or reject it. In the event of rejection by either, the government would have been dismissed and would be replaced by new (and presumably fascist) ministers selected by the King.⁴⁵ Parliament, it was argued, would be in a better position to criticise government policy because, when not convened for this purpose, MPs would be responsible for carrying out the work of government in the localities, individually responsible to their superiors in strict adherence to the leadership principle. Thus, elected MPs would have a dual function. At a national level they would sit periodically as part of a bicameral assembly in which the House of Commons was to remain, although the

House of Lords was to be replaced with a Senate, or Chamber of Merit, consisting of government-appointed representatives from the corporations, or other areas of public life.⁴⁶ Most of their time, however, would be spent as local administrators. Assisted by the machinery of local government, in an advisory rather than an executive capacity, MPs at last would be free of the soporific and corrupting atmosphere of Westminster and therefore, it was claimed, would achieve a far greater affinity with the needs and aspirations of their constituents. But despite promises by Mosley that the government would submit itself for approval both to parliament and the people at '... regular and frequent intervals',⁴⁷ it is clear that a government with power checked only by 'yes' or 'no' appeals to the nation at interminate periods is in practice unlimited.

The primary constituents of the economic structure of the corporate state were to have been the twenty-four individual corporations, designed to include the entire adult population of the nation.⁴⁸ Each corporation was to consist of representatives of employers elected by the owners, shareholders and managers of an industry, and workers elected by the employees, together with consumer representatives appointed by the government. Each corporation would represent all of the workers, employers and consumers who fell within its category, although within them would be a number of subdivisions and subsidiary councils proportionate to their overall size. Beneath each corporation would be a complicated structure, based on indirect elections, moving upwards from local, to district, and ultimately to the zonal councils which would elect the membership of the twenty-four corporations operating at national level. Each of these was to regulate and harmonise its own industry, and its decisions were to have the force of law, subject to the approval of the National Corporation.⁴⁹ This National Corporation was conceived as the foremost economic organ of the corporate structure and was to be composed of representatives drawn from all the twenty-four lower corporations in proportion to their size and overall importance to the economy. Its task was not only to arbitrate and decide between disputes arising within corporations or between separate corporations, but also to undertake a degree of economic planning by controlling profits, hours, conditions and dividends, and in particular to adjust consumption to production through the control of wages. It was to be assisted by an Investment Board and an Import and Export Board and would receive advice from '... the best executive brains of industrial and professional life' in their capacity as an advisory council to the Minister of Corporations, who was to head the National Corporation and unto whom it would be ultimately responsible.⁵⁰

All elections within the corporate state were to be based on an occupational franchise. The issues behind political decisions, it was

argued, were too complex for popular comprehension and consequently elections were too often decided by meaningless slogans. Under fascism people were to vote for colleagues within their own particular trade or profession upon a platform about which they were well qualified to judge because of their working experience. By thus bringing to an end votes of ignorance a technical parliament would emerge. A serious assembly elected upon merit rather than the ability to debate cleverly or '... to sit up all night to obstruct the business of the nation'.⁵¹

This then was the corporate machinery which, it was boasted, would achieve economic progress without injury to the national interest, which was so often the case with *laissez-faire* liberalism or the bureaucratic inefficiency axiomatic with socialism. The most striking feature of the structure of the corporations, however, was that with an equal number of representatives from the employers and the workers, power would reside with the government-appointed consumer representatives. As these would presumably be loyal fascists, and as fascist parties have a tendency to affiliate closely with the orthodox right when in power, it is likely that the workers would have found themselves in a permanent minority upon the corporations and yet bound legally to accept their decisions upon pay and working conditions.

For Mosley the corporate state represented the replacement of an obsolete system of government with a system suitable for the twentieth century. A belief in a small central executive free to govern without hindrance from parliamentary opposition had been one of the major thrusts of the *Mosley Memorandum* of 1930. But the corporate structure was more than a system of strong government in that it was designed to end class conflict and provide a framework within which Mosley's solutions to the problems of the inter-war British economy could be applied. Such a definitive framework had been absent from the *Memorandum*, but the Keynesian analysis which had inspired it remained paramount to Mosley who used it to underpin the corporate state.

The failure of demand to keep pace with the power of modern science to produce goods meant that rationalisation (an inevitable part of economic progress) resulted in permanent pools of unemployment rather than increased production. Unemployment further reduced consumption and caused still greater unemployment. A vicious circle had thus been established, it was argued, consisting of four links: rationalisation, unemployment, lower purchasing power, and further unemployment. The universally conceived solution, to expand export markets by further rationalisation and enforced wage reductions, only resulted in a further drop in domestic consumption and greater unemployment.⁵² Although Britain's prosperity had once been based upon its export markets the increase in the number of industrial nations able to compete with her, together with a general closure of foreign markets through

tariffs and quotas, had rendered this analysis inapplicable. The problem was further aggravated by the willingness of financiers to exploit cheap labour in backward countries which would work for wages far below those demanded by white workers.⁵³ By cutting wages in an attempt to produce more competitively priced goods, British industry was cutting its own domestic market. The corporate state was to provide an opportunity whereby domestic purchasing power could be increased within a protected home market. This protection, however, rather than being a system of *ad hoc* committees (as had been the New Party's commodity boards) would have amounted to '... a permanently functioning machine of industrial self-government which continually harmonised the conflicting interests of the industrial system'.⁵⁴

The need to prevent cheap foreign goods, the sweated products of international finance and its exploitation of backward labour, from undercutting the increased wage rates through which domestic consumption was to be raised, was paramount.⁵⁵ Whilst the corporations were designed to ensure that there was no undercutting from unpatriotic British producers, the need for protection from unscrupulous producers abroad meant that the corporate state would have to strive to achieve economic autarchy. This dream of self-sufficiency meant not only the exclusion of foreign manufactures, but also a drive to double the productivity of the agricultural sector.⁵⁶ The role of the empire in this general scheme of autarchy was crucial because it represented a large, non-industrial area from which Britain could gain the raw materials she needed, and from which a large and stable market could be carved in order to absorb British manufactured goods. 'An economic and spiritual unit insulated from the chaos and follies of the outside world.'⁵⁷ This idea of an insulated economic unit had been present in Mosley's thought long before his conversion to fascism as an essential prerequisite to any economic regeneration. On tour in the USA in the winter of 1925-6 he had seen how a large and well-insulated bloc was able to provide a stable market for mass-produced products and thereby provide the basis for unimpeded prosperity. The Ford motor factory at Detroit had illustrated this lesson vividly by producing the cheapest cars in the world whilst also paying the highest wages, thus proving Mosley's assertion that in a stable market it was rates of production rather than wage levels which determined the cost of production.⁵⁸

It was claimed that it would be in the interests of the dominions to belong to an autarchic empire. Those who objected to the idea were the financiers who exported capital from Britain in the form of foreign loans to equip Britain's '... industrial competitors all over the world'. They received their interest on these loans in the form of foreign goods which entered the domestic market and thereby created unemployment. Such interests would obviously suffer from the exclusion of foreign goods, but

faced with the choice between '... alien finance or the British producer', the BUF committed itself unequivocally to the latter.⁵⁹ Those who risked their capital by holding ordinary shares should be taxed less than those who made safe investments in bonds and debentures, it was argued, on the basis that the former was a 'producer' and the latter was a 'usurer'.⁶⁰ This hatred for the '... financial parasite of the world', which later was to become so inextricably entangled with anti-Semitism, became increasingly dogmatic within the BUF as international finance was blamed for producing economic instability through speculation. For '... the financial microbe of decadence produces a fever which may before long prove fatal. By fever the financier lives, but the body of industry perishes. ...'⁶¹ The roots of Mosley's contempt for international finance, like those of his belief in fascism itself, stemmed from the Keynesian concept of a community of interest between worker and capitalist against their common enemy, the *rentier*, who had profited from the maintenance of an artificially high exchange rate at the expense of the producer. The schemes of his *Memorandum* were to have been financed by raising loans in London rather than allowing that same capital to go abroad to the benefit of Britain's economic competitors.

Finally, it was accepted that between the achievement of power and the completion of the full corporate machinery, there would have to be provisions for the immediate relief of unemployment. These involved voluntary retirement for those over sixty, and the institution of a large programme of public works, including an ambitious construction programme pledged to eliminate the nation's slums within three years. This whole package of measures was drawn largely from Mosley's proposals of 1930.⁶²

It is striking that so many of the salient features of the BUF's corporate blueprint, including the concept of a harmonious political machine suitable for the twentieth century, government in favour of the producer not the financier, the reflation of an insulated home market, and the role of a public works programme, belonged, at least in part, to the pre-fascist political and economic analysis of Mosley. This analysis dates from the period when Mosley was very firmly in the centre of the political spectrum, and the fact that so many of Mosley's centrist proposals could be accommodated comfortably within fascism again indicates its status as an ideology of the centre.

How radical a programme did this really represent? Its refusal to accept the status quo coupled with its belief in effecting change through struggle often gave it the appearance of radicalism. There is no doubt also that Mosley's Keynesian analysis, which underpinned British fascism, represented a real form of radicalism in so far as it challenged the sacred tenets of contemporary economic orthodoxy. But even if it had

been implemented in full, would it have produced a society markedly different from that which it sought to replace?

In this respect the most obviously radical area of the BUF's programme lay in its alteration of the relationship between the citizen and the state, for the party was deeply committed to the destruction of every vestige of liberalism. The BUF stressed that individuals within the corporate state would be held more responsible for their actions than ever before, and promised that a people's court would be established to deal with those who had indulged in crimes against the people or the nation. *Rentier* wealth was a particular target. Private fortunes could be amassed only by those who gave service to the state. Families which failed to justify their riches could lose them, for the receipt of hereditary wealth was also to be a privilege rather than a right. The conscientious rural landlord who justified his position by providing local leadership (as his ancestors had done in feudal society) would be exempt from death duties, but he who neglected his obligations would be dispossessed without compensation. The urban landlord, whose rents were to be controlled whilst there remained a housing shortage, would be subject to a similar code of conduct. It was acknowledged, however, that the ownership of urban property was difficult to justify and, therefore, most would pass to the state. All were warned that '... the people's justice will turn with severity upon those who expect to be able to live as parasites at the national cost, and realise no obligation of service in return'.⁶³ It was admitted freely that such a cleansing of liberal notions would involve 'conditioning' individuals to accept new fascist values and educating the 'bourgeois mind' out of existence. This, it was suggested, would represent a real revolution – 'a revolution destroying the bourgeois concepts of monetary success and other meritricious values in order to harness the devotion of the people to the building up of a society without class barriers in which every individual instinctively harmonises his own interests within the confines of the general community interest'.⁶⁴

But simply attacking liberalism and the duplicity of liberal regimes was not in itself sufficient to produce automatically a revolutionary perspective. Indeed, fascism is the very proof of this assertion for the BUF's programme and analysis, despite these elements of radicalism, were deeply tainted by reactionary attitudes. The most fundamental of these concerned its elitism and traditionalism. There were frequent expressions of contempt for the concept of equality which was dismissed as '... sentimental and unscientific...' on the grounds that 'the inheritance of mental and physical characteristics, the existence of insuperable differences of environment, the laws of biology and psychology make it impossible that there should exist any real equality between men'.⁶⁵ Thus, as one moved upwards through the echelons of the corporate structure, each rise would have brought a corresponding increase in

privilege as well as power. Unlike the rough pyramid of liberal-democratic society, the corporate state was designed as a near perfect geometric figure held together by the authority of the party. At the summit of this human pyramid was to be that ancient symbol of institutionalised elitism: the monarch.

The sycophantic reverence with which the BUF beheld the monarchy was without limit. As well as being the embodiment of Britain's glorious heritage the crown was also considered to be the visible symbol of Britain's imperial splendour. 'He who insults the British Crown thus insults the history and achievement of the British race', it was asserted, and it was promised that a fascist government would ensure that the monarchy received the loyal support and allegiance of every subject. Therefore, all speeches by '... the snarling mongrels of Press, pulpit or politics',⁶⁶ which insulted or slandered the monarchy would be prohibited. This unquestioning acceptance of the institution of the monarchy went beyond a mere devotion to any individual occupant of this high office. Edward VIII was considered an ideal monarch for a fascist state, and at the time of his abdication there was even a BUF-sponsored 'Save the King' campaign which was spectacular only in its lack of impact. Despite its expressions of disapproval as to the manner in which Edward was forced to renounce his throne, the BUF was quick to pledge its complete loyalty to the brother who succeeded him and thereby assisted the junta of politicians who had forced the abdication.⁶⁷ For fascism, individuals, even kings, were dispensable but the institution of monarchy was paramount, for monarchs throughout history had personified, and thereby legitimised, societies founded upon inequality.

The only source of traditional authority (and, therefore, agent of inequality) greater than kings was that of gods. Here, too, the BUF was keen to underpin its elitist society with the blessing of that most eminent of all elitist institutions, the orthodox church. Mosley in effect admitted as much when he justified the BUF's belief in '... complete religious toleration' on the grounds that religion was welcome within the corporate state because it '... inculcates a sense of service and of spiritual values, for service and the values of the spirit are the essence of Fascism'.⁶⁸ Unlike communism, which tried to eradicate religion, fascism, it was claimed, would facilitate the fusing of the religious and secular spheres of the nation and thereby establish a 'higher harmony' between church and state. Amongst the pledges given by the BUF in this area were political representation for leading clerics within the Senate, the state maintenance of religious schools for those who demanded them, and even the assurance that 'atheism will perish under British Union; Christianity will find encouragement and security, in which it may prosper to the glory of its Creator'.⁶⁹

Another major area of elitism within the proposed corporate state

was that of education. Private and higher education were to be available for the privileged few, whilst for the majority, primary school would be followed by training in manual skills in preparation for the labour market. This brutal and wasteful system was designed '... to make citizens worthy of Fascist civilisation'.⁷⁰ Its numerous inequitable aspects cannot be justified by comparison with the injustices of the system which it would have replaced. The BUF's education policy, like the rest of its programme, was a theoretical document with the opportunity to shape and fashion any structure which was considered desirable. That it proposed an increase in the degree of elitism within a system already rotten with privilege gives further proof of the complete lack of egalitarianism within fascist ideology. It also illustrated the extent to which fascism feared education and logical reasoning which could expose its inconsistencies. All theory was regarded with suspicion, and those who dealt in it were considered particularly suspect as it rendered them especially vulnerable to the 'communist germ'.⁷¹ Those intellectuals who criticised the corporate state would be considered 'diseased', as would those who spent their time 'lolling among the cushions of their own philosophy titillating themselves with the needles of refined sensation'.⁷² Those thus afflicted were warned that '... if you be diseased ... you cannot expect to flourish under fascism'.⁷³ Although from the mid-1930s onwards greater efforts were made to win the support of intellectuals, fascism remained primarily an anti-intellectual ideology.

In the sphere of international affairs elitism provided an important justification for the overt imperialism necessary for the establishment of an autarchic empire within which the party's economic policy could be implemented. Although it was often claimed that fascist imperialism would be more enlightened than that of *laissez-faire* capitalism, its ultimate justification, like that of previous generations, was based on conquest – a proof that the colonising power is more efficient in the science of mass killing than is the subject people. Like generations of past imperialists Mosley mouthed platitudes concerning the rights of the victims of the urge to colonise, whilst accepting without question that '... to stultify the white man's genius in order to preserve native "rights" ... is an historical absurdity and a British tragedy. Therefore, consciously and determinedly we develop for the benefit of the British people the territory which the energy of the British people has made their own'.⁷⁴ Thus, despite promises to save the natives from the worst excesses of international capitalism and allow only British capitalism to exploit them, the BUF's conception of imperialism was almost identical to that of the reactionary right which would have concurred entirely with the BUF's belief that '... the people of Britain are temperamentally and spiritually fitted to assume the leadership of the nations of the earth'.⁷⁵

Fascism was also a doctrine of profound anti-feminism, and this too illustrated another area of its reactionary traditionalism. As already suggested, fascism identified with concepts traditionally linked to male virility, such as heroism, action and struggle. Women were considered as precious objects requiring protection from white slavers, the 'Black Peril', and above all from those who, to the eternal shame of their entire sex, wished in some way to 'imitate men'.⁷⁶ At the root of this attitude to women was an attempt to demarcate clearly between the roles of each sex within society. The problem, of course, with such delineation lies in the degree of choice given to each of the groups to whom particular functions are ascribed. When the BUF advocated the training of women in spheres of life where they could best utilise their 'special gifts', and 'specific qualities as women'⁷⁷ it was referring to qualities which did not exist objectively but which were perceived to be important, usually by men. The most important and obvious of these 'special gifts' was the ability of women to become impregnated by men. Thus, when fascism declared that it would create a race of virile men and feminine women, it meant in reality a situation where men would aspire to heroism, leadership and struggle, and where women would be mothers. In an attempt to make this consignment of women to the nether regions of domesticity more palatable to its victims, its status, on paper at least, was to be raised. 'Motherhood and the joy of carrying on the race ...' was projected as the 'fruition' of '... young womanhood', and it promised that within the corporate state this 'fruition' would be duly acknowledged as '... one of the greatest of human and racial functions, to be honoured and encouraged'.⁷⁸ Those thus persuaded to devote their lives to domesticity, which was where the 'true interest' of women was perceived to lie, would be rewarded through the recognition of the function of 'home-maker' as a 'profession'.⁷⁹ As such they would be represented politically, through their own corporation, which was referred to variously as the 'Women's Corporation', the 'Home Corporation', the 'Domestic Corporation', or 'a corporation of Motherhood', where women would '... vote as wives and mothers'.⁸⁰

To those recalcitrant enough to reject this natural feminine sphere, the BUF promised the freedom to pursue any chosen career on the basis of equal pay with their male counterparts. There were also promises of maternity leave, and a legal obligation for all employers of female labour to ensure the provision of day nurseries. There was no commitment, however, to combat sexual discrimination in employment, without which existing prejudice, combined with a desire to shirk the financial burdens of maternity leave and nursery provision, would have led employers to give jobs to men rather than women. Therefore, by advocating a programme of full economic rights for employed women, without any genuine commitment to sexual equality, the BUF was proposing

the mass unemployment of women. It was even admitted that many women would be displaced from the labour market through this process, but these, it was argued, could marry and help propagate the race. Despite their enforced economic dependency upon men, married women would experience a new type of freedom based upon material comfort and security, it was claimed, as the increased wages of husbands ensured that never again would wives be forced to poverty to renounce their collective destiny of motherhood. For it was '... woman's birthright to be a wife and mother, not a breadwinner'.⁸¹

Thus the BUF's superficial advocacy of women's economic rights did not contradict its anti-feminism. After being driven from the labour market women would have found themselves subjected to increased subordination, whilst fascism received the credit for the subsequent fall in male unemployment. Thereafter, forced to fulfil a traditional male-oriented stereotype, women within a fascist Britain would have been reduced to a state of servitude greater than that which already existed.

The BUF also concurred with traditional reactionary attitudes towards permissiveness, with frequent complaints that Britain had become a den of vice and sexual exhibitionism. The press was attacked for '... its mendacity, trivialities and photographs more calculated to attract attention to the bodies of females than to their faces',⁸² and the Sunday papers in particular were considered to '... revel in rape, delve into every unsavoury detail they can find, sensationalise seduction and generally flagellate their readers' imagination into a mass orgy of shady sexuality'.⁸³ Modern music was attacked as '... hot-rhythm jungle music tainted with the neurosis of the night-club',⁸⁴ and films were condemned as a collection of '... salacious bedroom comedies, putrescent leg shows, horrifying 'gangster' melodramas and suggestive farce. . . .'⁸⁵ Art, too, was castigated as '... an orgy of morbid and distorted imaginings' produced by diseased intellectuals who suffered from '... sexual maladjustment'.⁸⁶ The aim of these degenerates, it was claimed, was to destroy utterly the nation's moral standards by titillating the corrupt, and corrupting the innocent through luring '... millions of our decent English girls . . . into believing that exotic sex-appeal and so-called glamour are more desirable than motherhood and family life'.⁸⁷ Therefore the anti-social effects of obscenity were as undesirable as those of political subversion, and were to be controlled through very tight censorship of the media and the arts. The 'spiritual Bolshevism' which corroded the vital organs of the nation and excited '... unhealthy tastes and tendencies, . . . whereby, . . . the fairest of our girls display their allurements on films and in international dancing troupes, or "strip tease" in foreign cabarets before the multi-coloured scum of humanity',⁸⁸ would be thus destroyed, for '... in an age of health art must surrender deformity to the psychological clinic. . . .'⁸⁹

In regard to trade unions the BUF also displayed a reactionary hostility. Although their preservation as an integral part of the corporate state was guaranteed, their leaders were to be purged and any political affiliations were to be prohibited. The right to strike under fascism would, of course, be unnecessary owing to the regulative and conciliatory functioning of the corporate machinery, and to the statutory rights guaranteed to all workers. Rather than weakening trade unions the BUF claimed that their position under fascism, where all workers would be required by law to belong to their appropriate union, would be stronger than that which had been achieved in liberal Britain after a century of bitter struggle.⁹⁰ But the promise that unions would become a meaningful part of the decision-making apparatus of the state was a poor exchange for the sacrifice of the only significant weapon in the armoury of the working class: the right to withdraw its labour. Similarly, the promise of a completely unionised work-force was of no value, even if honoured, if the new unions were powerless to prevent the exploitation of their members. As the BUF considered that the existing trade union movement had been penetrated by '... plotters from Moscow',⁹¹ it would appear certain that union officials within the corporate state would have been either chosen or at least carefully vetted by the party. It is also likely that union funds would have been made vulnerable to arbitrary fines and confiscation by the government. The implications of such moves in regard to trade union independence are self-evident. Rather than destroying unions completely, the BUF planned to incorporate them within the coercive apparatus of the state from where they could be used to assist in the repression of those whom they were supposed to represent, by compelling their members to accept whatever conditions the government deemed necessary to impose upon them. Under such circumstances a trade union is worse than useless. It represents a menace to its membership whom it obstructs, deradicalises, and regiments. The corporate state would have created precisely such unions.

Thus the elements of radicalism, real or superficial, within the programme of the BUF were outweighed by attitudes (especially in regard to existing institutions), which ranged from establishmentarian to reactionary. Owing to its centrist position it is less than surprising that fascism contained reactionary and radical elements simultaneously. Its support for established institutions, however, should not be seen as evidence that as an ideology it belonged to the conservative right, but rather as an illustration of fascism's readiness to utilise many aspects of the regime which it sought to overthrow in order to exploit them for its own purposes, and through them to achieve a maximum degree of continuity. It reflected also the attitudes inherent within the predominantly middle-class leadership of the BUF.

In conclusion it must be stated that the oscillation and synthesis inherent within the BUF's programme were visible not only on the formal structured level of the planned corporate state, but also within the principles and values which underpinned it. They were the products of fascism's centrism and its consequent need to bind together elements of implacable mutual hostility. Invariably, however, they served only to camouflage rather than reconcile that hostility. As such, the BUF's programme gave an illustration of both the major strength and weakness of fascism. It has been argued that the BUF's support for traditional institutions damaged its revolutionary appeal.⁹² In overall terms, however, the conservative elements within the BUF programme were of great benefit precisely because they confirmed its credentials as a centrist rather than a revolutionary party. This in turn ensured that fascism had huge potential support. It was able to exploit aspects of the appeal of the left such as envy of the idle rich, the desire for a greater share of the nation's wealth, and the exposure of the faults and inhumanities of liberalism and *laissez-faire* capitalism, without necessitating its adherents to forsake the security of traditional values and institutions including patriotism, honour, monarchy, empire and the Christian church. It was not a revolutionary combination but it included many of the constituent elements of mass popularity and motivation. It is ironic that from this same combination arises fascism's most fundamental weakness: its unworkability. There was nothing within the programme of the BUF to suggest that it would have been able to overcome the intrinsic contradictions of fascism, or to have reconciled the class conflict inherent in capitalist society. Therefore the corporate state, had it been realised, would in all likelihood have amounted to nothing more than a euphemism concealing a reactionary capitalist dictatorship.

NOTES

- 1 *The Fascist Week*, 4–10 May 1934, p. 1.
- 2 O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, BUF, London 1932, p. 147.
- 3 O. Mosley, 'The philosophy of fascism', *Fascist Quarterly*, I, 1, January 1935, p. 44.
- 4 A. Raven Thomson: 'Fascism and the dialectic'; *BUQ*, III, 2, April–June 1939, pp. 50–8.
- 5 A. K. Chesterton, *Oswald Mosley: Portrait of a Leader*, Action Press, London 1937, p. 143.
- 6 *Action*, 24 April 1937, p. 9.
- 7 Chesterton, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
- 8 F. McEvoy, 'The disinherited of the soil', *BUQ*, III, 2, April–June 1939, p. 73.
- 9 W. E. D. Allen, *Fascism in Relation to British History and Character*, BUF Publications Ltd, London 1933?, p. 6. See also J. Drennan (pseud.), *B.U.F., Oswald Mosley, and British Fascism*, J. Murray, London 1934, pp. 188–90.
- 10 McEvoy, *BUQ*, III, 2, p. 73.
- 11 O. Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, BUF Publications Ltd, London 1934, p. 70.

- 12 O. Mosley, *My Life*, Nelson, London 1968, p. 325.
- 13 O. Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 4th edn, Greater Britain Publications, London 1939, p. 76.
- 14 Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 15 Darwin and Malthus; although the contribution of both (as was the case with many other philosophers whose work was used by the Nazis) was inadvertent. P. Hays, 'British intellectuals and the contribution to Nazism', in K. Lunn & R. C. Thurlow (eds.), *British Fascism*, Croom Helm, London 1980, pp. 173–4.
- 16 H. S. Chamberlain, *The Foundation of the Nineteenth Century*, London 1911, p. 261, as quoted in Lunn & Thurlow (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 180.
- 17 R. Gordon-Canning, *Mind Britain's Business*, Greater Britain Publications, London 1938, p. 8.
- 18 O. Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, BUF Publications, London 1936, Nos. 93, 94. See also W. E. D. Allen, 'The fascist idea in Britain', *Quarterly Review*, 261, October 1933, p. 226.
- 19 A. Reade, 'William Morris – Nordic', *BUQ*, II, 4, October–December 1938, p. 53. See also A. P. Laurie, 'Race suicide', *BUQ* IV, 1, spring 1940, pp. 46–50.
- 20 Streicher, *Die Sturmer* (n.d.), as quoted in *Daily Worker*, 16 March 1936, p. 4.
- 21 *British Union Constitution and Rules: general*, BUF, London 1936, pp. 1–5.
- 22 A. K. Chesterton, in the foreword to *British Union: Pictorial Record 1932–7*, BUF, London 1938.
- 23 Drennan (pseud.), *op. cit.*, p. 212. See also Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 24 Mosley, *My Life*, pp. 305, 319. In retrospect Mosley admitted that the BUF's obsessive pursuit of action brought it disadvantages as well as advantages: *ibid.*, pp. 292–3, 319.
- 25 *The Fascist Week*, 22–28 December 1933, p. 1.
- 26 C. R. Miller, 'Party-state or order-state', *FQ*, II, 3, July 1936, p. 424.
- 27 Drennan (pseud.), *op. cit.*, p. 281.
- 28 *The Fascist Week*, 19–25 January 1934, p. 8.
- 29 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 27. This principle was also enshrined within Mussolini's Charter of Labour. It was alleged by some fascists, however, that this did not mean the elevation of the state above the individual, because the state was only the sum of governed individuals within the nation. Therefore the welfare of the state and the welfare of its people were equal and synonymous. Chesterton, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
- 30 As quoted by H. R. Williamson, 'Democracy and Fascism', lecture delivered to the Fabian Summer School, 21 August 1939, reprinted in *BUQ*, III, 4, October–December 1939, p. 17.
- 31 The Italian Charter of Labour, as quoted by A. Raven Thomson, 'Why fascism', *FQ*, I, 2, April 1935, pp. 243–4.
- 32 O. Mosley, *Fascism in Britain* (n.d.), p. 5. Also Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 25–6.
- 33 Thomson, *FQ*, I, 2 (April 1935), p. 249. It has been suggested that because fascism attempts to heal society as a whole by appealing to potent energy sources (symbolic of the life-force) it performs a task not dissimilar to that of primitive witch-doctors, and that this may explain the importance to fascist movements of uniforms, which represent the masks of gods and demons in ancient rituals. The argument would appear to be deficient in credibility rather than originality. H. Rogger & E. Weber (eds.), *The European Right, A Historical Profile*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1965, pp. 25–6.
- 34 Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, No. 8.
- 35 B. Kidd, *Individualism and After*, Oxford 1905, p. 24, as quoted in Lunn & Thurlow (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 177–8.
- 36 Although there was no formal recognition or citation of the work of men like

- Kidd, BUF philosophers did use similar Social-Darwinistic arguments in favour of the corporate state. For example, Alexander Raven Thomson argued that '... individual units do not combine into an organic form merely for their mutual benefit. By the mere fact of organic cooperation they constitute a higher entity, which must inevitably have a wider and deeper purpose than the well-being of its constituent parts.' Thomson, *FQ*, I, 2, April 1935, p. 251.
- 37 A. K. Chesterton, 'The problem of decadence', *FQ*, II, 1, January 1936, pp. 60–7.
- 38 Mosley, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–9. Also J. Beckett, 'Fascism and the trade unions', *FQ*, I, 3, July 1935, pp. 334–5; *Daily Mail*, 29 January 1934, p. 10.
- 39 Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, pp. 42–3. Also *The Fascist Week*, 8–14 December 1933, p. 5.
- 40 A. Raven Thomson, 'Corporate economics', *FQ*, I, 1, January 1935, p. 22.
- 41 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 42 *Blackshirt*, 17 August 1934, p. 4.
- 43 Mosley, *My Life*, p. 332.
- 44 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 27. The phrase 'workers of hand, or brain, or capital' was a further attempt by the BUF to emphasise the idea of a natural coincidence of interest between those who produced against those who financed. For those who remained unconvinced as to the merits of the corporate state for all its alleged advantages, there was of course the familiar Mosley argument that it was the only alternative to crisis, national collapse, and the subsequent triumph of communism. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 45 Mosley's promise that the fascist government could be dismissed by a parliamentary vote of censure was contained in *The Greater Britain*, 1932 edn., p. 21. By 1934 it had been altered so that after the first general election, after fascism had achieved power, this right would have been removed, and only a direct vote of the people would have been sufficient to dismiss the government. *The Greater Britain*, 1934 edn, pp. 39–43. See also Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, p. 13; *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 72–3.
- 46 This second chamber offers an example of the inconsistencies of detail within the BUF blueprint. Initially Mosley seems to have conceived it as synonymous with the National Corporation, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–2, but later envisaged it as an altogether separate assembly, *Blackshirt Policy*, p. 74. As a general point, where details of BUF policy appear inconsistent the works of Mosley usually have been treated as authoritative, and where the inconsistencies occur between works by Mosley the most often expressed or logical view has been taken as official BUF policy.
- 47 Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, p. 18; *Daily Mail*, 29 January 1934, p. 10.
- 48 Initially Raven Thomson conceived of only twenty-three corporations, but later included a separate pensioners' corporation. The twenty-four corporations divided the population into the following basic categories: Agriculture, Fishing, Mining and Fuel, Iron and Steel, Metal Trade, Engineering, Printing and Paper Trade, Shipbuilding, Textiles and Clothing, Leather and Rubber, Glass and Pottery, Chemicals, Woodworking and Furnishing, Miscellaneous Manufactures, Building, Public Utilities, Transport, Shipping and Docks, Wholesale and Retail Trades, Banking and Insurance, Civil Service, Professional, Married Women, and Pensioners. *Fascist Week*, 20–26 April 1934, p. 5; A. Raven Thomson, *The Coming Corporate State*, Greater Britain Publications Ltd, London 1935.
- 49 *Fascist Week*, 27 April–3 May 1934, p. 5. The National Corporation was also referred to on occasions as the National Council of Corporations. Chesterton, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
- 50 *Fascist Week*, 4–10 May 1934, p. 5. Also Raven Thomson, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–12, 29.
- 51 Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, p. 18; *The Greater Britain*, pp. 33–4; Chesterton, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–50; *Action*, 31 October 1936, p. 4.
- 52 Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 20–21; *Fascism in Britain*, p. 4; and *op. cit.*, pp. 52–4.
- 53 Mosley, *Fascism in Britain*, pp. 4–5; *Blackshirt Policy*, p. 24; and *op. cit.*, pp. 55–66.
- 54 Mosley, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–8.
- 55 Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, p. 28. The increase of wages was to take the form of '... an advance upon existing wages and salaries ... thus retaining the element of service ...', rather than a free hand-out to the entire population as suggested by the Douglas credit scheme promoted by the Green-shirts. To avoid inflation this advance was to be entered into the employers' costs initially, and would only gradually be shouldered by them when increased demand had increased production, and this in turn had increased prosperity and made price rises unnecessary. A. Raven Thomson, *The Economics of British Fascism*, Bonner, London 1933, pp. 7–8.
- 56 Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 32, 55–7.
- 57 *Fascist Week*, 15–21 December 1933, p. 5.
- 58 Mosley, *My Life*, pp. 185–200.
- 59 *Fascist Week*, 15–21 December 1933, pp. 5, 7; Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* pp. 45–7; *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 35–6.
- 60 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 61 Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, p. 35.
- 62 Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, pp. 43–6.
- 63 *Blackshirt*, 16 October, 1937, p. 5. See also Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* pp. 57–8; and *Blackshirt*, 29 July 1933, p. 3.
- 64 Chesterton, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–7.
- 65 W. Joyce, *Dictatorship*, BUF Publications Ltd, London 1933, pp. 2–3.
- 66 *Action*, 23 July 1936, p. 2; and 15 May 1937, pp. 3, 11.
- 67 *Blackshirt*, 28 November 1936, p. 1; 12 December, p. 1; 19 December, p. 1. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 10 December 1936, p. 6; 11 December, p. 19; and *The Times*, 5 December 1936, p. 14.
- 68 Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, No. 10.
- 69 *Action*, 2 December 1937, p. 2. Also *Blackshirt*, 9 January 1937, p. 2; *Action*, 27 August 1936, p. 10; 29 October 1938, p. 7; *Fascist Week*, 9–15 February 1934, p. 5; 4–10 May, p. 7.
- 70 W. Joyce, *Fascist Education Policy*, BUF Press, London 1933, p. 2.
- 71 *Action*, 3 April, 1937, p. 6.
- 72 Drennan (pseud.), *The B.U.F., Sir Oswald Mosley, and British Fascism*, pp. 186–7.
- 73 *Fascist Week*, 5–11 January 1934, p. 8.
- 74 Mosley, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 75 *Blackshirt*, 26 March 1936, p. 2.
- 76 Reade, *BUQ*, II, 4, October–December 1938, p. 62; *Blackshirt*, 20 June 1936, p. 3.
- 77 A. B. Griggs, 'Reply to a letter', *FQ*, II, 1, January 1936, pp. 164–6; Reade, *BUQ*, II, 4, October–December 1938, p. 62; *Action*, 23 May 1940, p. 2.
- 78 Reade, *BUQ*, II, 4 October–December 1938, p. 62; Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, Nos. 31–2.
- 79 Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, p. 52; A. B. Griggs, *Women and Fascism*, BUF Publications Ltd, London 1935?, p. 1.
- 80 These various terms are to be found respectively in the following works: Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, Nos. 31–2; Griggs, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Raven Thomson, *Blackshirt*, 7 September 1934, p. 4; and Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy*, p. 52.
- 81 *Blackshirt*, 19 August 1933, p. 3; 7 September 1934, p. 4; 9 November 1934,

- p. 9.
- 82 J. McEvoy, 'Marxism, the doctrine of decay', *BUQ*, II, 3, July–September 1938, p. 15.
- 83 *Blackshirt*, 22 July 1933, p. 1.
- 84 McEvoy, *BUQ*, II, 3, July–September 1938, p. 15.
- 85 J. Rumbold, 'The dangers of our film censorship', *BUQ*, I, 3, July–September 1937, p. 52.
- 86 *Fascist Week*, 5–11 January 1934, p. 8.
- 87 *Action*, 28 March 1940, p. 5; 16 May 1940, p. 2.
- 88 McEvoy, *BUQ*, II, 3, July–September 1938, pp. 17–18; Rumbold, *BUQ*, I, 3, July–September 1937, pp. 55, 65.
- 89 *Fascist Week*, 5–11 January 1934, p. 8.
- 90 W. Risdon, *Strike Action or Power Action*, Abbey Supplies Ltd, London, 1937, p. 2.
- 91 J. Rye, 'God save the King', *BUQ*, I, 3, July–September 1937, p. 17.
- 92 G. C. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918–1939*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1978, p. 90.

Shape and form: the structural evolution of the BUF

We ask those who join us to march with us in a great and hazardous adventure. We ask them to be prepared to sacrifice all, but to do so for no small and unworthy ends. We ask them to dedicate their lives to building in this country a movement of the modern age. . . .

Neither to our friends nor to the country do we make any promises; not without struggle and ordeal will the future be won. Those who march with us will certainly face abuse, misunderstanding, bitter animosity, and possibly the ferocity of struggle and of danger. In return, we can only offer to them the deep belief that they are fighting that a great land may live.

O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*,
BUF, London 1932, pp. 159–60

**But we, actors and critics of one play,
Of sober-witted judgement, who could see
So many roads, and chose the Spartan way,
What has popular report to say
Of us, the Thespians at Thermopylae.**

N. Cameron, from 'The Thespians at Thermopylae'

The Fascist idea is born of a secret sense of self-superiority, coupled with a lust for power, in order to indulge in the desire to dominate others.

It is distinguished by an impatience of criticism (however honest, truthful or sincere) to the point of fanaticism that borders on insanity. . . .

It lusts to 'govern' absolutely and unchallengeably, even if it means by the ruthless use of the baton, the bullet or the hangman's rope. . . .

C. M. Dolan, *The Blackshirt Racket: Mosley Exposed*,
n.p. 1935?, p. 5.