# Breaking Boundaries: British Fascism from a Transnational Perspective, 1923 to 1939

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## Abstract

One of the most significant historical projects of the twenty-first century has involved the examination of important transnational circuits and interconnections. Historians have lagged behind many disciplines in accepting transnationalism as a serious form of investigation. Studying past events from a transnational perspective is important for historians. It challenges the assumption that ideologies, political cultures, economics, trade and societal organisation coincide within national boundaries and it allows us to analyse a party, group or ideology's strengths and weaknesses on a different scale and on a separate stage, thus potentially uncovering the less apparent when viewed from a single-country viewpoint.

This thesis seeks to identify and understand the role of transnationalism for the far right and fascism. Using a combination of mainly archival files, contemporary newspapers, pamphlets and periodicals, this study investigates the transnationalism of the three most important fascist movements operating in interwar Britain – the British Fascisti, the Imperial Fascist League and the British Union of Fascists. It uncovers previously unknown cross-border links and influences between British fascists and their overseas counterparts. Significantly, this is the first extensive investigation focused on the transnational British far right in the interwar period.

Chapter One is on the British Fascisti. It uncovers transnational influences that allowed continental fascism to exercise control over the movement, the impact of Italian Fascism and German Nazism on the Fascisti as well as its overseas activities. Chapter Two focuses on the Imperial Fascist League. It analyses the ways in which the Nazis and the Fascists impacted on the ideological make up of the League, and the transnational physical links and influences relating to the British movement. Chapter Three examines the British Union of Fascists. Investigated in this chapter is the relationship between the movement and Mussolini and Hitler as well as the Union's branches abroad and the organisation's imperial policy.

**Contents**

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When undertaking such a mammoth task as a PhD, it is impossible to do it alone. Therefore, I extend my sincere thanks to a number of people and organisations who have helped me to complete the journey.

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*For my late father, Trevor, who would never have believed it.*

## List of Abbreviations

BF – British Fascist

BNP – British National Party

BUF – British Union of Fascists

CINEF - *Centre International d' Études Fascistes*

CNA – Canadian Nationalist Party

CPGB – Communist Party of Great Britain

EU – European Union

FCC – Fascist Children's Club

GHQ – General Headquarters

IFG - Imperial Fascist Guard

IFL - Imperial Fascist League

IHRA - International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

NF – National Front

NSRP – American National States Rights Party

OMS – Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies

PCI – *Partito Comunista Italiano*

PNF *Partito Nazionale Fascista*

TUC – General Council of the Trades Union Congress

UM – Union Movement

## Introduction

The transnational far right is currently flourishing. The unexpected Brexit vote to leave the European Union and the right-wing populist Donald Trump as President of the United States has galvanised far-right groups across the world. In Europe, the rise of Trump combined with an increase in jihadi Islamist terrorism and an influx of refugees escaping Middle Eastern and North African conflicts has led to a resurgence of far-right activity. Politically, the far right has become mainstream in many countries, for example, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Finland, Denmark and Poland, and far right tropes (xenophobia, anti-liberalism, nationalism and social conservatism, among others) are gaining traction with European electorates at an alarming rate. The far right, therefore, is very relevant in today's world.[1]

## Literature Review

The far right is not a subject that has been neglected by historians. Unsurprisingly, given the political, social and cultural turmoil that swept across mainland Europe (and beyond) in the interwar years and the subsequent horrors of the Holocaust where an estimated 11 million people (including six million Jews) were brutally executed, scholars have tirelessly sought to highlight and explain the phenomena.[2] However, research has largely been conducted from a national perspective. According to Martin Durham and Margaret Power, the 'Right' has been seen as 'quintessentially a nation-

[1] Cas Mudde, 'The far right may not have cleaned up, but its influence now dominates Europe', *The Guardian*, 28 May 2019, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/28/far-right-european-elections-eu-politics], accessed 28 June 2019; 'Cas Mudde: No Western Democracy Naturally Immune to Far-Right', *The Global Post*, 18 September 2018, [https://theglobepost.com/2018/09/18/mudde-far-right-europe/], accessed 28 June 2019; 'Europe and right-wing nationalism: A country-by-country guide', *BBC News*, 24 May 2019, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36130006], accessed 28 June 2019. For scholarship on the rise of the contemporary right in Europe, see Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right* (London, 2019); Liz Fekete, *Europe's Fault Lines: Racism and the Rise of the Right* (London, 2019); Alina Polyakova, *The Dark Side of European Integration: Social Foundations and Cultural Determinants of the Rise of Radical Right Movements in Contemporary Europe* (Columbia University, 2016).

[2] Calculating the number of those who perished is a difficult task. The Nazis did not create a single wartime document that identifies the figure. Many agencies, including scholars, have relied on various records such as census reports, captured German and Axis archives, and post-war investigations, to compile these statistics.

bound phenomenon'.[3] Merlyn Trued's *What is Fascism? A Study in the Government of Austria* (1950) was one of the first in a comprehensive array of academic literature that examined fascism from a nation-centred viewpoint.[4] Following Trued, studies were, and continue to be, published on German, Italian, Spanish, French and the British far right.[5]

Included in the nation-centric model was the comparative approach. One of the first comprehensive overviews of the interwar European far right was Stuart Woolf's *European Fascism* (1968). In it, Woolf argued that 'regional differences were more salient than other criteria of differentiation'. Arguably, the most important comparative work on the subject was the extensive volume *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism* (1980) compiled by a group of leading scholars who identified the social groups and occupations that were most likely to support European fascist movements.[6]

In addition to nation-focused studies, other research projects have been undertaken. The 1990s were largely characterised by intense debates by scholars such as Roger Eatwell, Roger Griffin and Stanley Payne over the definition of the 'fascist minimum', while in the same decade academics focused on 'generic fascism', where a breakthrough finally occurred. From 2000, historians of the far right have mostly concentrated on the nexus

[3] Martin Durham & Margaret Power (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right* (New York, 2010), p. 1.
[4] Merlyn Nelson Trued, *Was it Fascism?: A Study in the Government of Austria, 1934–1938* (University of Oregon, 1950).
[5] Examples of national studies: William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960); Hamish Macdonald, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (Cheltenham, 1999); Stanley Payne, *Fascism in Spain* (London, 1999); Fabio Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism* (University of Toronto, 2003); Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester, 2000); Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Modern Britain* (London, 2000); Kevin Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism: The Right in a French Province, 1928–1939* (Cambridge, 1997). More recent studies include Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (Oxford, 2012); Helen Graham (ed.), *Interrogating Francoism* (London, 2016); Antonio Cazorla Sánchez, *Fear and Progress: Ordinary Lives in Franco's Spain, 1939–1975* (Oxford, 2010); Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy* (New York, 2013).
[6] Stuart Woolf, *European Fascism* (Indiana University, 1968), p. 7; Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet & Jan Petter Myklebust (eds.), *Who Were The Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism* (University of Michigan, 1980).

of fascism, political religions, totalitarianism and most recently on the 'nearly fascist' movements and ideologies, such as 'para-fascism'.[7]

However, a more recent change of direction that seeks to examine history from a different perspective has gained prominence: the transnational approach. Transnational study challenges the assumption that ideologies, political cultures, economics and societies coincide with national boundaries and allows us to analyse a party, group or ideology's strengths and weaknesses on a different scale and on a separate stage, thus potentially uncovering the less obvious when viewed from a single-country viewpoint. Unlike international history, which is usually focused on 'interrelations among nations, in particular at the political and strategic level', raising key questions that focus on war and diplomacy,[8] transnational history concerns the movement of peoples, ideas, technologies and institutions across national boundaries. It is important to note that transnational history should be understood as a perspective, rather than a new historical paradigm or master narrative. It does not attempt to undermine or even replace national history but instead aims to complement it. As Niall Whelehan explains, 'instead of choosing between local, national and transnational, new approaches explore how one relates to the other'.[9] The examination of important transnational circuits and interconnections has become one of the most significant historical projects of the twenty-first century. Writing in 2013, Simon Macdonald proclaimed that 'an elaboration of the scholarly purchase of the term "transnational history" is now well

[7] Main studies on the 'fascist minimum' include Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991); Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1996); Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–45* (London, 1997). For studies on totalitarianism and political religions, see Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison Of Dictatorships* Volume 1 (Abingdon, 2004); Maier & Michael Schäfer (eds.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison Of Dictatorships* Volume 2 (Abingdon, 2007); Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison Of Dictatorships* Volume 3 (Abingdon, 2007); Peter Bartley (ed.), *Catholics Confronting Hitler: The Catholic Church and the Nazis* (San Francisco, 2016). For more on the 'nearly fascist' movements, see Antonio Costa Pinto & Aristotle Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe 1919–1945* (London, 2014); David Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and Its Era, 1919–1945* (New York, 2016).

[8] Giles Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network* (Basingstoke, 2012).

[9] Niall Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History* (Abingdon, 2015), p. 1.

underway'. Another scholar in the field, Matthew Guterl, confirms that historians have now 'taken up the banner of [this] transnational inquiry'.[10]

As it stands today, transnational history has seen a wealth of recent scholarship. In 2009, Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier compiled the groundbreaking *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (2016), which has been identified as 'an indispensable resource' for the field of transnational history.[11] The 1200 page book consists of contributions from over 350 experts in transnationalism from 25 countries spanning across six continents and covers a broad array of topics. The previous year, *The Transnational Studies Reader* (2008) was published. This collection of articles challenged the isolationism of various fields within the discipline of history and demonstrates the ways in which a transnational approach to researching areas such as religion, politics and culture can defy the deep-rooted ideas of community, authority and identity. Other important contemporary literature includes *Connected Worlds* (2005) which provides fresh (transnational) insights into the past by historians of Islam and India, the Pacific and the Atlantic, imperialism and race, modernity and travel; *Organizing the Transnational* (2011) which focuses on politics, labour and social change; and the European cross-national focused *Comparison and History* (2004). A 'how to' book, named *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (2015), has even been published on the various ways to write and conceptualise history beyond the 'nation-state-container'.[12] In addition, universities across the world are increasingly designating sections of their history departments to the field of transnational study.[13]

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[10] Simon Macdonald, 'Transnational history: a review of past and present scholarship (January 2013)', *Objectives of studying Transnational History*, [www.ucl.ac.uk/cth/objectives/simon_macdonald_tns_review], accessed 2 July 2019, p. 11; Matthew Guterl, 'Comment: The Futures of Transnational History', *The American Historical Review* 118:1 (2013), p. 130.

[11] See back cover of Akira Iriye & Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.) *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke, 2009).

[12] Sanjeev Khagram & Peggy Levitt (eds.), *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections & Innovations* (Abingdon, 2008); Ann Curthoys & Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra AUS, 2005); Luin Goldring & Sailaja Krishnamurti (eds.), *Organizing the Transnational: Labour, Politics, and Social Change* (University of British Columbia, 2007); Deborah Cohen & Maura O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (Abingdon, 2004); Matthias Middell & Lluís Roura (eds.), *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (London, 2015).

[13] University College London, University of St Andrews, Freie Universität Berlin, University of Toronto, Yale University.

The study of transnational history has also begun to impact on scholarship relating to the far right. An increasing number of scholars whose research lies within this field are advocating, and even adopting, a transnational methodological approach to their work. Andrea Mammone, one of the most important scholars using a transnational approach to study the far right,[14] stresses the importance of a 'more rounded historical and cross-national analyses for the study of [the far right] political phenomena'. He asserts that a 'genuine "fascist wind" blew across interwar European state borders (and probably also outside them) […] A web of exchanges, transfers and adaptations then made this fascist galaxy'.[15] Matteo Albanese and Pablo Del Hierro claim that 'neo-fascist movements after 1945 cannot be fully understood without the transnational dimension'.[16] In addition, Federico Finchelstein considers fascism to be a genuine global-transnational doctrine with distinct redeveloping offshoots and transformations.[17]

Recent works have illuminated the field. The impressive *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational* (2012) hosts a collection of essays where the authors have attempted to evaluate specific issues in relation to certain far-right parties but also identify sets of common features shared across Europe. Mammone has analysed the transnational neofascist connections between post-war France and Italy, while Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe's *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (2017) looks at the transnational dimension to interwar European movements inspired by the early example of Fascist Italy. Other studies have examined transnational links that breach this narrow European block. In

[14] Mammone's work includes 'The Transnational Reaction to 1968: Neo-Fascist National Fronts and Political Cultures in France and Italy', *Contemporary European History* (2008), pp. 213–236; with Emmanuel Godin & Brian Jenkins, 'Introduction: The Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: History, Interpretations, Performance', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17:2 (2009); 'The Eternal Return? Faux Populism and Contemporarization of Neo-Fascism across Britain, France and Italy', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17:2 (2009), pp. 171–192; with Godin & Jenkins, *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational* (Abingdon, 2012); *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge, 2015).

[15] *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*, p. 15.

[16] Matteo Albanese & Pablo Del Hierro, 'A Transnational Network, The Contact between Fascist Elements in Spain and Italy 1945–1968', *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 15:1 (2014), p. 84.

[17] Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Duke University, 2010), p. 13.

*Transatlantic Fascism* (2010), Federico Finchelstein traces the intellectual and cultural connections between Argentine and Italian fascisms. Paul Jackson and Anton Shekhovtsov have coedited *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right: A Special Relationship of Hate* (2014), while Durham (2010) explores attempts by European and American groups to forge various transnational links in areas such as music, religion and Holocaust revision. Contributors to Albanese and Hierro' *Transnational Fascist in the Twentieth Century* (2018) examine Spain, Italy and the 'Global Neo-Fascist Network' and, most recently, Graham Macklin and Fabian Virchow analyse the international cooperation between extreme right groups in the post-war period in *Transnational Extreme Right Networks* (2019).[18]

**Fascism in Britain**

Politically, the far right in Britain has been an abject failure. When compared with movements on the Continent, most notably interwar Italy and Germany, their British counterparts seemed almost an irrelevance. This 'failure' can be clearly seen by its lack of electoral support. No candidate from a British far-right group has come anywhere near being elected to the UK Parliament, with only a small number elected at the local level to council and parishes. For example, in 1926, Arnold Leese, a well-known local vet was elected to the Stamford council in Lincolnshire along with another fascist colleague. In 1938, landowner and local British Union of Fascists (BUF) leader, Ronald Creasy, was elected after finishing fourth of five in a four-member constituency in Eye, Suffolk. In the 1940s, Mosleyite Robert Saunders was elected as an 'Independent' in Dorset. The post-war period saw the National Front gain a minute number of (uncontested) council seats. In 1969, two Conservative councillors on the Wandsworth

[18] *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe*; *Transatlantic Fascism*; Paul Jackson & Anton Shekhovtsov (eds.), *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right: A Special Relationship of Hate* (Basingstoke, 2014); Durham, 'White Hands across the Atlantic' in *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right*, pp. 149–171; *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*; Matteo Albanese & Pablo del Hierro, *Spain, Italy and the Global Neo-Fascist Network* (London, 2016); Arnd Bauerkämper & Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (Oxford, 2017); Graham Macklin & Fabian Virchow, *Transnational Extreme Right Networks* (Abingdon, 2017). Also, see Macklin, 'Transatlantic Connections and Conspiracies: A.K. Chesterton and The New Unhappy Lords', *Journal of Contemporary History* 47:2 (2012); Macklin, 'Transnational Networking on the Far Right: The Case of Britain and Germany', *West European Politics* 36:1 (2013); Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (New York, 2007).

London Borough Council, Peter Mitchell and Athlene O'Connell, defected to the NF for two months before returning to join the Tories, and, in 2010, John Gamble of Rotherham council defected from the BNP to the NF.

The most electorally successful far-right party in British history, however, is the BNP. The party's first triumph was a seat on the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' council in the early nineties, but their most fruitful spell occurred between 2002 and 2009. Beginning in 2002 with three council election victories in Burnley, the party increased its seat share. Their most successful period was 2008 and 2009, winning 55 local council and three county council seats, and two to the European Parliament. During the 2010 campaign, numerous commentators predicted an electoral breakthrough for the BNP; however, their vote share collapsed at the election. 'Success' was short lived and by the 2014 elections, the BNP lost all but one of their seats. Some argued that the British far right had been 'wiped out', others that it had been dealt a 'mortal blow'.[19]

However, the lack of political success does not mean that the British far right is unworthy of serious scholarship. The subject has attracted an abundance of academic attention which has illuminated the topic and shown that the British far right did (and still does) have more than a fleeting impact on the country's society and was not simply the 'political joke' it was commonly believed to be. In fact, such assumptions were challenged as long ago as 1975 when Robert Skidelsky's biography of Sir Oswald Mosley demonstrated that the British far right has a well thought out set of ideas and is not just a brutish movement that exists on the margins.[20] At the same time, earlier contributions from Colin Cross (1961) and Robert Benewick (1973) highlighted the

[19] Matthew Taylor & Hugh Muir, 'General election 2010: the defeat of the BNP', *The Guardian,* 14 May 2010, [www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/may/14/general-election-2010-fall-bnp], accessed 2 July 2019; Fiona Hamilton, 'BNP hopes of a breakthrough dashed as party defeated in target seats', *The Times,* 7 May 2010, [www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article2504152.ece], accessed 2 July 2019; Cahal Milmo 'Griffin's future in doubt as BNP campaign implodes', *Independent,* 7 May 2010, [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/griffins-future-in-doubt-as-bnp-campaign-implodes-1968206.html], 2 July 2019.
For the BNP's electoral history, see 'Electoral Performance of the British National Party in the UK (2009)', *House of Commons Library*, [http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05064], accessed 2 July 2019; Nigel Copsey & Graham Macklin (eds.), *British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 1–6; Matthew Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 1–4.
[20] Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975).

significance of political violence and the response of the social and political mainstream.[21] Skidelsky's work prompted scholars to undertake research on the British far right and to take it more seriously. Following Skidelsky, a wealth of work emerged, including comprehensive surveys of the British far right and studies attempting to understand its 'failure'.[22] A particularly interesting avenue of inquiry has been ideology. Richard Thurlow, for example, argues that a coherent political ideology existed behind fascist movements in Britain. He insists that 'fascism was and is an action-oriented movement, where the function of ideas is to explain behaviour more in terms of instinct than rationality'.[23] Although antisemitism has been an area of interest to scholars for some time, more recent studies have again begun looking at the matter in greater detail.[24] Historians have also extended investigations beyond fascist self-representation by viewing the British far right as a 'cultural phenomenon' and are currently analysing interactions between far-right cultures and mainstream popular culture in terms of values and beliefs, core ideas, group behaviours, music, dress codes, literature and texts. As Nigel Copsey and John Richardson (2015) point out 'unquestionably, culture was, and remains, central to the fascist dystopian project'.[25]

The study of the British far right has also been used as a prism through which to view other aspects of British politics and society. For example, Copsey's comprehensive

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[21] Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London, 1961), and Robert Benewick, *Fascist Movement in Britain* (London, 1973).

[22] See Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918–1985* (Oxford, 1987); David Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931–81* (Manchester, 1987); David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, 1996); *Fascism in Modern Britain*; *British Fascism 1918–1939*; Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005). For studies that examine the failure of Britain's far right, see Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism: the Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (Basingstoke, 1996).

[23] *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918–1985*, p. x; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London, 1998); *Fascism in Modern Britain*; Salvatore Garau, *Fascism and Ideology: Italy, Britain, and Norway* (Abingdon, 2015). For a counter-argument, see David Renton, 'Was Fascism an ideology? British Fascism Reconsidered', *Race & Class* 43:3 (1999).

[24] Daniel Tilles & Garau (eds.), *Fascism and the Jews: Italy and Britain* (Edware, 2011); Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–1940* (London, 2015). The earlier work was conducted by authors such as William Mandle, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* (London, 1968).

[25] Copsey & John Richardson (eds.), *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism* (Abingdon, 2015), p. 1. For work on the interwar years, see Julie Gottlieb & Linehan (eds.), *The Culture of Fascist Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London, 2004); for the post-war period, see *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*.

study of *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (1999, revised 2016) investigates the fascists' opponents. Julie Gottlieb illuminates the gender sphere by analysing the role of women in British fascism. Roger Griffin uses British fascism as a case study into the difficulties fascists face in gaining power while operating in unfavourable environments. Richard Griffiths and Martin Pugh explore the relationship between the interwar British conventional political right and the far right, noting the 'flourishing traffic in ideas and in personnel' between the two. Mike Cronin used British fascism's failings to call for resistance to extremism, which is allegedly characteristic of British politics. While, most recently, Daniel Tilles brings together British fascism and Anglo-Jewry with the intention of 'helping shed light on both'.[26] This research on the transnational nature of the British far right adds to this illumination of other aspects of British politics and society.

**Aims and Scope of this Thesis**

This thesis focuses on the underdeveloped sphere of the British far right from a transnational perspective. It will examine the British Fascisti, the Imperial Fascist League and the British Union of Fascists, described by Paul Stocker as 'the three major fascist parties during the interwar era'.[27] In fact, this will be the first extensive investigation focused on the transnational British far right in the interwar period. The goal is to uncover, analyse, and explain the transnational connections from abroad on the British far right and, in turn, the impact that the British far right had on their overseas counterparts.

The study will enhance historical scholarship threefold: First, it will add a much-needed cross-border dimension to the British far right, of the kind recent transnational studies on overseas far-right groups have achieved.[28] The vast majority of studies on the British

[26] Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke, 1999, revised 2016); Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movements* (London, 2003); Griffin, 'British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling' in *The Failure of British Fascism*; Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts! Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2005), p. 5; Richard Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsey, The Right Club and British Anti-Semitism 1939–1940* (London, 1998); Cronin,'"Tomorrow We Live" – The Failure of British Fascism', in *The Failure of British Fascism*; *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–1940*, p. 1.

[27] Paul Stocker, '"The Imperial Spirit"': British Fascism and Empire, 1919–1940', *Religion Compass* 9:2 (2015), Abstract.

[28] *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*; 'A Transnational Network, The Contact between Fascist Elements in Spain and Italy 1945–1968'; *Transatlantic*

far right, and the far right in general, have been nation-centred. This research will challenge the impression of this national uniqueness by transcending the borders and tracing connections and parallel developments between the movements and individuals at home and their multiple counterparts abroad. This approach intends to add a transnational dimension to the topic, therefore providing a greater understanding of the British far right. Second, by being the first in-depth study on the British far right from a transnational perspective, it will contribute an original and innovative area of study to the relatively new historical sphere of Transnational History. Third, it will uncover significant and unexplored aspects of the far right as a result, offering a more complete picture of the larger context of which it is a part. Furthermore, the investigation will cover three fields: historical, cultural and political. Therefore, it will extend our understanding of the significance of fascism/far right in Britain and beyond.

**Note on Terms**

The concept of the left-right political scale is a useful holistic tool for understanding the fundamental goals and values of political movements.[29] In *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (1996), Noberto Bobbio argues that, although its usefulness has been challenged from 'various quarters', the left-right distinction is crucial because it reflects the essentially antithetical nature and dynamics of democratic politics.[30] However, scholars contest the exact positions where parties and ideologies should appear on this spectrum. The left is commonly associated with egalitarian, social equality and anti-Capitalism, with Communism being the antithesis of capitalism, considered far left. Communism, which incorporates several schools of thought (including Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism and anarchism), is structured, in theory, upon a classless and moneyless society where common ownership of production and property is established. The right, on the other hand, is regarded as conservative, as defenders of hierarchies and tradition, and pro-Capitalists.[31]

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*Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945*, p. 13; *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right*; Christian Goeschel, 'Italia docet? The Relationship between Italian Fascism and Nazism Revisited', *European History Quarterly* 42:3 (2012)

[29] Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany; Origins, Interpretations and Legacies* (London, 1999), pp. 15–16.

[30] Noberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 18–37.

[31] *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, pp. 37,51,62 & 69; Steven Lukes, 'Epilogue: The Grand Dichotomy of the Twentieth Century', in Terence Ball &

Despite its frequent use by journalists and scholars alike, the term far right, otherwise referred to as 'extreme right' or 'radical right', is rarely explicitly defined.[32] In fact, Peter Davies and Derek Lynch in *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (2002) set their own simple test: 'could we avoid commenting on a particular movement in a discussion of far-right politics? If not, we will include it.'[33] The far right consists of those anti-socialists and anti-Communists who, in pursuing their goals, either reject or are indifferent to the principles and practices of liberal democracy and are not averse to using violence or terror. Common features often prevalent in far-right parties or movements include racism, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and the desire for a strong state. Fascism, a hotly contested concept, is included in the broader far-right spectrum but possesses its own unique characteristics. These include elements of populism, radicalism and anarchism. Unlike the broader far right that usually intends to defend the status quo, the quest of fascism is to create a new society. A further set of concepts that are genuine variants of fascism also join the far-right family. For example, 'para-fascism', 'proto-fascism', 'abortive-fascism' and 'crypto-fascism'.[34]

Scholars have debated the term 'fascism' for generations. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, fascism remains probably the vaguest of the major political terms. The most likely explanation for this is that the word itself contains no explicit political reference, however abstract, as terms such as socialism, liberalism, communism and democracy do. As one of the first works on Italian Fascism, written by German Social Democrat Fritz Schotthöfer in 1924, accurately observes 'Fascism has a name that tells us nothing about the spirit and goals of the movement. A fascio is a union, a league;

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Richard Bellamy (eds.), *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 602–626; Rodney Carlisle, *The Encyclopaedia of Politics: The Left and The Right* Volume 2 (London, 2005), pp. 692–694.

[32] Paul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (Abingdon, 2008), pp. 7–8.

[33] Peter Davis & Derek Lynch (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London, 2002), p. 7.

[34] *The Encyclopaedia of Politics: The Left and The Right* Volume 2, p. 694; *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*, pp. 1–7; Cas Mudde, 'The War of Words: Defining of the Extreme Right Family', *West European Politics* 19:2 (1996), pp. 225–248; Meindert Fennema, 'Some Conceptual Issues and Problems in the Comparison of Anti-Immigration Parties in Western Europe', *Party Politics* 3:4 (1997), p. 474.

Fascists are unionists and Fascism a league-type organisation'.[35] In fact, the term has probably been used less by its proponents than its opponents, the latter being responsible for the adjective's depreciation, which is most frequently linked to words such as 'repressive', 'violent', 'dictatorial' and 'brutal' or others that are used in a negative context. Yet, if fascism were restricted to terms such as these then Communist regimes, for example, would be included as among the most fascist, therefore diluting the word to an almost useless label.

However, defining fascism is no straightforward task. Political scientists, social scientists, historians and other scholars have wrestled with the term for more than half a century with many immersing themselves in extensive and exhaustive debates over the exact nature and core tenets of fascism. In fact, the definition confused the original Italian Fascists from the beginning, with the problem frequently being compounded by most of the interwar fascist movements not using the name for themselves, whereby nearly all Communist regimes and parties preferred to call themselves 'Communist'.[36] Indeed, one of the few uncontested statements that can be made about the word is that it was a name given to an Italian interwar political force headed by Benito Mussolini, although this model is referred to with a capital 'F' (Fascism) unlike the 'generic' type that is not confined to the Italian peninsula.

By and large, interwar research on fascism was confined within the Marxist-Leninist 'camp'. They were the first to offer a general theory of fascism, explaining its ideological roots, social-political and structural conditions that favoured the rise of fascist movements, their evolution over time, and the main characteristics and goals of fascist regimes. The Comintern meetings held frequently during the period debated at length and published definitions of fascism alongside the dangers posed by it. One of the earliest interpretations viewed it as simply a reactionary movement that surfaced when the Biennio Rosso threatened bourgeois-liberal order.[37]A decade later, a report by

[35] Fritz Schotthöfer, *Il Fascio: Sinn und Wirklichkeit des Italienischen Fascismus* (Frankfurt, 1924), p. 64.
[36] *A History of Fascism 1914–45*, p. 3.
[37] Amadeo Bordiga, *Relazione del PCd'I al IV Congresso dell' Internazionale Comunista* (5 November – 5 December 1922, reprinted in Milan, 1976).
Translated to English '*Biennio Rosso*' means the 'Red Biennium'. This was a two-year period immediately following the First World War in Italy of intense social conflict revolved around fears of a possible Bolshevik revolution, which rose from the economic crisis following the War. For a recent analysis of the subject, see Andrea Ungari, 'New

the Comintern declared that 'fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of financial capital'.[38] By the mid-thirties, 'fascist' was used extensively within the left as a debasing term for any movement or regime that encouraged the destruction of Marxism and any governments that represented it.[39]

After a period of stagnation that followed the first post Second World War decades, the 1960s saw the beginning of serious scholarship by non-Marxist historians. Several pioneering scholars from Western Europe and North America founded the *Journal of Contemporary History* which set out to establish the basis of comparative fascism as a distinct field of study.[40] Their work has had a significant impact on fascist studies and was to last a long time. A number of related but distinct areas of research were created from their works: 1) comparable historical analysis of fascist movements and regimes 2) focus on a distinct ideology and culture which appealed to the masses and 3) the debate over arriving at a consensual theoretical model of generic fascism. In 1963, one of the editors, Ernst Nolte, made an original and seminal contribution to generic fascism by creating a theory based on a history of ideas. Nolte saw fascism as the 'great anti-movement' based on a set of negations: anti-capitalist, anti-liberal, anti-bourgeois and most importantly, anti-communism. For Nolte fascism was

> anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvement of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet

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Italian Nationalism', in Lawrence Rosenthal & Vesna Rodic (eds.), *The New Nationalism and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2015).

[38] Georgi Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism' (2 August 1935) in *Georgi Dimitrov, Selected Works* Volume 2 (Sofia, 1972), available online at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm. This was the main report at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International.

[39] For interwar documents published by The Communist International, see Jane Degras, *The Communist International 1919–1943 Documents* Volumes 1, 2 & 3 (Oxford University Press, 1965) also available in full on Marxists.org. To see a more 'abridged' version of the documents, see 'Extracts from Comintern Debates over the Dangers Posed by Fascism' in Griffin & Matthew Feldman (eds.), *Critical Concepts in Political Science* Volume 1 (London, 2004).

[40] These were cultural historians George Mosse & Walter Lacquer, a German scholar who researched predominantly fascism and communism, Ernst Nolte, and historian of Modern Europe, Eugen Weber. The journal still runs today and is now edited by Richard Evans & Payne, and is available online at http://jch.sagepub.com/.

> typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy.[41]

Nolte's new theory had an immense impact on the scholarly community. British historian, Sir Ian Kershaw suggests that it was one of the most influential academic contributions of the decade.[42] As a result, Nolte's work generated such debate that numerous international conferences were held to discuss generic fascism as a concept, while collections were devised and significant academic literature that dealt with the subject as an intellectual phenomenon was published. A leading scholar of generic fascist studies, Roger Griffin, said Nolte's book considerably enhanced the research into the field and 'encouraged other academics to take generic fascism seriously as a subject worth investigating'.[43]

However, the proliferation of fascist studies that followed Nolte's book brought more confusion to the field than light. The 'all-inclusive' studies did illuminate numerous complex aspects of fascism, yet because of the excessive broadening of the sample undermined its generic value.[44] To add further confusion, many of the non-Marxist authors propagated their own unique definitions. This chronic lack of consensus made the process of studying generic fascism difficult for those students and academics attempting to investigate certain aspects of the subject, therefore causing many to avoid the subject altogether.[45] This resulted in requests from certain scholars to call a halt in

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[41] Ernst Nolte, *The Three Faces of Fascism* (New York, 1966), p. 20. This work was originally published in German as *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (1963) before being translated to English. Nolte later added 'positive' characteristics of fascist movements to his theory as well as the leadership principle (1968). Then, in his subsequent work, Nolte questioned whether generic fascism was a suitable subject for research (1977/1982).

[42] Ian Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship* (London, 1989), p. 24.

[43] Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London, 1998), p. 48.

[44] See, for example, *European Fascism*; Stuart Woolf (ed.), *Nature of Fascism* (New York, 1968); Paul Hayes (ed.), *Fascism* (London, 1973); Henry Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization', in Henry Turner (ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York, 1975), pp. 117–139; George Mosse (ed.), *International Fascism* (London, 1979); *Who Were the Fascists?*

[45] Griffin, 'The Palingenetic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology' in Alessandro Campi (ed.), *Che cos'è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerche, Ideazione editrice* (Roma, 2003), p. 99.

the search for a generic type of fascism, with one academic suggesting 'few concepts are more in need of Ockham's razor than fascism'.[46]

When it looked as if the search for a generic type of fascism was fading into obscurity, a breakthrough occurred at the beginning of the 1990s, and the situation changed beyond recognition, transforming the theory into in a new and more developed form. This 'remarkable revival'[47] was predominantly down to the pioneering work of, the then self-confessed 'maverick', Roger Griffin.[48] Griffin's *The Nature of Fascism* (1991) invigorated the international debate. He identifies what he calls the 'fascist minimum' – that is, the minimum conditions that a certain political movement must meet in order to be considered 'fascist' – without which, he claims, there is no fascism.[49] According to Griffin, 'Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.'[50]

This new ideal type model of generic fascism has become a 'mandatory' reference in the field, prompting scholars of fascism to argue their position in relation to the model and re-evaluate or reconsider their own definitions. Outlining a workable definition of fascism is a crucial element to this study. This thesis, therefore, accepts Roger Griffin's premise that all fascisms are (ultra)nationalistic and derive from their own unique permutations: 'Fascism is a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.'[51]

However, by so doing, the study considers ultra-nationalism and transnationalism not to be mutually exclusive. In fact, Griffin argues that the spread of the Italian Fascist model outside of Italy by default makes fascism more than a nationalistic entity: 'When political movements […] appropriated the word as a badge of honour it showed that some political activists at least were convinced that Mussolini's dictatorship was to be

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[46] In Gilbert Allardyce, 'What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept', *The American Historical Review* 84:2 (1979), for quote see p. 368; In Karl Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York, 1970), pp. 85–86, Bracher argued that the entire notion of generic fascism is intellectually invalid; Also, see Renzo De Felice, *Le interpretazioni dei contemporanei e degli storici* (Rome, 1970).
[47] As described by Constantin Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London, 2009), p. 21.
[48] 'The Palingenetic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology', p. 60.
[49] The term was first used by Nolte in the 1960s.
[50] *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 26.
[51] Ibid.

emulated as the manifestation of a positive new force in modern politics, one not confined to the Italian peninsula but supra-national, and hence 'generic'.'[52] In addition, each of the three the studies examined here appropriated the word 'Fascist' or 'Fascisti' into their name from the outset (until their demise); therefore, this scenario in itself goes a long way to adding the Griffin-type fascist tag to each case study.

What is transnational history? As Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor note, no consensus exists between historians for the term's definition as it is generally defined by the researcher's investigations.[53] However, a number of working definitions can be referenced. For example, Ian Tyrrell considers transnational history to be 'the international context of national action in all of its manifestations', while Akira Iriye suggests it should be viewed as 'the study of movements and forces that have cut across national boundaries'. Patricia Clavin argues that transnationalism is 'first and foremost about people: the social spaces they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange'. David Thelen offers a similar vision: 'scholars can use transnational movements and moments as sites for listening to people as they look beyond national borders to place in larger context and find solutions for problems they first discovered within their nations.'[54]

Although scholars seem to agree that cross-border flows is one fundamental aspect to the investigation of transnational history, this is not a comprehensive definition. Historian of nineteenth century America, Sven Beckert describes transnational history as a progressive approach beginning with 'the interconnectedness of human history as a whole, and while it acknowledges the extraordinary importance of states, empires, and the like, it pays attention to networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend these politically defined spaces'.[55] In other words, taken in the context of transnationalism, 'nation' is often understood as incorporating a variety of political

[52] *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 1.
[53] *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, p. xii.
[54] Ian Tyrrell, 'American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History', *American Historical Review* 96:4 (1991), p. 1053; Akira Iriye, 'Transnational History', *Contemporary European History* 13:2 (2004), p. 213; Patricia Clavin, 'Defining Transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14:4 (2005), p. 442; David Thelen, 'The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History', *The Journal of American History* 86:3 (1999), p. 973.
[55] 'Defining Transnationalism'; C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', American Historical Review, 111:5 (2006), p. 1459.

units instead of simply the nation-state. No single definition of transnationalism exists, so for the purpose of this study transnationalism is defined as the movement of people, cultures, ideas, technologies, organisations and institutions across either metaphorical or literal boundaries.

Transnational history is one of a series of terminologies that has evolved with the intention of investigating spheres that go beyond rigidly focused areas of study such as state or nation-centred history. However, debate exists around how transnational history relates to these other cross-border terms. It has been argued that comparative history concentrates on the similarities *and* differences of nations (although other units are also investigated) by asking which factors or conditions were largely shared and which were idiosyncratic and, most importantly for some, comparative history fails to even transcend the national boundaries and is still bound to national exceptionalism.[56] MacDonald suggests these reasons, among others, explain why comparative approaches have 'not greatly prospered across historical scholarship as a whole'.[57] Global history, as Tyrrell points out, tends to operate on a world level. He explains that Globalisation is focused 'on unidirectional activity [and] on the homogenisation of the world'.[58] Further work, pioneered by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, focuses on 'entangled' or 'crossed' histories, namely 'histoire croisée', and has been described as the crossings between different historical formations: 'intercrossing can be distinguished from intermixing'.[59] Cultural Transfer is also a cross-border form of study. MacDonald describes this concept by suggesting that 'not all cultural differences map onto national differences: but where cultural differences do exist, they imply processes of acculturation, whose proper study requires that valorized notions of national cultural paradigms should be corrected by attentiveness to the particular economic, technological, and human vehicles of cultural transfer.'[60]

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[56] See Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', *History and Theory*, 42:1 (2003), p. 41, and Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Going Transnational? News from Down Under: Transnational History Symposium, Canberra, Australian National University, September 2004', *Historical Social Research*, 31:2 (2006), p. 127.
[57] 'Transnational history: a review of past and present scholarship', pp. 5-6.
[58] Tyrrell, 'What is transnational history? (2007)', *Ian Tyrrell*, [www.iantyrrell.wordpress.com/what-is-transnational-history/], accessed 9 October 2019.
[59] Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45:1 (2006), p. 38.
[60] 'Transnational history: a review of past and present scholarship', p.6.

However, most historians have avoided setting transnational against other spheres of cross-border study and have argued that they should work in conjunction with each other instead. Although Tyrrell admits transnational historians generally separate their work from comparative history, leading scholar of German transnational study, Jurgen Osterhammel insists the transnational and comparative approaches 'complement one another', and cites a number of recent examples.[61] According to Beckert, cross-border studies 'are all engaged in a project to reconstruct aspects of the human past that transcend any one nation-state, empire, or other politically defined territory'.[62] All the various approaches, according to many commentators, are aligned side-by-side with transnational history and should be seen as, what MacDonald explains, 'having certain family resemblances', which involve the study of 'conjunctions and divergences, share various common points of reference, or have comparable goals'.[63]

Included in this study is the examination of transnational activity between the case studies and the British Dominions. By the First World War, anti-colonial nationalist discourse was already imagining itself as a nation. Therefore, the aspiration to 'national' was also, in effect, producing the 'transnational'. Furthermore, Australia, Canada, the Irish Free State, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa were essential self-governing states. After a campaign by the dominions, this was eventually made into law in the Balfour Declaration of 1926. The document declared the Dominions to be 'autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another' within a 'British Commonwealth of Nations'.[64] The parliaments of Australia, Canada, the Irish Free State, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa (and certain others) were no longer under British legislative control, and therefore free to make their own laws and govern how they saw fit. Leader of the Greyshirts in South Africa, Louis Weichardt, for example, stated that 'the vast majority of South Africans now think of the [South African] Union as an entirely independent state, sovereign in all matters both internal and external, whose connection to the British Crown and Empire is purely

[61] 'What is transnational history?'; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'A "Transnational" History of Society: Continuity or New Departure?', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York, 2009), p. 39.
[62] 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', p. 1445.
[63] 'Transnational history: a review of past and present scholarship', p. 7.
[64] 'Dominion status and legislation', *The National Archives*, [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/dominion-status-legislation.htm], accessed 11 October 2019.

voluntary'.[65] Weichardt claimed that even among English-speaking sections 'imperialist feeling is often lukewarm'.[66] Therefore transnationalism within the British Empire.

Furthermore, this thesis will adhere to the guidance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) concerning the spelling of 'antisemitism', as opposed to the often-rendered 'anti-Semitism'. The IHRA's concern is that

> the hyphenated spelling allows for the possibility of something called 'Semitism', which not only legitimizes a form of pseudo-scientific racial classification that was thoroughly discredited by association with Nazi ideology, but also divides the term, stripping it from its meaning of opposition and hatred toward Jews […]The unhyphenated spelling is favored by many scholars and institutions in order to dispel the idea that there is an entity 'Semitism' which 'anti-Semitism' opposes. Antisemitism should be read as a unified term so that the meaning of the generic term for modern Jew-hatred is clear. At a time of increased violence and rhetoric aimed towards Jews, it is urgent that there is clarity and no room for confusion or obfuscation when dealing with antisemitism.[67]

**Sources and Methodology**

While drawing on secondary literature, this study revolves mainly around primary research, much of which exploit underused sources. In particular, it focuses on the material published by the British Fascisti and the Imperial Fascist League. Collections of BF newspapers *The Fascist Bulletin, The British Lion* and *British Fascism* and the IFL newspaper, *The Fascist*, are housed at the British Library. Furthermore, in its collection on fascism, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford hosts a number of rare, yet invaluable, leaflets and pamphlets on pre-BUF fascist movements.

In greater supply are BUF periodicals, almost all of which are now digitised by a number of online research companies. UK Press Online, for example, hosts the 'Mosley Press Personal' package, which features complete collections of *Action, Blackshirt,* and *Fascist Week*. The British Online Archives house the 'The British Union of Fascists: newspapers and secret files, 1933–1951' collection, which includes *Action, Blackshirt,*

[65] L.T. Weichardt, 'National Socialism in South Africa', *The Fascist Quarterly*, October 1936, p. 567.
[66] Ibid., p. 556.
[67] 'Spelling of Antisemitism', *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, [www.holocaustremembrance.com/spelling-antisemitism?usergroup=5], accessed 28 June 2019.

*Fascist Week* and *The East End London Pioneer*, as well as government files relating to Oswald and his wife Diana Mosley.[68]

Mainstream newspapers have been consulted extensively for this thesis. Historical issues of *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* are among the many UK nationals that are widely cited. The digitisation of many regional and local newspapers of the interwar period by The British Newspaper Archive has provided access to another arm of the British and Irish press. The National Library of Australia's Trove online archive, which holds hundreds of freely accessible newspapers, has been an invaluable source for examining links between British and Australian fascists. Finally, because of digitisation, global newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Times of India* have also been sourced for this thesis.

The National Archives hosts previously classified material from the Home and Foreign Offices on fascism, much of which has been investigated for this thesis. The Security Service began monitoring the activities of the British fascists immediately after the inception of the British Fascisti in 1923. Due to the popularity of the BUF, MI5 increased its surveillance on fascist groups in the 1930s, with files also opened on British fascists operating in Italy and Germany during this period. Furthermore, German intelligence (Abwehr) officers operating in Britain were also monitored. During the Second World War, high-profile members of the BUF, including Mosley, were interrogated by the Home Office. For obvious reasons, the interviewers were particularly interested in the BUF's relationship with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, including the financial arrangements Mosley had managed to secure.

As this study is based largely around ideas, 'cause and effect' methodology will be applied to interrogate the sources and attempt to define what significant policies and ideas were national and what came from overseas and, in turn, what, if any, influence the British far right might have had on their counterparts from abroad. To approximate an adequate explanation of past events, some distinction needs to be made between background causes and direct causes. Lawrence Stone provides an effective example of

[68] www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/open/services.jsp; www.microform.digital/boa/collections/9/the-british-union-of-fascists-newspapers-and-secret-files-1933-1951.

this procedure. In his study of the 'The Causes of the English Revolution', Stone considers, in turn, the 'preconditions' that came into being in the century before 1629, the 'precipitants' (1629–39) and the 'triggers' (1640–2). By constructing this approach, he shows the interaction of long-term factors, such as the spread of Puritanism and the Crown's failure to acquire the instruments of autocracy, with the role of individual personalities and fortuitous events.[69] This multi-layered method will be applied to this study to analyse whether certain characteristics or policies come from historical and national traditions, or whether they are influenced by events or ideas occurring from abroad.

The two key concepts that form the research methodology for this thesis are 'fascism' and 'transnationalism'. Through examination of the movements' ideologies, each chapter will explain why the respective group investigated should be considered fascist as per Griffin's minimum: 'Fascism is a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'. However, based almost exclusively on primary material, the majority of each chapter is devoted to the transnational – defined as the movement of people, cultures, ideas, technologies, organisations and institutions across either metaphorical or literal boundaries – aspect of each group. Both concepts will be developed through the subsequent chapters by showing how they are being used to analyse similarity, difference and the nature of transnational exchanges across the case studies.

**Theoretical Implications**

In *The Practice of History*, G.R. Elton suggests the job of the historian is to search for the objective truth about the past through historic documentary records, which he argues as the ultimate arbiter of historical accuracy and truth.[70] Ideally, all sources need to be corroborated with other sources. However, this is not always possible, as every source has an agenda. In respect of this thesis, the materials published by fascists are nothing short of propaganda for their cause, while techniques used by MI5, such as blackmail and 'motives and machinations of those who worked in the shadows of the secret

[69] Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529–1642* (London, 1972). For further analysis on 'Cause and Effect', see John Tosh, *Pursuit of History* Fifth Edition (Harlow, 2010), chapter six: 'Writing and Interpretation', pp. 147–175.
[70] G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London 1967).

world', may have shaped sources.[71] As explained in *British Intelligence: Secrets, Spies and Sources*

> Information, whether deriving from human or technical intelligence, is seldom cut and dried, neatly packaged and sealed from doubt, and the murky worlds of double or even triple agents create a hall of mirrors in which nothing may be what it seems […] [Intelligence] has its limitations and can never give the whole picture.[72]

The theoretical implications for this study challenge the notion that the British far right (and the far right more broadly) is a 'nationalistic' entity. As Mammone explains

> the classic ultra-rightist doctrine has been often perceived to be indissolubly related with the concepts of nation and race. Parties and political cultures belonging to the right of the mainstream right might be consequently better analyzed only in given national contexts, as they are tied with some deep virtues of the fatherland and should be mainly seen as genuine products of single nation-states. Hence, these prominent features led some scholars to consider the extreme right as an exclusive national tradition, and profoundly different from similar foreign movements, regimes, and doctrines.[73]

This approach fails to acknowledge the connections and exchanges of far-right groups and individuals from different countries with each other, or, in other words, their 'inner universalist tendencies'.[74] By combining the historical dimension with the transnational lens of investigation, it allows us to depart from the parochialism that may limit the single-country focus without going too far in the opposite direction of overtly general conceptual models. Consequently, this method of analysis gives us the opportunity to observe, trace, describe, and eventually contextualise the new dimensions. As Mammone stresses, these commonalities, exchanges and transfers, are what 'creates transnational political webs, spaces, as well as ideologies'.[75] Put simply, the transnational element sheds a strong light on the roots and antecedence of strands of British fascism that is impossible to get from elsewhere.

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[71] Stephen Twigge, Edward Hampshire & Graham Macklin, *British Intelligence: Secrets, Spies and Sources* (Richmond, 2009), p. 16.
[72] Ibid., p. 17.
[73] *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*, p. 2.
[74] Ibid., p. 3.
[75] Ibid., p. 21.

**Current Research**

Research already undertaken has shown that the BUF had clear transnational connections.[76] Research already undertaken from the author's Master's thesis has uncovered an influx of funding for the BUF from both Mussolini and Hitler in exchange for support for Italy and Germany's aggressive foreign policy. In April 1935, MI5 reported that regular payments of £3,000 a month were made to the BUF by the Italian government. In return, the British fascists were to 'render the Italians all support in their power should this country attempt to interfere over the question of Abyssinia'.[77] Several months later Mosley bragged to his members that 'capital was to be made out of the Italo-Abyssinian situation'.[78] Until recently, although always rumoured, no evidence was available that Hitler also provided financial assistance to the BUF. However, Stephen Dorril's analysis of the diaries of Dr Josef Goebbels identifies that he had given monetary aid. Goebbels diary states that '[Mosley] has already had £2,000…£100,000 necessary. £60,000 promised. Must submit to Fuhrer'.[79] Dorril managed to go beyond the Goebbels diaries to the files of the Luxembourg Nazi Party, which he acquired through the former socialist barrister Frederick Elwyn. In them, Dorril discovered that the BUF received payments in francs through 'Agent 18'.[80] Dorril has also analysed Nazi connections with the BUF, especially following the 1936 wedding of Diana Mitford to Mosley, which took place at Joseph Goebbels' home, in the presence of none other than Adolf Hitler.[81] In *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s*, Claudia Baldoli (2003) charted the BUF's sizable activities within Italy: a subject too neglected; not least as the BUF and other British fascist movements had notable support from British expatriates overseas.[82] Gary Love's (2007) ground-

[76] Robert May, 'British Fascism: Imitative or Indigenous?', (Master's thesis: Teesside University, 2015).
[77] TNA KV 3/53, 'Fascist Activities in London', 27 April 1935. Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1934.
[78] TNA KV 3/53, September 1935. Evidence of Mussolini's funding was announced in 1945 in the House of Commons. For figures and more in-depth analysis on Italian funding of the BUF, see Gary Love, '"What's the Big Idea?": Oswald Mosley, the British Union of Fascists and Generic Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42:3 (2007), pp. 453–455.
[79] Cited in Stephen Dorril, *Black Shirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London, 2006), pp. 376–377. For figures and more in-depth analysis on Nazi funding of the BUF, see *Black Shirt*, pp. 376–381.
[80] Ibid., p. 381.
[81] *Black Shirt*, pp. 376–381.
[82] Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascism and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2003).

breaking work has investigated Mosley and his party's ideological influences, which shows that there was more than just the standard fascist fare in, for instance, Mosley's monetary policies. He concluded that, although the BUF was a homegrown movement, aspects of it imitated the Italian and German models.[83]

Indeed, contemporaries such as prominent BUF writer and former Ulster Unionist MP, W.E.D. Allen, and from the opposite perspective the famous novelist and socialist commentator, George Orwell, recognised that fascism was a pan-European and internationalist movement. Allen (1934) argued that 'Fascism as the expression of the European will-to-renewal is essentially a Pan-European movement. It draws its strength from the historic seats of European culture.'[84] In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell (1937) simply claimed that 'Fascism is now an international movement, which means not only that the Fascist nations can combine for purposes of loot, but that they are groping, perhaps only consciously as yet, towards a world system.'[85] Interestingly, as Love has pointed out, if these two men, so diverse in their thinking, perceived fascism to be an internationalist movement, it is puzzling why many historians struggle to do the same. Indeed, it is striking that only in recent years that transnational connections have become an accepted part of Fascist Studies, so heretofore nationally bounded in approach.

The Germans, like the Italians, probably believed that if they funded the BUF it might reduce British hostility to their expansionist plans. Mosley eventually struck a deal with the Nazis to set up and broadcast a commercial radio station to Britain from Germany. In 1933 in a bid to obtain 'Empire autarky', the BUF formed The New Empire Union, which consisted of fascist groups from Australia and Ulster. In the interwar period, British fascists looked up to the Nazis and Italian Fascists as a source of sustenance, ideology (to an extent) and financial aid. These dynamics shifted in the post-war years. The external props that were so valuable in the interwar period were removed, hence their transnational organising takes on a slightly different hue with regards to what benefited them directly. Interestingly, the initial years of the post-war period saw a

[83] "'What's the Big Idea?', p. 446.
[84] James Drennan, *B.U.F.: Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London 1934). 'Drennan' was a pseudonym for Allen.
[85] George Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 2001 /original 1937), p. 200.

reversal in positions; old comrades were attempting to prop up and support their defeated German counterparts and help them and their movements rise again.

Due to the attention that Mosley and his BUF received from scholars, very little research has been undertaken on the BF and IFL from a transnational perspective. Of the exceptions are James Loughlin and Paul Stocker. Loughlin has uncovered a number of links – ideological, class and personal – between the BF and Ulster loyalism. In so doing, he has demonstrated that research on the BF in Ireland provides an important insight into Ulster Unionism across the interwar period.[86] Stocker, by contrast, has investigated the BF's ideology from 1923 to 1926. In his research, he argues that the movement was a 'hybridisation' of domestic reactionary factors and Italian Fascism.[87] This challenged the common perception among scholars that the BF was merely an overt form of conservativism.[88]

In the post-war years, far right transnational discourse continued. Following the defeat of fascism and the subsequent discovery of the horrors of the Holocaust, the European far right was severely depleted. Public opinion was almost unanimously hostile. In *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (2014), Aline Sierp identifies the intense 'moral dismay and moral accusations […towards] Fascism/Nazism' that existed across Europe at the time.[89] In addition, many of the main players of interwar fascism were either executed, exiled or imprisoned, leaving a fragmented rump to try to reignite the flame of the far right. Therefore, a transnational impetus was pivotal if the far right was to mount a resurgence in Europe once again.

New ideas emerged during this period. 'What Europe is' became a hot topic in far-right circles. Following his internment during the war, Mosley formed a new party, the Union Movement, which argued for a single nation-state that would span the continent of

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[86] James Loughlin, 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', *Immigrants & Minorities* 32:1 (2014).
[87] Paul Stocker, 'Importing Fascism: Reappraising the British Fascisti, 1923–1926', *Contemporary British History* 30:3 (2016), p. 331.
[88] *Fascist Movement in Britain*, pp. 28–29; Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (London, 2010), p. 86; *A History of Fascism*, p. 223; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 55; *Black Shirt*, p. 196; *British Fascism 1918–39*, p. 64; David Baker, *Extreme Right in the 1920s* in *The Failure of Fascism*; Barbara Farr, *The Development and Impact of Right-wing Politics in Britain, 1903–1932* (New York, 1987), p. 60.
[89] Aline Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 1.

Europe – 'Europe a Nation'. According to Graham Macklin, Mosley's 'drive and determination to disseminate this ideal represented a concerted effort to revise and relocate Fascist and Nazi thought within the context of a post-Fascist Europe'.[90] The leader of the National Socialist Movement, Colin Jordan, also embraced this tendency by co-establishing the World Union of National Socialists with the American Nazi Party leader, George Lincoln Rockwell, and adopted the title 'World Führer', as Jackson and Shekhovtsov, and Frederick Simonelli have explained.[91] In the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of white power music spread far beyond Britain's shores, while Holocaust Denial remained a constant cross-border theme throughout the post-war period.[92]

Modern online communications have undoubtedly aided cross-national links.[93] In 2007, Europol released a report indicating a tendency of the European far right to increasingly organise cross-nationally.[94] In 'Radical Right Wing Mobilization and Discourses on Europe in Time of Crisis', Manuela Caiani illustrates how far-right groups have utilised 'technological globalization' to build relationships with their overseas counterparts and keep abreast of international activities. Interestingly, her research shows that the British far-right rank joint second (with Austria, and only behind the US) as 'the most internationalized', with half of the organisations active internationally.[95] This has

[90] *Very Deeply Dyed in Black*, p. 78.
[91] *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right*; Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London, 2017), pp. 141–146; Frederick Simonelli, *American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party* (University of Illinois, 1999).
[92] *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right*; Mark Hobbs, '"The Men Who Rewrite History": Holocaust Denial and the British Far Right from 1967' in Nigel Copsey and Matthew Worley (eds.), *Tomorrow Belongs to Us: The British Far Right since 1967* (London, 2018); Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (New Brunswick, 2016); Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, 1994); Lipstadt, *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* (New York, 2017); Kenneth Stern, *Holocaust Denial* (New York, 1993).
[93] Chris Atton,'Far-right media on the internet: culture, discourse and power', *New Media and Society* 8:4 (2006); Heather Kettrey & Whitney Laster, 'Staking Territory in the "World White Web": An Exploration of the Roles of Overt and Color-Blind Racism in Maintaining Racial Boundaries on a Popular Web Site', *Social Currents* 1:3 (2014); Claudia Alvares & Peter Dahlgren, 'Populism, Extremism and Media: Mapping an Uncertain Terrain', *European Journal of Communication* 31:1 (2016).
[94] Europol (2007), *Report on EU Terrorism Situation and Trend*, TE-SAT, p. 7, [www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/tesat2007_1.pdf], accessed 2 July 2019.
[95] Manuela Caiani, 'Radical Right Wing Mobilization and Discourses on Europe in Time of Crisis', p. 12, Innovative Democracy WP Series, Osterreichische

become a useful tool for further forging a sense of common identity amongst activists, resulting in the far right becoming more transnational than ever before.[96]

**Chapter Outline**

**Chapter One: The British Fascisti**

Chapter One begins by building on historians' work on the BF's ideology. It challenges the common perception by historians that the BF was little more than an ultra-conservative movement. By using Griffin's fascist minimum, it argues that Britain's first fascist movement, formed in the months following the March on Rome and founded by war hero of the First World War, Rotha Lintorn-Orman, was essentially fascist. Attention then turns to uncovering transnationals aspects of the BF. First to be explored is the transnational influences that continental fascism exercised over the BF: Italian Fascism in particular and German Nazism influenced the British movement significantly. Attention then turns to the BF's quest to become an internationalist movement. The perceived threat of a Bolshevik uprising led the BF to prioritise the defence of the British Empire. BF branches were formed in a number of British overseas territories. Attention is given to each one, but the main focus of this section is on its branches in Australia and Ireland, which were undoubtedly the BF's greatest transnational 'successes'.

**Chapter Two: The Imperial Fascist League**

Chapter Two is divided into two sections. Part one analyses the ideological makeup of the IFL, which there can be little doubt fits in Griffin's fascist minimum. Beginning with its formative years in which an idiosyncratic mix of Mussolini's Fascism and Leese's own fascist philosophy – anti-democratic, anti-Communist, ultra-nationalist and White supremacist – dominated IFL thought. It then turns its attention to the considerable impact Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party had on the British movement. Part

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Forschungsgemeinschaft, Austrian Research Association, Vienna, Austria (2014), [www.oefg.at/oeffentlichkeit/publikationen/online/zukunft-der-demokratie/], accessed 2 July 2019.

[96] Caiani & Linda Parenti, *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet* (Farnham, 2013); 'Radical Right Wing Mobilization and Discourses on Europe in Time of Crisis'; Stuart Wright, 'Strategic framing of racial-nationalism in North America and Europe: An Analysis of a Burgeoning Transnational Network', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21:2 (2009); Phyllis Gerstenfeld, Diana Grant & Chau-Pu Chiang, 'Hate Online: A Content Analysis of Extremist Internet Sites', *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy* 3:1 (2003).

two focuses on transnational physical links and influences relating to the IFL. Most notably, the relationship between the IFL and the Nazi Party. The section also investigates the question of whether the IFL favoured the Third Reich over its own nation, concluding that it did.

**Chapter Three: The British Union of Fascists**

By far the most popular and most significant of the interwar British movements investigated in this thesis was the British Union of Fascists led by aristocrat, war hero and experienced politician Sir Oswald Mosley. This chapter begins by analysing Mosley's pre-BUF years, in which he had a history of cross-border activities and how he flirted with fascism before finally created his own fascist party in November 1932. Thereafter, the myriad of transnational activity undertaken by the BUF is examined. First to be explored is its vision a corporate state, which was significantly influenced by the Italian system. Attention then turns to the ways in which Mosley courted Mussolini from the outset in an attempt to not only create solidarity and brotherhood between the Italian Fascists and the BUF but also to extract financial support. Following this, BUF branches abroad – most notably in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany – and BUF imperial policy, which included forming The New Empire Union, are investigated. Finally, the considerable impact Hitler and his Nazi movement had on the BUF is examined.

The aforementioned chapters that examine British fascism through a transnational lens will enhance our understanding of the phenomena and expand the theoretical and empirical horizons relating to British fascism. The conclusion will reflect upon what all these newly uncovered transnational links add to our understanding of British fascism.

## Chapter One: 'History proved that the right people were in a minority always, but the difficulty lay in finding which minority held them.'[1]

The British Fascisti was a movement based on fear of communism. Its transnationalism reflected this. The belief that communism would destroy the British Empire and conquer Britain if it did not intervene was the driving force behind Britain's first fascist movement. Fascism's defeat of Communism in Italy inspired Rotha Lintorn-Orman to create the BF – the Italian-sounding name 'British Fascisti' is perhaps the most obvious indication of how inspirational the Italian model was to the forming of the BF. However, the influence of Italian Fascism did not stop here.

The influence of continental fascism on the BF was considerably more ideological than physical. The BF considered itself the British version of the Italian Fascists. Besides the name, the BF copied the Fascist salute, Fascist violence and military tactics – the Pollitt case, which was inspired by the abduction of the Italian anti-fascist Giacomo Matteotti a short time earlier, is the most notable example – Fascist-inspired revolutionary undertones and later corporatism became central to the movement's ideology. As a result of the surge in popularity of the Nazi Party in Germany in the early 1930s, the BF, in attempt to attract more support at home, adopted rabid antisemtism. Italian Fascism and, to a lesser extent, Nazi Germany had a significant impact on BF ideology.

The transnationalism between the BF and Fascism and Nazism was almost entirely one-way. Despite regular attempts by the BF to build relations with the continental fascists, neither Italy nor Germany were interested in developing a 'brotherhood' with the British movement. The BF did make acquaintance with one of Mussolini's main men in London, and a columnist named only as 'An Italian Fascist' wrote one article for the BF publication *The Fascist Bulletin*, while, in an article on British fascism, the Fascist newspaper, *Critica Fascista*, used various quotes from BF literature. An unconfirmed report suggested that the BF received a donation from the Nazis in its later years. Even if the report was correct, the amount was negligible – enough to purchase posters to put up in an area of London.

[1] Quote by the Archbishop of York at Huddersfield on 21 September 1929 printed in *The Fascist*, November 1929, p. 3.

However, what was not one-way was the BF's transnationalism. The influence of continental fascism on the British movement's ideology forms only half of its transnational activities. Ideologically and physically, the BF expanded its influence to outside of Britain. It was particularly keen to spread its tentacles across the Empire in a bid to prevent a perceived communist-inspired uprising. BF branches abroad, at least part-controlled by its London headquarters, were set up. The two most active were BF Ireland and BF Australia, which are the main focus of this chapter's section titled 'The Quest to Become an Internationalist Movement'. The movement spread patriotic and anti-Communist sentiments through various mediums such as sport, newspapers, children's clubs, entertainment, politics, rallies and violence. It is perhaps surprising that the BF managed to set up active branches abroad given its ineffectuality at home.

Research on interwar British fascism from a transnational perspective is still very much in its infancy. Of the many fascist organisations in modern British history, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) has doubtless been the focus of the majority of academic attention. A wealth of local and regional case studies have been written spanning the breadth of the country.[2] Yet, this chapter will do something different in turning to Britain's first fascist movement through archival sources, especially newspaper accounts, to integrate the issue of fascist transnationalism before it became an Axis endeavour. These paradoxical attempts at nationalist internationalism have become a rich topic of debate in Fascist Studies of late, with work by Salvatore Garau, Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe all showing that, despite claims of nationalist priority, many fascist movements learned from each other and, paradoxically, worked across borders to advance their 'palingenetic ultra-nationalist' message.[3]

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[2] Works examining this include Todd Gray, *Blackshirts in Devon* (Exeter, 2006); Liz Kibblewhite & Andrew Rigby, *Fascism in Aberdeen: Street Politics in the 1930s* (Aberdeen, 1978). No fewer than twenty local and regional case studies have been written on the BUF.

[3] Palingenetic ultranationalism is a theory concerning generic fascism created by Roger Griffin: Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), p. 26; Salvatore Garau, *Fascism and Ideology: Italy, Britain, and Norway* (Abingdon, 2015); Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939' *East Central Europe*, 37:2–3 (2010); Bauerkämper & Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (Oxford, 2017).

Alongside more localised work on the BUF in the 1930s, national membership and support have also been of scholarly interest.[4] Recent perspectives have focused on the party's ideology, its vision for a corporate state, its attitude towards antisemitism, its impact on British culture; while Mosley, the BUF leader and his 'thoroughly programmatic' fascist philosophy are all areas of interest to historians.[5] As well as being considered 'intellectually the most coherent and rational of all the parties in Europe', the BUF was by far the most successful, organised and important of the interwar far-right British movements.[6] It also had a respected and charismatic leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, who 'probably had the greatest intellectual gifts […] of all the fascist chiefs'.[7]

Perhaps for this reason, a group that has attracted much less historical analysis than the BUF is Britain's first avowedly fascist movement, the British Fascisti (BF), founded by war hero of the First World War, Rotha Lintorn-Orman.[8] Of the few historians who have written on the BF, most have provided brief overviews of the movement and have argued that it was a progenitor for the fully-fledged fascist movements of the 1930s and beyond.[9] The rare exceptions are Paul Jackson who has examined the religious dimensions of the BF, the Imperial Fascist League and the BUF, and Julie Gottlieb, who has devoted a chapter of her book *Feminine Fascism* to the 'feminization' of the BF, noting that

[4] Works examining this include David Shermer, *Blackshirts: Fascism in Britain* (New York, 1971); G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History* 19:4 (1984).
[5] Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–45* (London, 1997), p. 305. Works examining this include Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts! Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2005); Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–1940* (London, 2015); Helen Pussard, 'The Blackshirts at Belle Vue: Fascist Theatre at a North-West Pleasure Ground', in Julie Gottlieb & Thomas Linehan (eds.), *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London, 2004); Bret Rubin, 'The Rise and Fall of British Fascism: Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists', *Intersections* 11:2 (2010).
[6] Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London, 2005), p. 75.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Lintorn-Orman volunteered as a rescue ambulance driver. She twice won the Croix de Charité for rescues in Salonica, Greece.
[9] See, for example, Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 61–71; Robert Benewick, *Fascist Movement in Britain* (London, 1973), pp. 27–36; Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (London, 2010); Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918–1998* (New York, 1998), pp. 33–40.

> [m]emories of the roles played by women during the war were central to the definition of the movement and to constructing notions of self-worth. […] Right-wing women emerged from their war-time experiences with a renewed sense of patriotic endeavour.[10]

However, in recent years, James Loughlin and Paul Stocker have investigated the BF from a transnational perspective. Loughlin has examined a number of links – ideological, class and personal – between the BF and Ulster loyalism. In so doing, he has demonstrated that research on the BF in Ireland provides an important insight into Ulster Unionism across the interwar period.[11] Stocker, by contrast, has investigated the BF's ideology from 1923 to 1926. In it, he argued that the movement was a 'hybridisation' of domestic reactionary factors and Italian Fascism.[12] This challenged the common perception among scholars that the BF was merely an overt form of conservativism.[13]

In a separate article, Stocker examined the importance of the British Empire to the BF. The British Empire, he claimed, was of the utmost significance to the BF as it was evidence of British prestige and greatness. According to Stocker, the BF believed that the only way to prevent a Bolshevik invasion of British lands was for a fascist system of governance to rule Britain and her empire: 'The BF championed the British Empire as both the country's proudest heritage and completely essential to a British fascist state.'[14] Not only did this highlight the significance of Britain's overseas territories to the BF but also demonstrated how integral it was to BF ideology.

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[10] Paul Jackson, 'Extremes of Faith and Nation: British Fascism and Christianity', *Religion Compass* 4:8 (2010), pp. 507–517; Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movements* (London, 2003), p. 14.
[11] James Loughlin, 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', *Immigrants & Minorities* 32:1 (2014).
[12] Paul Stocker, 'Importing Fascism: Reappraising the British Fascisti, 1923–1926', *Contemporary British History* 30:3 (2016), p. 331.
[13] *Fascist Movement in Britain*, pp. 28–29; *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 86; Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1996), p. 223; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 55; *Black Shirt*, p. 196; *British Fascism 1918–39*, p. 64; David Baker, 'Extreme Right in the 1920s', in Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism* (Basingstoke, 1996); Barbara Farr, *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903–1932* (New York, 1987), p. 60.
[14] Stocker, '"The Imperial Spirit"': British Fascism and Empire, 1919–1940', *Religion Compass* 9:2 (2015), p. 49.

Scholars are unanimous in their assertions that the British Empire played a major role in interwar British fascist thought. In fact, John Brewer has argued that fascism only appeared in Britain as a bulwark to the breakup of its Empire, which was under threat by growing colonial demands for self-government.[15] Thomas Linehan has also suggested that the threat to 'imperial security' was a key feature in the emergence of British fascism.[16] More recently, scholars have examined the attitudes of a number of fascist groups in Britain towards the Empire during the interwar period, the BUF commanding the most attention.[17]

This chapter adds to the growing field of transnational scholarship on the British Fascisti. Although ideology will be explored, most of the chapter will be devoted to transnational physical links and activities, the majority of which have not been written about until now, most notably, in its quest for world expansion, the BF's overseas exploits. The BF was formed in the months following the March on Rome and founded by war hero of the First World War, Rotha Lintorn-Orman. This section begins with a discussion on how 'fascist' the BF was and will argue that the movement, considered by almost all historians as not fascist, is more fascist than is commonly perceived. Attention then turns to the BF's relationship with Italian Fascism and German Nazism and explains how Mussolini and Hitler's regimes influenced the British movement. The focus of the final section is on the BF's quest to develop itself as an international movement. Its greatest 'successes' were in Australia and Northern Ireland. Both of these contexts are explored as well as other less 'successful' endeavours abroad.

During the first decade of Mussolini's rule, the Duce and his Fascist party attracted many admirers beyond Italian shores. Following the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy in Russia in 1917 and the subsequent consolidation of power by the Bolsheviks, a real fear existed that this 'Russian poison' would spread across Europe.[18] In fact, the Russians founded and sponsored the Communist International (1919–1943), which intended to fight 'by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of

[15] John Brewer, 'Looking Back at Fascism: A Phenomenological Analysis of BUF Membership', *The Sociological Review* 32:4 (1984), p. 3.
[16] *British Fascism 1918–39*, p. 39.
[17] Liam Liburd, 'Beyond the Pale: Whiteness, Masculinity and Empire in the British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940', *Fascism* 7:2 (2018), pp. 275–276; Evan Smith, 'The Pivot of Empire: Australia and the Imperial Fascism of the British Union of Fascists', *History Australia* 14:3 (2017).
[18] 'Mr. Churchill On Fascism', *The Times*, 21 January 1927, p. 14.

the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State'.[19] The emergence of Communism demonstrated to the wider world the existence of an alternative to parliamentary politics. With much of Europe suffering from the carnage of the Great War, where many countries were on the verge of economic and political collapse, revolutionary sentiments were widespread.

Italy experienced widespread civil unrest following the war. Alarm at the prospect of a communist revolution engulfed the country. The *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Communist Party of Italy – PCI) was a section of the Communist International that accorded to Vladimir Lenin's vision, and it adopted the same programme and tactics as agreed at the Second Congress in Moscow in 1920.[20] In contrast, the Fascist movement in Italy led by Mussolini opposed the rise of the international far left. In a bid for power, the opposing sides fought bloody battles on the streets, before Mussolini masterminded a successful coup against the Italian government in 1922, resulting in his appointment as Prime Minister by King Victor Emmanuel III. The following years saw Mussolini brutally suppress his leftist opponents, leading to the eventual termination of the PCI in late 1926.

Of course, fascism's appeal was much wider than just Italy. The worldwide economic depression following the First World War caused many to lose faith in democracy and capitalism. Economic liberalism was deemed to be an outdated doctrine, while political liberalism was blamed for government inefficiency and waste, excessive bureaucracy, class egoism and encouraging party factionalism. Fascism, on the other hand, was virulently opposed to the concepts outlined above, its propagandists favouring nativist traditions and influences, where the nation came before all else, including the individual. The rise of communism added an innate fear that these 'weak' and 'fragile' governmental systems could not stand up to the challenge. Therefore, 'anti-communism' at this juncture helped underpin an emerging movement that, whatever its national differences, was united by this ideological theme.

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[19] Cited from Adam Fuller, *Taking the Fight to the Enemy: Neoconservatism and the Age of Ideology* (Plymouth, 2012), pp. 57–58.
[20] In 1921, the PCI membership was 43,000: John Riddell (ed. and translated), *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* (Boston, 2015), p. 12.

Mussolini's example inspired other like-minded groups across Europe into action, particularly in the countries closest to Italy who experienced similar social and economic upheavals, most notably France, Germany and Austria where nationalist movements were already in existence before 1914. For example, the writer for the French far-right monarchist political movement *Action Française*, Leon Daudet was enthusiastically applauded by a student audience when he claimed that *Action Française* 'would soon seize power by force and that then the purges carried out by the Fascists would pale in comparison with those in France'. Its youth wing, *Camelots du Roi* perpetuated violence similar to those dealt out by their Italian counterparts. While on their way to a mass meeting, three left-wing politicians were beaten and covered in tar.[21]

In the months following the March on Rome, the then largely unknown German Nazi Party sought a German-Italian alliance. Even then, Hitler was being spoken of in nationalist circles as Germany's Mussolini.[22] To riotous applause, the close associate of Hitler, Hermann Esser, declared: 'What has been done in Italy by a handful of courageous men is not impossible. In Bavaria too we have Italy's Mussolini. His name is Adolf Hitler.'[23] In an interview with the *Daily Mail* on 3 October 1923, Hitler, in an obvious reference to himself and a comparison with the Italian leader, was quoted as saying, 'If a German Mussolini is given to Germany […] people would fall down on their knees and worship him more than Mussolini has ever been worshipped.'[24] As Hitler's biographer, Ian Kershaw explains, 'The model of Mussolini's triumph in Italy now offered the opening for such ideas to be incorporated into the vision of national revival, a key aspect of fascism, preached by the National Socialists.'[25]

The Italian leader gave Hitler a role model.[26] Less than a month after Italy succumbed to Fascism, Hitler, with reference to Mussolini, reportedly said, 'So will it be with us. We only have to have the courage to act. Without struggle, no victory!'[27] As evidence of his infatuation, Hitler kept 'a monumental bust' of Mussolini in his home, and even wrote

[21] Quoted in Francis Ludwig Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism* Second Edition (University of California, 1980), p. 79.
[22] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (London, 2009) p. 78.
[23] Quoted in *The Rise of Fascism*, p. 80.
[24] 'A Visit to Hitler', *Daily Mail,* 3 October 1923, p. 9.
[25] *Hitler*, p. 111.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

to the Duce pleading for a signed photograph.[28] While in prison for unsuccessfully launching a Mussolinian inspired *putsch* of his own in November 1923, Hitler wrote of the Italian leader:

> I conceived the profoundest admiration for the great man south of the Alps, who, full of ardent love for his people, made no pacts with the enemies of Italy, but strove for their annihilation by all ways and means. What will rank Mussolini among the great men of this earth is his determination not to share Italy with the Marxists, but to destroy internationalism and save the fatherland from it.[29]

In Britain, as across the world, Italian Fascism was seen as a bulwark against the spread of communism. Many British statesmen lauded attacks on the 'Red evil', as they saw the Russian model as not only a threat to their country but a challenge to their own positions. In the 1920s, despite commentators' widely overlooking his early praise for Fascism, Winston Churchill was in awe of Mussolini.[30] While addressing the 'international aspect of Fascismo', Churchill told the Italians that their movement had rendered a service to the whole world and had provided the necessary antidote to the 'Russian poison'. 'If I had been an Italian', Churchill declared, 'I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.'[31] The British Foreign Secretary (1924 to 1929), Austen Chamberlain, was also clearly impressed by the Italians and

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[28] Ibid., pp. 211–212.

[29] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* [Complete and Unabridged and Fully Annotated], [www.archive.org/stream/meinkampf035176mbp/meinkampf035176mbp_djvu.txt], accessed 2 July 2019, p. 986. Even in the mid-thirties, when Hitler was several years into his reign, he told Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano, that Mussolini was 'the leading statesman in the world, to whom none may even remotely compare himself': *Hitler*, p. 369.

[30] For example, in his huge 900-page biography of Churchill, Roy Jenkins skips over in one sentence his subject's admiration for Italian Fascism: '[He had] two encounters with Mussolini in Rome, after which he issued much too friendly statements', see Roy Jenkins, *Churchill* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 412. *The Guardian* published 'The Churchill You Didn't Know', which listed many of Churchill's little-known quotes, yet failed to mention either Mussolini or Italy, [www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2002/nov/28/features11.g21], accessed 2 July 2019.

[31] 'Mr. Churchill on Fascism', *The Times*, 21 January 1927, p. 14.

considered Mussolini to be 'a man with whom business could be done'.[32] Even Ramsey MacDonald, Britain's first Labour prime minister, sent Mussolini friendly letters.[33]

Similarly, the majority of the British press extolled Fascism's victory over the 'Red Menace'. The *Daily Mail* was particularly supportive of Mussolini and his regime. Among the other pro-Italian columns that were printed, it ran a series of articles by their 'Special Correspondent', Sir Percival Phillips, describing how the threat of Communism 'stirred all that was best in Italy to combination against the Bolsheviks'.[34] The paper also encouraged its readers to read pro-Fascist literature, while praising the 'actual achievement of Fascism as […] sufficiently wonderful.'[35] *The Spectator* claimed that Fascism was much more 'constructive than destructive' and was led by a man who had demonstrated 'exceptional talents for organization'.[36] While columnist for *The Sunday Times*, 'Scrutator', remarked how 'Signor Mussolini destroyed a stupid Communist tyranny that would have ruined Italy.'[37]

In 1920, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was formed. As with the PCI in Italy, and dozens of other groups across the globe, the CPGB adhered to its Russian masters and became the British section of the Communist International. The party gained the support of several workers' bodies and clubs, was represented by the Red Clydeside movement, and played a role in the General Strike of 1926.[38] Links between the CPGB and the Labour Party gained traction, and the affair of the Zinoviev Letter (1924) identified the communists as being involved in widespread subversion which, according to the forged document, they hoped would lead to a communist uprising in the country.[39]

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[32] Gijs van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (London, 2005), p. 92. Other admirers included Thomas Edison, Sigmund Freud, Mahatma Gandhi and George Bernard Shaw.
[33] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2010), p. 124.
[34] 'Battle of the Pygmy and the Giant', *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1922, p. 7.
[35] 'New Books: Fascism From Within', *Daily Mail*, 8 June 1923, p. 13; 'Fascism From Within', *Daily Mail Atlantic Edition*, 19 July 1923, p. 6.
[36] *The Spectator*, 20 January 1923, p. 6.
[37] '"Scrutator". Force and its Nemesis' *The Sunday Times*, 22 June 1924, p. 12.
[38] Red Clydeside existed between 1910 and the early 1930s. It was the era of political radicalism that characterised the city of Glasgow and surrounding urban areas and was often referred to as the political militancy of the time.
[39] Published by the *Daily Mail* four days before the 1924 General Election. Alleged to be a directive from Grigory Zinoviev, head of the Communist International, to the

It is important to note that, in hindsight, the communist threat in Britain was not as severe as in other parts of Europe. Yet, many contemporaries perceived Britain to be at risk of a communist takeover.[40] Shortly after the war, in a meeting with the then Prime Minister Lloyd George, the Food Controller, Mr G. H. Roberts, claimed that 'there are large groups preparing for Soviet government [in Britain]'.[41] Media reports heightened tension amongst the public. *The Financial Times* ran the headline, 'Menace of the Communist: London Danger', warning Londoners of the 'danger […] of being ruined or crippled by Labour-cum Communist-cum Bolshevist efforts to create a world of their own and to apply in practice the theories of "Comrade Lenin" and the fellow extremists who have brought Russia to her present terrible pass'.[42] The *Daily Mail* also emphasised the 'Communist Threat', uncovering a supposed plot by the 'extremists' to 'create as much public nuisance as possible.' The aim was to exploit the unemployed by enticing them to undertake a 'stink bomb' campaign across the capital in an attempt to disrupt Christmas and the trade leading up to it, as Communists rejected religion. To make the 'upmost nuisance of themselves', activists were told to 'operate' where people congregated, such as cinemas, crowded theatres, in large crowds in the stores and in busy lifts, where the 'foul-smelling chemicals […] would be an admirable annoyance'. According to the *Daily Mail*, the police had taken steps to deal with the 'emergency', should it have arisen.[43]

Six months following Mussolini's March on Rome, the British Fascisti emerged as a counter-revolutionary organisation dedicated to the 'unrelenting struggle against the

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CPGB instructing it to engage in all sorts of seditious activities. In 1998, a report was commissioned by the then foreign secretary Robin Cook to assess the letter. The report concluded that the letter was clearly forged by White Russian exiles in Riga and passed to MI5, who then disseminated it in the U.K. See Gill Bennett, *A Most Extraordinary and Mysterious Business: The Zinoviev letter of 1924* (London, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1998), pp. 89–94. For more on the CPGB, see James Eaden & David Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain Since 1920* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[40] 'Britain in the 20th Century: The Great War and its Consequences (by Professor Vernon Bogdanor)', *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_Yo86Rlj_g&t=422s], accessed 2 July 2019, clip 15.20–16.30.

[41] The quote is taken from the diary of the then Deputy Cabinet Secretary, who was at the meeting, in February 1920: cited from the Bogdanor lecture, clip 16.30–17.05.

[42] 'Menace of the Communist', *The Financial Times*, 4 February 1922, p. 5.

[43] 'Communist Threat: Stink Bomb Campaign In London', *Daily Mail*, 21 December 1922, p. 5.

powers of evil represented by Bolshevism'.[44] 'We are resolutely opposed to Communism, which is another word for Bolshevism, regarding it as a fraud designed to hoodwink the masses, and reduce them to slavery under alien domination.'[45] Although the BF was gravely concerned about a Red revolution in Britain, they were equally as anxious about the potentially destabilising effect of Communism on the Empire:

> Very powerful forces are at work within the confines of these shores, but inspired and stimulated from without, for the disruption of the great Empire of which we are so justly proud and for which thousands of our countrymen have fought and died. These forces work openly, but more often secretly, in different ways and under different names, all striving ceaselessly for the same object, namely, the overthrow of the British Constitution and the establishment of the Bolshevik regime, misnamed 'Workers' Republic,' in which the 'workers' would actually have no real part – similar to that which has reduced Russia to a welter of anarchy, slavery and ruin, and would have brought about the same condition in Italy but for the heroic determination of her people.[46]

The majority of historians agree with the fascist Arnold Leese, a one-time member of the BF, when he described the movement as not fascist but merely 'Conservatism with Knobs On'.[47] Richard Griffiths suggested that Britain's first fascist movement was nothing more than 'a Conservative movement, obsessed by the dangers of civil emergency'.[48] Thomas Linehan described them as 'super-patriots who harboured an intense aversion to Bolshevism, radical socialism and militant direct action trade unionism, which were thought to pose a serious threat to property, civil order and ordered government'.[49] David Baker has claimed that BF activity centred on 'military-style discipline, organised strike-breaking and stewarding right-wing Conservative meetings', dismissing the movement as 'little more than [… a] defence league, made up

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[44] Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London, 1975), p. 291.
[45] 'The Union Jack and Rules of Your Own Race or The Red Flag and Alien Domination. Which will You serve?', *British Fascisti*, 1 October 1924 (revised) No. 4. Also, see, for example, 'How the Need for Fascism Arose in England', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27, p. 2.
[46] 'The Union Jack and Rules of Your Own Race or The Red Flag and Alien Domination. Which will You serve?'. Also, see 'The Need For British Fascism', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 20 June 1925, p. 1; 'Fascism and Revolution', *The Times*, 8 April 1925, p. 16.
[47] Arnold Leese, *Out of Step: Events in the Two Lives of an Anti-Jewish Camel-Doctor* (unknown, 1951), p. 49; *Fascist Movement in Britain* (London, 1972), pp. 28–29; *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 86; *Fascism: A History*, p. 223; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 51; *Black Shirt*, p. 196.
[48] *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 86.
[49] *British Fascism 1918–1939*, p. 64.

largely of Conservatives obsessed with the dangers of civil strife and Bolshevism, and seeking to maintain public order and guarantee essential services through a network of paramilitary units if Red Revolution should come to the Home Counties'. Similarly, Barbara Farr considers the movement a form of 'constitutional right-wing activism'.[50] As Linehan has remarked, 'The predominant view in the historiography is that the BF was essentially a reactionary right-wing conservative movement which, in terms of its outlook and policy, differed very little from Baldwin's Conservative Party.'[51]

Examination of security service files held at The National Archive as well as the BF's own publications challenges these rather simplistic claims that the fascisti were simply overenthusiastic stewards at Conservative meetings. Britain's first fascist movement was, in fact, more 'fascist' than originally perceived. Initially, certain MI5 agents assigned to infiltrate the BF, including Maxwell Knight – reputedly the model for the James Bond character 'M' – were sympathetic to fascism, supporting its fight against communism.[52] Therefore, it is unsurprising that reports show considerable bias in favour of the movement. For example, commending the fascists on their continual 'good work', describing the propaganda section of the BF as 'excellent' in its attempts to penetrate 'the worst Labour centres throughout the country', complementing the stewards for the way they 'policed' (Tory) elections meetings and describing certain members as 'good men'.[53]

Other, less biased, officers were worried by the BF. On 20 September 1923, Inspector Joseph Clarkson sent a police report on the BF to Intelligence Officer, Major General Sir Vernon Kell – the founder and first Director of the British Security Service – warning him that the fascist movement was 'a poor sort of business, and if it materialises will do some harm'.[54] Kell was particularly troubled over the information he received on a young man calling on the Regimental Headquarters, Buckingham Gate, with a view to obtaining recruits for the British Fascisti. According to the reports, the adjutant informed him that he had no business approaching any officer or man of British

[50] 'Extreme Right in the 1920s'; *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903–1932*, p. 60.
[51] *British Fascism 1918–1939*, p. 68.
[52] John Hope, 'Surveillance or Collusion: Maxwell Knight, MI5 and the British Fascisti', *Intelligence and National Security* 9:4 (1994).
[53] TNA KV 3/57, 'Report on "The British Fascists", 23 November 1924, p. 1, (31a[?]).
[54] TNA KV 3/57, a letter to 'my dear Kell' from Clarkson, 20 September 1923, (2).

forces for any such purpose, whereupon he withdrew. Following an investigation lasting six weeks, the man was identified as salesman, Fred Jeffers, but no action was taken, although Kell's superiors were informed.[55] Furthermore, MI5 received a letter from former BF member, F.M. Lowe, reporting on the 'rumours' that he had heard questioning the loyalty of the movement to its country.[56]

Suspicion mounted as to the revolutionary intent of the BF. The *Daily Herald* argued that the BF was a threat to democracy. On 18 January 1924, the paper suggested that the BF's tactics meant 'deadly business', claiming that their archives contain lists of names and addresses of arms and explosive makers.[57] MI5 also believed the BF to be 'a dangerous organisation'. In March 1925, information obtained from 'recent reports', described the danger from 'several points of view'. Firstly, they 'bring discredit by their methods on all who really wish to maintain law and order'. Secondly, 'Some of them talk about "the Day" when they will take charge, using the Police as mere assistants – much as Sanballat was allowed to help in building the post-captivity Temple.' Thirdly, '[t]heir Secretary, Hewlett, has political ambitions and has been heard to say that he is looking forward to the day when the Empire shall be a Republic with one parliament'.[58]

The BF claimed to be a 'peaceful' movement, stressing that fascism in Britain would only occur by 'constitutional means'.[59] However, columns in its own newspaper appear to contradict this assertion. In August 1927, District Officer, E.G. Mandeville Roe, called for fascism to 'capture' all political parties: 'it is only by ridding all political

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[55] TNA KV 3/57, 'The British Fascist Movement', 17 January 1924, (12); letter to Captain Arbuthnot from Sir Vernon Kell, 23 January 1924, (15); letter to Major Alexander from the Chief Constable of Oxon, Captain Ernest Arbuthnot, 29 January 1924; letter to Sir Wyndham from Kell, 31 January 1924, (30a); note to Major Ball, 27 February 1924, (minutes sheet).

[56] TNA KV 3/57, a letter from F.M. Lowe, 11 October 1923.

[57] 'British Fascisti Tactics', *Daily Herald,* 18 January 1924, p. 6.

[58] TNA KV 3/57, extracts from recent reports, undated and unnumbered. Sanballat's Temple was a biblical reference found in the book of Nehemiah. In support of Alexander the Great, Sanballat led a large contingent of soldiers to the siege of Tyre. As a reward, Alexander gave him authority to erect the Temple on Mount Gerizim. For further information, see H. Rowley, 'Sanballat and the Samaritan Temple', (February 1955), [www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:1m1899&datastreamId=POST-PEER-REVIEW-PUBLISHERS-DOCUMENT.PDF].

[59] 'National Fascisti', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 12 June 1926, p. 7; 'President States Their Aims And Objects', *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette,* 27 December 1924, p. 11.

parties with Fascism that national salvation is possible'.[60] In an article titled 'The Ideals of British Fascism' (1925), Lintorn-Orman hints at revolutionary intent:

> The peculiarity about British Fascism is that it has no past traditions to fetter its actions. It is based on certain principles, and can therefore speak out in favour of what it believes to be remedial measures, without having to explain its non-adherence to the previous declarations of weak-kneed exponents whose only desire was to shelve awkward questions.
>
> During the two years of its existence certain basic principles have emerged, and on them its past, present and future actions are based. First of all, it is a definite challenge to put an end to the vile disease that has brought us to our present deplorable condition. Softness, sentimentalism, flabby compromise and thoughtless acceptance of catchphrases without examination as to their truth or falsity are amongst the many symptoms of the malady. What we want is a return to *VIRILITY*, a fearless exposure of plain truth, and a determination to get the right Kingdom regardless of immediate consequences […] Fascists can, and must, show the way – it is really a matter of life or death.
>
> […]
>
> Surely there must be millions in this land who feel as we do. Let us be up and doing; let us give up something of our spare time and resources for our Country; and let the word go forth that we do not intend to allow faint-hearted politicians on the one side, or Moscow-driven traitors on the other to wreck our homes, our lives, or the Land of our Fathers.
>
> The truth is, that politicians are afraid of grasping the nettle, what with financiers controlling Party activities through the "war chest", and wretched postponements and tergiversations in successive cabinets, we are drifting fast towards the rapids.[61]

As a result of a change in personnel in the Grand Council at the beginning of the thirties, the BF adopted a fully fascist programme. The intention was to 'capture the political power of the State' – as identified in its mouthpiece, *British Fascism* – and abolish General Elections, which 'subject affairs of State to uncertainty'.[62] According to the BF, the party system had become 'obsolete and totally inadequate' for the conditions of the twentieth century: 'Every Briton must thoroughly realise that the time is in hand when the Party system will be thrust aside and the fight for power restricted

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[60] 'Is Fascism Political?', *The British Lion,* August 1927, pp. 8–9.

[61] 'Summary of Policies and Practice', the supplement included in the April 1931 issue of *British Fascism*; 'The Ideals of British Fascism', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 26 September 1925, p. 1.

[62] 'The Political Programme of the British Fascists', *British Fascism,* summer programme 1933, p. 8; 'The Progress of Fascism', *British Fascism,* November 1930, p. 7.

between Fascism and Social-Communism.'[63] The BF argued that '[t]his is an age of change' in which 'old ideas and values no longer apply'.[64] It is time to replace the 'Old Gang Parties' with a 'United body' consisting of a 'higher standard of life [and] a higher social conception'.[65] The 'Fascists are out to capture the control of the British State in order to erect the Fascist Corporate System and eliminate the present chaotic and vicious party system'.[66] This revolutionary shift in tone did not escape the attention of MI5, who, as well as collecting snippets from *British Fascism,* remarked that, under the BF, the language used by the BF shows that in a crisis, they would probably have little regard for the 'Parliamentary machine', therefore preferring to create a new social, political and cultural order in Britain.[67]

**The Italian Fascist Influence**

The BF was certainly influenced by Mussolini and Italian Fascism. In a bid to increase its membership, the movement appeared to openly distance itself from the Italian model in an attempt to appear less foreign and more 'British'. In 1924, the BF anglicised their name from the British Fascisti to the British Fascists. In June 1926, *The Fascist Bulletin* stated that the movement had nothing to do with the Blackshirts.[68] In fact, '[we] do not consider that Italian [violent] methods pure and simple will ever do in this country, for the simple reason that the population is only apathetic and not communistic as in Italy. What we consider is that the British form of Fascism must be adopted'.[69] The Organising Secretary, Captain Robert Smith, stated that 'We are not linked to the Italian Fascists but use the name to denote citizens joining to defend the state.'[70] The *Brighton and Hove Herald* reported on a meeting of fascists in the town where the speaker emphasised that the movement was 'educational and evolutionary' and should not be confused with the 'Blackshirt Brigade'.[71] Even the BF's constitution stated that 'there is no connection whatever between the British and Italian Fascists'.[72]

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[63] 'The Political Programme of the British Fascists'.
[64] Ibid.
[65] 'Editorial Notes', *British Fascism,* summer programme 1933, p. 2.
[66] Ibid.
[67] TNA KV 3/58, 'B', 11 August 1933, (in minutes sheet).
[68] 'National Fascisti' *The Fascist Bulletin,* 12 June 1926, p. 7.
[69] Ibid.
[70] TNA HO 144/19069, Robert Smith to the Lord Chancellor, 17 June 1926.
[71] *Brighton and Hove Herald,* 20 March 1926.
[72] 'British Fascist Manifesto. Constitutional', *The British Lion,* Issue Number 31, p. 3.

However, Italian Fascism was unquestionably the ideological inspiration of the BF. In fact, incorporating the word *Fascisti* into the movement's name and adopting the Italian Fascist salute is evidence of its founder's admiration for Mussolini's new fascist experiment.[73] Fascism's defeat of Communism in Italy inspired Lintorn-Orman to create the BF. Orman believed that the far left, aided by the weapon of the General Strike, was attempting to turn Britain into a battlefield similar to Serbia in 1916.[74] She argued that if her movement was to accomplish its objective, which was 'the extermination of Communism', all ranks and all classes must unite and work together for this end.[75] The BF's constitution proclaims that

> [W]e realise and admire the wonderful spirit of patriotic devotion which enabled the Italians eventually to save their country from the horrors of a Red Revolution […] in the words of Signor Mussolini, creator of the Fascist Ideal 'Fascism is not for Italy alone, but is for all Nations, but each Nation must adapt it to the characteristics of its own people'.[76]

Despite attempts to anglicise fascism, obsession with the Italian Regime is evident in BF publications. Besides regular tirades against the Red enemy, virtually every issue of the BF newspapers (and pamphlets) includes sections relating to Italy, most commonly on the 'achievements' under Mussolini. Correspondents sent reports from Italy to the BF lauding the fascist regime. For example, in a column titled 'Practical Fascism In Italy', the author, named as 'A British Fascist', gives a detailed (and heavily biased) account on the changes implemented by the fascists since the March on Rome: 'There can be little doubt but that Sr. Mussolini and the Fascisti have effected a great improvement in the administration of the departments of the State, things are now much better managed than what they were, because inefficiency and slackness are no longer tolerated.' The author warned would-be visitors of pickpocketing in Rome, claiming that the public is now so wealthy under fascism that 'money is often displayed'.[77] Another account by a traveller, printed in *The British Lion,* claimed to have travelled

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[73] 'British loyalists adopted their title 'Fascist' because of the success attained by Mussolini and his supporters. [...] when Italy was on the brink of revolution and ruin': 'Fascists in Italy and England', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 29 August 1925, p. 2; 'The King Gives Fascist Salute', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 15 August 1925, p. 4.
[74] *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain,* p. 55.
[75] R. Lintorn-Orman, 'Fascist Sunday Schools and Kitchen Meetings', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 13 June 1925, p. 2.
[76] 'British Fascist Manifesto. Constitutional', *The British Lion,* Issue Number 31, p. 3.
[77] A. British Fascist, 'Practical Fascism in Italy', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 20 June 1925, p. 2.

across Italy and mingled with all classes where 'Fascism is deeply rooted in their hearts'. Communists 'insulted, tortured and murdered [people] in the streets […] until Mussolini came and restored order and has gone on gaining the confidence of all decent citizens. His picture is to be found in houses and in the cottages of the peasants in the mountains.'[78]

Devotion to Fascism is expressed through connections to its Italian counterparts. Over the course of its lifetime, the BF attempted to build a relationship with the Italian Fascists. Shortly after the movement's inception, MI5 received information that, according to Hewlett, the BF had made a contact within the Italian Fascisti.[79] The contact turned out to be Camillo Pellizzi, one of the founders of the London Fascismo, State Delegate for the Fascisti of Great Britain and Ireland and the London correspondent for *Il Popolo d'Italia* – founded by Benito Mussolini in 1914 and the organ of the National Fascist Party. Pellizzi appeared to have some impact on the BF as, according to MI5, he introduced the former Dublin Castle Intelligence Officer, Sir Ormond Winter, to the movement in which he went on to head the London District of the BF.[80] Examination of *The Fascist Bulletin* identifies Winter as the head of the London area BF, but there is no mention of Pellizzi or the Italian influence.[81] This could be because the BF published its first newspaper in mid-1925, around six month after MI5 produced a report on the BF featuring Pellizzi.

The BF hoped to build a relationship with Mussolini. On 11 September 1926, anarchist and ardent antifascist, Gino Lucetti, tried to kill the Duce by throwing a bomb at him as his car went past him in the street. Unfortunately, for Lucetti, the bomb hit the target's car but failed to explode until it fell to the payment metres away, blowing up in the faces of numerous innocents.[82] In response to the 'odious attempt upon his life', the

[78] Briton, 'The Daily Chronical and Fascism', *The British Lion*, 18 December 1926, p. 5. For more lauding of Italy by a traveller, see 'The State of Italy', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 29 August 1925, p. 3.
[79] TNA KV 3/57, 'Report on "The British Fascisti"', 23 November 1924, p. 9 (31a).
[80] TNA KV 3/57, 'Sir Ormond Winter', 12 December 1924.
[81] 'Great Fascist Rally in Hyde Park on Empire Day', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 13 June 1925, p. 3.
[82] Many attempts on Mussolini's life were undertaken and, therefore, it is not certain what one the BF was responding to. For a biography on the would-be assassin, Lucetti, see Riccardo Lucetti, *Gino Lucetti and his attempt to assassination Benito Mussolini (Il Duce) 11 September 1926* (Hastings, 2012 – original in Italian 2000).

BF's headquarters sent a message directly to Mussolini 'wish[ing] to convey to your Excellency their congratulations on your provident escape from assassination'. Augusto Rosso of the *Italian Charge d'affaires* responded, informing the British movement that 'His Excellency the Head of the Italian Government has received the telegram so kindly addressed to him […] and wishes me to convey to you his most sincere thanks.'[83] The previous year, Mussolini was expected to visit London to sign the Locarno Treaty, although he sent an aide instead.[84] Hoping to capitalise on the opportunity, the BF sent an invitation to Mussolini to 'meet and perhaps address the British Fascists' while in London. The BF explained how

> the moral, spiritual and fundamental objects of the British and Italian Fascists are identical; nor fortunately is there any danger that the patriots of the kingdoms may find themselves pitted against one another – on the contrary […] the corner-stone of peace in the near future probably rests upon a close alliance between the two.[85]

In addition, the BF attempted to persuade 'a leading Italian Fascist' to publish a series of articles in its newspapers.[86] However, their endeavours were unsuccessful as they only managed to attract an author known only as 'An Italian Fascist'. The first article of the supposed series appeared in *The Fascist Bulletin* on 6 March 1926. Noticeably proud of achieving their coup, the movement devoted over half a page to the newly acquired Italian writer. Under the title 'The Labour Policy of Fascism', the author covers a variety of fascist-inspired subjects. For example, 'The Pioneers of Fascism', Fascist Corporations, interests of Fascism, strikes and the evolution of Fascism. Despite proclaiming that a series of articles would be published, 'The Labour Policy of Fascism' appears to be the only one written.[87]

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Perhaps the most famous attempt on Mussolini's life was by an insane Irish aristocrat named Violet Gibson. For a forensic report on Gibson, who was freed by the fascists and spent the remainder of her life in an institution for the mentally ill in England, see Enrico Ferri, 'A Character Study and Life History of Violet Gibson Who Attempted the Life of Benito Mussolini, on the 7th of April 1926', *American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 211 (1928–1929). For an academic biography of Gibson, see Frances Saunders, *The Woman Who Shot Mussolini* (London, 2010).

[83] 'Signor Mussolini', *The British Lion*, 23 October 1926 Issue Number 9, p. 13.

[84] The Treaty was a peace treaty between the major powers, and it enabled Germany to be admitted to the League of Nations.

[85] 'Signor Benito Mussolini Prime Minister of Italy', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 21 November 1925, p. 1.

[86] 'Italia Felix', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 6 February 1926, p. 4.

[87] 'The Labour Policy of Fascism', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 27 February 1926, p. 5.

Despite the BF's desire to establish links with the *fascismo*, their Italian 'brothers' were, for the most part, not receptive. However, they did receive a modicum of attention through the Fascist newspaper, *Critica Fascista,* whose founder, Giuseppe Bottai, was a Fascist politician and was present during the March on Rome. The paper devoted a lengthy article to a description of fascism in Britain, which included various quotations from the BF pamphlets, suggesting that 'The principle characteristic traits [of British and Italian fascism] are identical. Its future depends partly on the tactics by which Communism will carry out its programme.' The BF proudly reprinted the article in *The Fascist Bulletin*, emphasising the movement's inclusion in it.[88]

Aspects of Italian Fascism were adopted by the BF. One of the most telling examples is the movement's willingness to use military tactics against their common enemy, as displayed by their Italian counterparts. Despite publicly claiming to be a defence force, the BF was, in fact, a violent outfit.[89] In a pamphlet titled *Taking Off The Gloves,* the BF described the need for violence to defeat the 'workers of evil': 'We [shall not] defeat our opponents by *fighting in kid gloves*. Let us attack and go on attacking the Bolshevist enemies of our Empire by *every means and by every device in our power*. We can only win by hitting and by hitting hard.' The pamphlet concludes with a call to arms: 'let us take off our gloves, and get busy'.[90] Another pamphlet lists its objectives. Number one on the list is '[t]o oppose Communism […] by all means in our power'.[91]

Prominent members of the BF perpetuated the need for violence. The leader of the BF units in Scotland, Lord Glasgow – who visited Mussolini, Hitler and Franco in the 1930s – spoke to crowds of fascists about 'the necessity for Fascist action' against the Communists.[92] John Cheshire, District Officer Western Command, declared that the military aspect of Fascism is one that should appeal to every man, and no place exists in its ranks for the 'coward, neurotic or pacifist'.[93] Threats of violence were sent to

[88] 'The Italian Press on British Fascism', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 12 September 1925, p. 3.
[89] 'Fascism & Force', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 5 December 1925, p. 1; 'British Fascism Purely Defensive', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 3 October 1925, p. 3; '"No Force Unless" Objects of British Fascists', *The Sunday Times,* 28 December 1924, p. 10.
[90] R.A.C.,'Taking Off The Gloves', *The British Fascists,* 1926 No. 16.
[91] 'Objects', *The British Fascists,* 1926.
[92] 'Successful Meetings at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Newcastle', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 13 June 1925, p. 3.
[93] 'A Defence of Militant Fascism', *The British Lion,* Issue Number 28.

prominent left-wing campaigners by the BF; for example, envelopes with packets of gun cartridges were received with the warning 'remember the recent attempt on Mussolini. Our men won't miss'.[94] These commands were taken on board by the movement's rank and file and physical attacks on communists became commonplace, as did the well-publicised court cases that followed.[95]

The kidnapping of the politician and leading activist of the CPGB, Harry Pollitt, by the BF in 1925 appears to have been inspired by the abduction of the prominent Italian socialist politician and outspoken critic of the Italian Fascist government, Giacomo Matteotti, by Mussolini's men months earlier. On 10 June 1924, Matteotti was forcibly bundled into a vehicle outside his house by agents of the Fascist secret police. Two months later, his corpse was found near Riano, a few kilometres from Rome.[96] On 14 March 1925, in an almost identical plot, five fascists approached Pollitt at Edge Hill station forcing him into a motorcar. In a bizarre turn of events, the Communist appears to have charmed his captures into releasing him unharmed after a weekend in captivity. According to Pollitt's court testimony, he realised that 'physically he had not a chance' and therefore decided to 'pit his wits against theirs' by being 'diplomatic'. The tactic worked and when the fascists freed him at Shrewsbury station, they shook hands before he departed back to London. Remarkably, the jury found the fascist defendants not guilty of kidnapping, believing their defence that they 'thought it would be a good practical joke to […] take him away for the weekend'.[97] The British press reported extensively on the Matteotti incident and the methods used. Therefore, it is certain that the BF would have had knowledge of the event. Tellingly, the BF sent threatening letters to leading left-wing activists reminding them to 'Remember what happened to Matteotti. Your fate will be far worse.'[98]

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[94] 'Threaten Miners' Officers', *The New York Times,* 28 April 1926. The reference to Mussolini was referring to one of many attempts on his life.
[95] 'Activities in Glasgow: Clashes With The Communists', *The Fascist Bulletin,* 11 July 1925, p. 3; 'Communists Bombed', *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette,* 15 May 1928, p. 8; 'Liverpool Fascists Fined', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1928, p. 14; 'Fascist Who Was Provocative: Sequel to the Arrests in Trafalgar-Square', *Daily Herald,* 14 October 1924, p. 3.
[96] For more on the Matteotti murder and its impact on the Fascist regime, see Mauro Canali, 'The Matteotti Murder and the Origins of Mussolini's Totalitarian Fascist Regime in Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 14:2 (2009), pp. 143–167.
[97] 'Pollitt Kidnapping Charge – Accused Not Guilty', *The Manchester Guardian,* 24 April 1925, p. 18.
[98] 'Threat to Kill', *Daily Herald,* 23 October 1926, p. 2.

The kidnapping of the leading communist and the court case that followed attracted significant attention in Britain. Both the national newspapers and the regional press covered the story comprehensively.[99] For example, under the heading 'The Amazing Story of Mr. Pollitt', *The Manchester Guardian* devoted regular columns to the Pollitt affair.[100] The incident was also debated in Parliament a number of times, with the then Home Secretary, Sir W. Joynson-Hicks, who investigated the kidnapping, responding to questions from fellow MPs.[101] As Robert Benewick has stated, 'The publicity value of the kidnapping was worth more than a dozen speeches or demonstrations to both organisations.'[102]

Although both sides gained greater publicity from the event, the Pollitt case provided an important insight into British society's attitudes to both fascism and communism at the time. In summing up the case, the judge was clearly unprejudiced. In his address to the jury, Mr Justice Finlay highlighted the importance of the case and demanded their 'most serious consideration'. He stated that

> It would be disastrous if Pollitt, admittedly a Communist who had made seditious speeches, did not get that to which he was entitled – fair justice at the hands of the British law. It was said that the defendants did this thing as a practical joke. If they had brought themselves into the law it did not matter whether they did it as a practical joke or not.[103]

The verdict of 'not guilty' by the jury is telling. It is an example of the negative attitude of the British public towards communists in the 1920s. The result also identifies how strongly sympathetic British society was towards the fascists, particularly towards their belligerent actions against Bolshevism. In an address to the Commons, in which members openly showed their lack of interest by persistently laughing, Joynson-Hicks, revealed that the railway officials, although witnessing Pollitt's abduction, did not intervene despite Pollitt's appeals because they thought that he was 'legally under

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[99] Including *The Scotsman*, *The Dundee Courier*, *Evening Telegraph*, *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, *The Western Morning News*, *The Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, *The Hull Daily Mail*, *The Nottingham Journal*, *The Shields Daily News*, *The Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*.
[100] *The Manchester Guardian*: 17, 18, 20, 23 March & 3, 24 & 27 April 1925.
[101] *Hansard*, 16, 17 & 19 March 1925 Volume 181.
[102] *Fascist Movement in Britain*, p. 34.
[103] 'Pollitt Kidnapping Charge – Accused Not Guilty'.

restraint'.[104] This is clearly untrue as the fascist perpetrators were dressed like 'hooligans, with their caps down over their eyes, mufflers on, and their coat collars turned up'.[105]

Newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* referred to the 'not guilty' verdict as a stain on British justice, and a minority of MPs challenged the leniency shown to the BF. A small group within the Liberal Party – including the future Labour politician Tony Benn's father, William – requested that the party file a motion to Parliament about the 'friendly treatment' of British fascists by the courts, declaring that 'there is strong feeling about it'. Consequently, the group were defeated at a party meeting and, therefore, the motion was not put down. Nevertheless, the group thought it necessary to register their protest in the form of a motion on the order paper of the House of Commons.[106] Members of the Liberals were not the only politicians to complain. The incensed socialist Labour MP for West Ham Silvertown, Mr J. Jones, questioned Joynson-Hicks over the lenient treatment of the fascists: 'Does the […] Gentleman know that the British Fascisti […] are saying that, when they cannot get their own way by constitutional methods, they are prepared to fight for it? Is the […] Gentleman prepared to take any steps to stop this display of force on the part of the Fascisti?' The question went unanswered.[107]

The most significant development during this period was the BF's attitude towards the relationship with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The exodus of members included those who sat on the Grand Council. They were replaced with more fanatical individuals, including Mandeville Roe, an enthusiast for corporatism, Neil Francis-Hawkins, known for his military zeal, and Mrs Harnett, now Commander of the Ulster Command. Mandeville Roe and Francis-Hawkins later joined Mosley's BUF, the latter becoming Director General as well as Mosley's deputy. Harnett, in the late thirties, was, with Francis-Hawkins, a member of the pro-Nazi organisation, the Link. It is no surprise, therefore, that the BF shifted to a more ardently pro-fascist position and

[104] *Hansard*, 17 March 1925 Volume 181. Also reported under 'Mr. Pollitt's Strange Adventure. Questions In Commons', *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1925, p. 5; 'The Case of Mr. Pollitt. Home Secretary's Statement', *The Times*, 18 March 1925, p. 8.
[105] 'Pollitt Kidnapping Charge – Accused Not Guilty'.
[106] 'British Fascists and the Bench', *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1925, p. 8.
[107] *Hansard*, 17 March 1925 Volume 181.

evidence of transnationalism is apparent throughout the period, particularly concerning ideology.

Corporatism became a central theme of the movement's ideology. Mandeville Roe, now the BF's Propaganda Officer, played a key role in this shift. In 1930, he visited Italy to study the 'conditions and policy of the country', reporting his 'research' in October's edition of *British Fascism*. Europe's 'most well-beloved ruler', according to the Mandeville Roe, 'has benefited all, from the baby to the centenarian. […] Italian life is full of the improvements he has wrought. No public service is untouched'. He described a type of worker-bliss now firmly entrenched in the Fascist state. It is '[n]o wonder the workmen employ spare moments to daub the remark "Viva il Duce !" upon walls, fences and bridges'. While in Italy, Mandeville Roe secured an audience with the Duce, presenting 'Europe's greatest living man' with a letter from the BF 'congratulating him upon the success of his work, and wishing him many more fruitful years in the service of his country and humanity'.[108] On return, Mandeville Roe wrote a series of articles championing Italy's political and economic system.[109]

The BF periodically updated its policies and practices, cumulating in a 24-point 'political programme' in which it set out how the Fascist State – strikingly similar to the Italian model – would be erected in Britain. This included the abolition of the party system in favour of a corporate state, formed through the guilds and corporations of workers, traders, employers and owners; state supremacy over all sections, classes and interest – 'All to be within, non against the state'; an almost identical phrase used by Mussolini in a speech in 1925 – the elimination of class barriers in favour of 'merit, character and work' as the 'only passport of the new aristocracy'; and the outlawing of strikes.[110]

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[108] 'I met Signor Mussolini', *British Fascism*, October 1930, pp. 4–5; 'Italy and Peace' *British Fascism*, October 1930, p. 6.
[109] Ibid. 'Workable Fascism', *British Fascism*, November 1930, p. 2; 'Fascism and Parliament', *British Fascism*, April 1931, p. 6; 'Fascists and The Liberal Revolt', *British Fascism*, Summer Holiday Number 1931, p. 4; 'Why The Fascist Policy Is Wanted', *British Fascism*, Spring 1932, p. 4.
[110] 'The Political Programme of the British Fascists', *British Fascism*, summer programme 1933, p. 8.

**The Nazi Influence**

The rise of Hitler's Nazi Party clearly impacted on the BF. Most notably, its adoption of rabid antisemitism, which – despite claims to the contrary by the movement – was heavily influenced by German Nazism. This is partly as a result of the Council's radical turn and partly in an attempt to attract more support from the public at home, as Hitler was doing so successfully in Germany. Attacks on Jews by the BF were rare before the Nazis came to prominence in the early thirties. In January 1932, the BF published the translation of a violently anti-Jewish article titled 'Hated by All Humanity!' from *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi Party's newspaper. In the same issue, a very favourable review on an English translation of, the German antisemite, Theodor Fritsch's *The Riddle of the Jews' Success*, which – among many other accusations against Jews – argued that the First World War was 'one glorious profit making ramp for the Jews'.[111] The BF also attacked politicians who 'can find time to shed crocodile tears on behalf of the poor persecuted Jews in Germany'.[112]

Antisemitism became a prominent feature of the BF. Jews were singled-out in its programme for a corporate state. 'Members of the Jewish race [are] to be classified as aliens, to be debarred from holding official positions in the State, from voting and from controlling the financial, political industrial and cultural interests of the British people.'[113] Pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish articles and comments became commonplace in the pages of *British Fascism*, as well as the publishing of antisemitic letters sent in from its readers. For example, in 1933, the BF printed a triple page spread by, 'Special Press Correspondent in Berlin', Cyril G. Philipoff, titled 'Germany and the Jewish Question'. The article staunchly defended the Nazis treatment of Jews, who 'in every part of the world [are an] organised an unscrupulous minority and the main body of the people [are] totally unconscious of their real danger'. According to Philipoff, 'Adolf Hitler's struggle is the first stride towards the liberation of the whole of the Aryan race from the yoke of the hook-nosed sons of Israel.'[114]

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[111] 'Hated by All Humanity!', *British Fascism*, January 1932, p. 7; 'A Great – But Stifled – Problem: Gentiles and Jews', *British Fascism*, 1 January 1932, p. 8; D. Legh, 'Why We Are Anti-Semitic', *British Fascism*, Extra Autumn Issue 1933, p. 7.
[112] 'Editorial Notes', *British Fascism*, Special Summer Propaganda Number 1933, p. 2.
[113] 'The Political Programme of the British Fascists', *British Fascism*, summer programme 1933, p. 8.
[114] C. Philipoff, 'Germany and the Jewish Question', *British Fascism*, Special Summer Propaganda Number 1933, pp. 6–7 &10–11.

Physical connections to the Nazis are less apparent, particularly when compared with those of Fascist Italy.[115] However, in the latter years of the movement, when antisemitism was a key feature, links were made with Hitler's men. In early 1933, members of the BF's Executive Committee did call at the German Embassy to give their congratulations on the Nazis coming to power.[116] In the October, MI5 received a report from an unnamed source stating that the BF had received a donation from the Nazis. The service was unable to confirm the report and the BF made no mention of it in its literature, but MI5 did note that 'the Stanhope Gardens organisation [the BF had recently moved their headquarters to the area] has recently been sticking its posters all over Chelsea may be an indication of increased wealth'.[117] Although the BF's implementation of antisemitism to its doctrine was influenced by the German Nazis – a policy that Mussolini was yet to adopt – and it may or may not have received funds from them, the British movement was (and always had been) ideologically closer to and had a higher regard for Fascist Italy than Nazi Germany.

**The Quest to Become an Internationalist Movement**

The British Empire had the utmost significance for the BF. They saw it as a force for creating a 'better' world and a higher form of civilisation, with the mother country at the forefront. In its early months, President Blakeney wrote a series of articles in which the importance of the Empire was emphasised. Blakeney claimed that the BF was a 'great army of patriots who believe that the British Empire has an essential part to play towards building up a nobler civilisation in this century.' This 'nobler civilisation' would consist of 'Christianity […] a greater sense of civic responsibility and pure patriotism'. Italy was lauded as the blueprint to follow: 'The regeneration of Italy under a Fascist regime is the admiration of the civilised world, and the example which Fascist Italy set for a disorganised Europe holds a lesson for the British Empire, and especially for Great Britain as the pivot.'[118]

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[115] Besides Mandeville Roe's tour of Italy and his audience with Mussolini, the BF continued to send letters to the Fascists. For example, a note of congratulations was sent to the Italian leader on the birth of his grandson: see 'Signor Mussolini A Grandfather', *British Fascism*, October 1931, p. 4.

[116] *British Fascism*, February 1933: cited in *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 93.

[117] TNA, KV 3/58, 'With reference to 143a', 26 October 1933, (in minutes sheet).

[118] 'British Fascists: Summary of Organisation and Policy', 1 October 1924; 'British Fascists: The Union Jack and Rules of Your Own Race or The Red Flag and Alien Domination. Which will You serve?', 1 October 1924; C.W. Higginbotham, 'Fascism – An Empire Need', *The British Lion*, 9 October 1926, p. 7.

The Empire, according to the BF, was in grave danger of a communist invasion, something that the fascists were determined to prevent. The British movement claimed that a 'secret book' from Moscow was in circulation among communists, with 'great precautions taken to prevent copies "straying"'. Apparently, the book called for the breakup of the Empire and set out how it was to be achieved: 'That object is to be attained by preparation of the ground, thanks to a flood of doctrines, many of them innocuous, to conceal the hidden poison which is to sap the vitality of the Empire.'[119] The BF took defending the Empire very seriously indeed. Each new member was required to sign a pledge to uphold the Empire, promising to 'render every service in my power to the British Fascists in their efforts to destroy all treacherous and revolutionary movements that may endanger the Throne and the Empire'.[120] Furthermore, included in the movement's number one 'object' was 'To oppose Communism and any movement that is calculated to endanger […] the Empire by all means in our power.'[121]

To combat this danger, 'Imperial growth' was required. According to the BF's Propaganda Officer for Southern Ireland, Mr C.W. Higginbotham, the movement

> must expand and rise in every corner of the Empire. We must think and act Imperially at all times. We cannot remain an insular force, when the ramifications of Communism and disintegration extend throughout the Empire. Every Imperial city, town and hamlet should have its Fascist centre, with its group of steadfast British Fascists, ever looking to the Flag, and honouring the King, as the constitutional head of the Commonwealth. To work unceasingly towards that goal should be the aim of every unit in the Organisation. This conscious Imperialism should be ever present in mind. Every member should say to himself, 'Come what may, I will without personal consideration, assist to the best of my strength and ability, in maintaining the Empire'.[122]

One of the BF's key objectives was to grow their organisation in foreign lands, some far beyond the island of Great Britain, to combat the perceived rising threat of a communist uprising in the Empire and beyond. In June 1925, the BF declared that 'The phenomenal

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[119] British Fascisti, 'Communism Unmasked' (1924/5?).
[120] British Fascisti, 'Enrolment Form', (1924/5?). Also, see British Fascisti, 'Policy and Practice (Provisional)', 2 July 1926.
[121] British Fascisti, '"For King and Country" Objects', *British Fascisti*, undated.
[122] C.W. Higginbotham, 'Fascism – An Empire Need', *The British Lion*, 9 October 1926, p. 7.

growth of British Fascism is by no means confined to the British Isles. Indeed, it may almost be spoken of as "world wide" for today, just over two years, we can boast of branches in every part of the Empire.'[123] The following year, a report by a regional newspaper in Australia sympathetic to fascist ideals identified BF branches in every dominion and Crown colony under the British flag. and among the British communities in the Argentinian Republic, Belgium, China, Denmark, France, Hawaiian Islands, Holland, Italy, Mexico, Persia, Siam, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US.[124] Although both these claims were outright farcical, the movement did expand its network overseas.

Given its relative insignificance at home, it is surprising that the BF managed to spread its tentacles across the Empire. Perhaps the most interesting example of this transnational dimension is the BF's activities in far-flung Australia. A genuine fear of a communist takeover engulfed Australia in the early 1920s. Inspired by the Russian Revolution, a group of socialists including the prominent trade unionists Jock Garden, Thomas Walsh and suffragette Adela Pankhurst (daughter of Emmeline and wife of Walsh) formed the Communist Party of Australia in October 1920. In the following years, the party infiltrated and influenced trade unions and related social movements alongside the rise of the Australian Labor Party.[125] Supporters of communism appeared to many contemporary observers 'hell-bent on following in the footsteps of Lenin's Bolsheviks.'[126] In 1923, unprecedented scenes of rioting and looting took place on the streets of Melbourne in the wake of a police strike, perceived to be a communist endeavour. Andrew Moore (1991) stated that the 'reverberations of this "Bolshevik Orgy"' had a significant impact on Australians.[127]

Looking to capitalise on the unrest and feelings of alarm, the BF introduced its branches into the country through the game of cricket. In 1924, England travelled to Australia to play the Australians in the Ashes series. Both the captain of the England cricket team,

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[123] 'British Fascism in Buenos Aires', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 27 June 1925, p. 3.
[124] 'Fascism in Europe', *Cairns Post*, 19 August 1926, p. 8.
[125] The Labor Party changed its name from The Labour Party in 1912.
[126] Andrew Moore, 'The Fascist Cricket Tour of 1924–25', *Sporting Traditions: the Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History* 7:2 (1991), p. 165.
[127] Ibid. For more on the riot, see Moore, 'Guns across the Yarra: Secret Armies and the 1923 Melbourne Police Strike' in Sydney Labour History Group (ed.), *What Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Australian History* (North Sydney, 1982), pp. 220–233.

Arthur Gilligan, and their tour manager, F.C. Toone, were active members of the BF, Gilligan occasionally contributing to the movement's periodicals. In an article titled 'The Spirit Fascism and Cricket Tours', Gilligan explained the relationship between cricket and fascism: 'In [...] cricket tours it is essential to work solely on the lines of Fascism, i.e. the team must be good friends and out for one thing, and one thing only, namely the good of the side, and not for any self-glory', a direct reference to the collectivist element of fascism.[128]

Before leaving for the tour, the 'undercover fascists' were given enrolment forms, internal memoranda and propaganda to carry in their luggage by the BF's Recruit and Propaganda Department with instructions to '[t]alk about the movement to everyone you meet'. They were also told to 'Always carry at least one enrolment form and one of each of the other pamphlets with you wherever you go'.[129] Despite the Australian cricket commentator, M.A Noble's, assertion in his book, *Gillian's Men,* that the visiting cricketers were too engaged with cricket to sample the 'real Australia', the English fascists found the time to disseminate the BF literature among the 'heaps of good friends' that they made while in the country.[130] Shortly after the tour, officers of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch came across the BF material, which was 'all printed in London [and] the contact address on the enrolment form being altered in handwriting to a GPO [General Post Office] Box Number.' in Australia.[131] However, it appears that the branch did not take the matter further.

Toone and Gilligan's efforts instigated the creation of BF branches across Australia, which were reported in Australian newspapers as well as *The British Lion*. By the end of 1925, three branches had been set up in Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart. The Commander of British Fascists in Australia and leader of the Melbourne division was retired naval officer, Captain James Older Hatcher, a fervent anti-Communist. Hatcher, an English emigre from Hampshire, joined the Commonwealth Public Service in

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[128] 'The Spirit Fascism and Cricket Tours', *The Fascist Bulletin*, May 1925. Gillian continued to write about cricket for the BF for some years: 'Why We Won The Ashes', *The British Lion*, 28 August 1926 Issue 5, p. 8; 'The Past Cricket Season', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926 Issue 7, p. 11; 'Playing Cricket', *The British Lion*, June 1927 Issue 19, p. 10 – in which he complained of being 'heartily sick of the Reds'.
[129] 'The Spirit Fascism and Cricket Tours'.
[130] Ibid; Montague Noble, *Gilligan's Men* (London, 1925) p. 7.
[131] The Australian Archives, series number SP 1714 item N4673: cited in 'The Fascist Cricket Tour of 1924–25', p. 167.

Tasmania in 1922, before becoming an Inspector of Seamen in Melbourne. Through its mouthpiece, *The British Lion*, the BF informed its readers that 'There is no doubt Captain Hatcher is the man for the job, and his knowledge of Communism and international intrigue are of the greatest use to the cause for which we all work.'[132]

The Australian BF had two main objectives. The first was to assist 'every patriotic organisation and individual in awakening our fellow countrymen to the [Communist] danger of the whole of the British Empire'. The second, to 'plant groups of Fascists in every corner of the large cities, also in towns and districts throughout Australia, not only to assist in countering Communist poisoning but to encourage self-sacrifice and brotherhood […] in the event of attempted revolution'. According to Hatcher, the ideological underpinning of the movement was to defend the Empire for 'we believe that the stronger the British Empire the better for the world. […] [T]he welfare of the [Empire] depends upon the character of its people, and so we reject these conditions of life which are detrimental to character and consequently detrimental to the good of this glorious country.'[133] In other words, Communism is a direct challenge to Australia, the British Empire and the character of its citizens.

The Australian branches were unquestionably under the control of the BF from London. The most obvious indication is that they operated under the name 'the British Fascists'. Furthermore, the groups in Australia used the emblem of the British Fascists: 'a disc surmounted by a rose, and in the centre is the letter "F"'.[134] In fact, badges were made with the emblem printed on and members, in exchange for no subscription charge, were asked to buy a badge and wear it. Hatcher himself adhered to this command and when

[132] 'British Fascism in Australia', *The British Lion*, June 1926 Issue Number 1, p. 4. Hatcher's appointed was reported in the Australian press: 'Plain Admission. Fascisti Organisation. An Official's Statement', *The Brisbane Courier*, 3 November 1925, p. 19; 'Organisation Here. An Australian "Command"', *The Age* [Melbourne], 3 November 1925, p. 11.

[133] '"We Have Spies." Fascist Movement. Strike Committee's Allegations' and 'Plain Admission. Fascisti Organisation. An Official's Statement': both in *The Brisbane Courier*, 3 November 1925, p. 19.

[134] 'British Fascists Organise in Australia. Objects Explained', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1925, p. 15. A picture of the BF's emblem was printed in various newspapers including *The Weekly Times* [Melbourne], 7 November 1925, p. 10, and *The Mercury* [Hobart], 19 January 1927, p. 7.

he told an interested Labor official what the badge represented. The anti-fascist official retorted 'You ought to be shot, and you will be shot.'[135]

The Australian arm of the BF did not attempt to hide its subordination to London. In fact, they were proud to be part of the British movement. 'We are a British Fascisti', declared Hatcher to the Australian press. 'We are a registered company in London upon constitutional lines, under the name of the British Fascists […] Our headquarters are at 75 Elm Park Gardens, London, S.W., and the president of the association is Brigadier-General Blakeney.' The honorary secretary of the Victorian Command, Mr W. G. Park, boasted to the press that 'the Australian Fascisti was a branch of the organisation known as the British Fascists'[136] Furthermore, the membership forms of the Australian BF were signed by the London based 'Mr. A. Kirby Hewlett, organising secretary, British Fascists'.[137]

It is difficult to estimate the membership numbers of the Australian branches, but they appear to be low. Australian newspapers occasionally reported on the movement's size. On 24 November 1925, Hatcher told *The Daily Standard* (Brisbane) that 600 people in Victoria had joined the BF.[138] The following year, Hatcher claimed that in states where Labor Governments were in power, 'Fascisti flourished'.[139] On 29 January 1927, *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney) were informed by the BF that its Sydney branch had over 1,000 active members as well as the staff.[140] The fascists were eager to inflate the importance of the movement to the public in an attempt to attract members. Therefore, they exaggerated the size of its membership numbers in Australia.

It is likely that the size of the BF in Australia did not exceed the low hundreds at any one time, and there is no evidence to suggest that the BF 'flourished' anywhere in Australia. By the end of the decade 'Fascism was in such a bad way in Australia that it

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[135] 'Plain Admission', *The Queenslander*, 7 November 1925, p. 19.
[136] 'Movement in Tasmania', *The Mercury* [Hobart], 19 January 1927, p. 7.
[137] 'British Fascists Organise in Australia. Objects Explained'.
[138] 'The Fascist Evil in Victoria', *The Daily Standard*, 24 November 1925, p. 10.
[139] '"Revolution in Britain". Fascist Warning', *The Evening News* [Sydney], 15 March 1926, p. 3.
[140] 'Sydney's Mystery Fascist Secretary', *Smith's Weekly* [Sydney], 12 February 1927, p. 9.

numbered only a few zealots'.[141] Previous leaders resigned their posts and publicly distanced themselves from the movement. Hatcher had left the BF by the summer of 1926, after having 'provided a mild sensation as the un-Mussolini-like leader of the Victorian Fascists'.[142] In response to a report identifying him as an active fascist, the ex-head of the Tasmanian division, Captain Victor Holyman, wrote to the newspapers explaining that he had 'severed connection with the Fascists four or five months ago [mid to late 1926], since which time he has had absolutely nothing to do with the movement'.[143] Around the same time, *The Mercury* reported that Wagstaff had also split from the organisation.[144] Similarly, the 'State commander' of Melbourne resigned in January 1927.[145]

The resignations were likely down to the realisation by the men that they were fighting a lost cause. In November 1928, the 'general organiser in Australia for the British Fascists', Mr Chas. P. Godhard, admitted that membership was becoming non-existent. While on his way to London from Sydney, Godhard explained to *The West Australian* that 'the organisation in Australia had no difficulty in obtaining money, but there was a dearth of man power necessary to counter the propaganda of Communists. Money was not as necessary as volunteers willing to carry on the work of the organisation.'[146] It appears that the Australian arm of the BF was dissolved soon after.

According to Godhard, '[t]he ignorance of the ideals and objects of the British Fascist organisation was the cause of the apathy of Australians towards the movement'. He explained how the they devoted their activities 'entirely to peaceful ends, but that aspect is not generally realised by Australians'.[147] However, throughout the movement's lifetime, the Australian press gave regular column inches to the BF to explain their motives. For example, when reporting on the Hatcher affair (covered below), many papers across the country printed Hatcher's statement that 'Communism [is] the only

[141] Ibid; According to *The Angus* [Melbourne] on 28 October 1927, just fourteen men and five women attended the elections for a Victoria fascist council (p. 14).
[142] 'The Last Cruise of Sir Guy Gaunt', *Smiths Weekly*, 21 August 1926, p. 13.
[143] 'The Tasmanian Fascists', *The Mercury* [Hobart], 27 January 1927, p. 12.
[144] 'British Fascists. Movement in Tasmania', *The Mercury* [Hobart], 19 January 1927, p. 7.
[145] 'British Fascists', *Advocate* [Burnie], 19 January 1927, p. 5.
[146] 'British Fascists: Work in Australia', *The West Australian* [Perth], 5 November 1928, p. 11.
[147] Ibid.

organisation that we [are] against. We will loyally support any Government constitutionally elected'.[148] More locally, *The Advertiser* [Adelaide] printed a letter from the Australian BF secretary, F. W. Darley, who emphasised that 'the British Fascists have no time and have no cause for the unconstitutional methods of Mussolini. We Britishers have an Empire, and it is our duty as such to protect and develop that Empire on constitutional and peaceful lines, doing any bit to avoid internal trouble'.[149] The letter prompted responses from members of the public and reporters.[150]

Although Godhard's explanation has merit, many believed fascism to be synonymous with the Italian brand and its revolutionary methods. A number of other factors explain the low membership numbers. Firstly, during the first half of the movement's short lifespan, the Australian branches had limited amounts of literature to disseminate – presumably only those left by the English cricketers. The Hobart branch only had two BF pamphlets available for distribution: 'Communism Unmasked' and 'The Union Jack and Rulers of Your Own Race or the Red Flag and Alien Domination', both written by Blakeney.[151] In response to enquiries about joining the movement, Hatcher admitted to would-be signups that 'We are short of literature at the present time.'[152] Perhaps, a variety of BF propaganda in greater numbers at their disposal would have resulted in greater interest.

Secondly, the intention of the Australian BF was to operate covertly and therefore attracting members would undoubtedly be difficult. When Wagstaff was approached in person by a reporter from *The News* [Hobart], he expressed surprise: 'With a penetrating glance, he surveyed the "News" man as if to say, "what do you know about it?"' The reporter informed him that he had 'on good authority' reason to believe that Wagstaff was the 'Tasmanian representative of the Fascists'. 'Oh well', Wagstaff replied, 'I suppose the other fellow has "blown the gaff" and there is no use in denying it. Yes, it is

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[148] 'British Fascists. Branches in Australia. Constitution Outlined.'; 'Plain Admission. Fascisti Organisation. An Official's Statement'; 'Fascists in Australia. A Constitutional Force', *The Daily Mercury* [Mackay], 20 November 1925, p. 3; 'Fascists Here. A Branch in Hobart. Official Statement', *The Examiner* [Launceston], 3 November 1925, p. 5.
[149] 'British Fascists', *The Advertiser* [Adelaide], 25 February 1926, p. 7
[150]'British Fascists', *The News* [Adelaide], 1 March 1926, p. 6. 'British Fascists', *The Advertiser*, 2 March 1926, p. 18.
[151] 'The Black Shirts Are Here. Organisation Established In Hobart'.
[152] '"We Have Spies." Fascist Movement. Strike Committee's Allegations'.

quite true […] We have remained quiet about it because the Communists work quietly, and we thought that the best way would be for us to do the same.'[153] London appeared to be the main recruiters for their Australian arm. *The Fascist Bulletin* requested 'all Fascists to send names and addresses of relations and friends in Australia, so that we may be enabled to get in touch with them.'[154]

However, the most likely reason for the low membership numbers of the Australian BF is the political climate in Australia during the 1920s. The attitude and policies of the country's government were pro-British, pro-Empire and avidly anti-Communist. The Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce (1923 to 1929), made major reforms to the Australian federal system to strengthen the role of the Commonwealth. He also formed closer ties to Britain and the rest of the Empire and actively encouraged a stronger emigration policy to attract more British migrants. Bruce successfully pressured the British government into allowing a permanent political 'liaison officer' in London to act as a conduit between Westminster and Melbourne.[155] His strong pro-British sentiments led the press to depict him as 'an Englishman who happened to have been born in Australia'.[156]

Furthermore, Bruce was fiercely anti-Communist. He was appalled at Britain's decision to formally recognise the Soviet Union in 1924.[157] Bruce's refusal to accept the policy played a major role in Britain signing the General Treaty with the Soviet Union on her own behalf only, marking a major split between Britain and Australia on foreign policy.[158] At home, Bruce sought a 'new spirit of co-operation in industry' between the unions and the employers.[159] In 1925, he had controversial amendments to the Navigation and Immigration Acts passed to break a strike. When, under the amended

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[153] 'The Black Shirts Are Here. Organisation Established In Hobart'.
[154] 'Letters From Fascists In Australia', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 12 September 1925, p. 1.
[155] Eric Andrews, *A History of Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne, 1988), p. 49.
[156] Heather Radi, 'Bruce, Stanley Melbourne (1883–1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University*, [http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bruce-stanley-melbourne-5400/text9147], accessed 2 July 2019 (published first in hardcopy 1979).
[157] 'Treaties with Russia. Australia's Position', *The Argus* [Melbourne], 20 August 1924, p. 19.
[158] John McNair & Thomas. Poole, *Russia and the Fifth Continent: Aspects of Russian-Australian Relations* (University of Queensland Press, 1992), pp. 176–177.
[159] 'Class War', *The News* [Adelaide], 17 November 1925, p. 6; 'Bruce, Stanley Melbourne (1883–1967)'.

Immigration Act, Bruce attempted to deport Walsh and fellow Communist, J. Johnson, Labor demanded that the prime minister held a federal (general) election. His campaign linked strikes and the 'foreign agitator' with loss of wages and rising prices, denouncing the 'wreckers who would plunge us into the chaos and misery of class war'.[160] Bruce won the election increasing his party's seats by 11 overall and continued his quest to overhaul Australia's industrial relations system. This eventually brought about his downfall in 1929 when his own party turned on him after he attempted to abolish the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, an Australian arbitration court that sought to settle industrial disputes.[161] The Australian government's programme of the 1920s mirrored the key ideological principle of the Australian BF: anti-Bolshevism. This strongly suggests that the Australian BF was not necessary and may explain why it was virtually a non-entity to the Australian public.

The Australian BF was undoubtedly unsuccessful in attracting significant members to the movement. However, it did attract considerable attention in Australia, unwittingly finding itself at the centre of a plot by the Labor Party to discredit Bruce in the run-up to the federal election on 14 November 1925.[162] Two weeks before Election Day, while the country was in the midst of a series of industrial disputes Labor undertook a campaign to connect the Federal Government to the Australian BF, claiming that Bruce and his men would 'pet and pamper local fascists' if they won the upcoming election, turning Australia into a 'Fascist Dictatorship'.[163] In perhaps overzealous terms, *The Labor Daily* declared that 'to protect our country against Fascist outrage-mongers and conspirators, the electors must put Labor into power'.[164]

Despite its desire to remain a covert force, Mr Charles O'Neill, President of the Overseas Strike Committee and Labor Party member, exposed the BF at a meeting held at Socialist Hall on 2 November 1925. His intention was that the press would 'take the matter up' to provoke an 'outcry' by the public who already reduced fascism to the

[160] Ibid.
[161] 'Bruce, Stanley Melbourne (1883–1967)'.
[162] The Labor Party changed its name from The Labour Party in 1912.
[163] 'A Fascist Dictatorship For Australia', *The Labor Daily*, 10 November 1925, p. 4.
[164] 'Protect Australia From Outrage-Mongers', *The Labor Daily*, 12 November 1925, p. 4.

brutality of Mussolini's Blackshirts.[165] O'Neill accused the government despite its claims to the contrary of not only knowing about the Australian BF but of supporting it by letting Hatcher use the Melbourne Mercantile Marine Office, a government building in which he worked to promote the movement.[166] Rumours spread that Hatcher issued a circular inviting people to meet him at 'his' office.[167] O'Neill stated that he was going to see the Director of Navigation, Captain John King Davis, to insist that he remove Hatcher from the premises. If Davis refused, O'Neill remarked, then he would make sure that the Seamen Union declare the BF offices 'black'; therefore, boycotted by trade-union members.[168] Furthermore, O'Neill called on Bruce to shut down the 'unlawful movement'.[169]

To the delight of O'Neill and Labor, the incident played out widely and effectively in the Australian press. Hatcher was asked for comment and flatly denied that the Mercantile Office was being used for fascist business, as the organisation was 'self-supporting'.[170] A bemused Davis released a statement in which he considered it 'clearly unthinkable that a public department should be used for the purposes of political activities'.[171] According to Davis, the paper reports were unclear as to whether the office was being used for political purposes. He claimed that Hatcher shared the office with three other officers, each 'might arrange to have someone meet him there before going elsewhere to discuss political matters'.[172] Even Prime Minister Bruce entered the argument: 'There is no possible authority to use any Government department for this

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[165] 'Fascist Organisation. Melbourne Activity Alleged', *The West Australian* [Perth], 2 November 1925, p. 9.
[166] 'Plain Admission. Fascisti Organisation. An Official's Statement'; 'British Fascists. Branches in Australia. Constitution Outlined.', *The Register* [Adelaide], 3 November 1925, p. 9; 'Fascist Movement. Growth in Melbourne. Mr. C. O'Neill Perturbed', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 3 November 1925, p. 3. For Bruce's claim to 'know of no Fascisti movement in Australia, see 'No Fascisti Here Says Mr. Bruce', *The Evening News* [Sydney], 2 November 1925, p. 7; 'Mr Bruce Disowns Fascisti', *The Herald* [Melbourne], 2 November 1925, p. 8.
[167] 'The Government and the Fascisti', *The Catholic Press*, 12 November 1925, p. 21.
[168] 'Plain Admission. Fascisti Organisation. An Official's Statement'; 'British Fascists. Branches in Australia. Constitution Outlined.', *The Register* [Adelaide], 3 November 1925, p. 9.
[169] 'Australian Fascists. Mr O'Neill Annoyed.', *Cairns Post* [Queensland], 3 November 1925, p. 4.
[170] 'Fascist Movement Established in Australia', *The Mercury* [Hobart], 3 November 1925, p. 5.
[171] 'Local Fascisti', *Weekly Times* [Melbourne], 7 November 1925, p. 10.
[172] Ibid.

purpose [….] and I would certainly not permit it to be done.'[173] Following the affair, the government appeared not to act, Hatcher remaining in the Mercantile Office and O'Neill did not action his threat. In isolation, the Hatcher affair had little effect on politics in Australia. It was, however, the catalyst that provoked accusations of a BF-Bruce pact against Labor.

Following this, *The Labor Daily* – the mouthpiece of the Labor Party – undertook a series of sinister actions to convince the public of a relationship between Bruce's government and the fascists. In the week of the election, portraying the Australian BF as a violent outfit 'prepared to use any weapons', the newspaper complained daily that the fascists were undertaking a violent campaign against the newspaper and its staff with the backing of Bruce.[174] It claimed to be receiving menacing letters from the Australian BF 'similar to those which anticipated the brutal Maletotti [sic] murder in Italy and criminal assaults on trade union officials in England', accusing Bruce of refusing 'to arrest and punish […] these advocating organised pillage and murder'.[175]

Then, on 12 November 1925, *The Labor Daily* claimed that masked 'probably *fascismo*' criminals attacked their premises. According to the paper, an armed gang 'invaded' their offices at 11:30 pm, some 'held the staff at bay with wicked-looking automatics and pick-handles, others made a hurried and amateurish attempt to wreck the ground floor and capture the Editor [Mr Spedding].' During the attempted kidnap, while 'struggling violently', Spedding and one of his 'assailants' slipped on 'some inflammable liquid' poured on the floor by the gang. 'One man', the article claimed, 'had been detailed to sprinkle the building with petrol or kerosene, which was contained in 1-gallon oil tins'. The inflammable liquid was 'dashed promiscuously over the general office' but the 'desperate invaders' did not have the time to ignite it. Spedding put up a 'determined resistance [that] evidently interfered with their plans' and the 'noise of scuffling' attracted members of staff from various parts of the building before the 'desperadoes' escaped in an awaiting car parked outside.[176]

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[173] 'Disowned. Fascisti Movement. Mr. Bruce Firm', *The Daily Mail* [Brisbane], 7 November 1925, p. 9.
[174] There's Going To Be Trouble', *The Labor Daily*, 7 November 1925, p. 1.
[175] 'Talk of State. Our Fascist Exposure', *The Labor Daily*, 9 November 1925, p. 5;
[176] 'Masked Criminals Attack "Labor Daily" Premises. Editor is Violently Handled', *The Labor Daily*, 12 November 1925, p. 5.

The paper blamed Bruce for the apparent actions of the Australian BF. 'If the Fascismo were responsible for last night's outrage, and we are confident that it was their actions [that] had a sinister interpretation. And having a political significance, Mr Bruce must be held culpable.'[177] It called for the 'effective' punishment of the '[i]mpudent violators of the law', remarking that 'Imprisonment with hard labor (sic) seems almost too good for them.' 'Will Bruce deal with them?', the newspaper asked, 'We are sure that he won't. They are too valuable to his political existence'.[178] Other newspapers ran the story. Some, for example, *The Daily Standard* [Brisbane], believed *The Labor Daily*'s explanation of events; others were more sceptical.[179]

As events unfolded in the following days, sources identify that *The Labor Daily* had staged the attacks. On behalf of the Australian BF, bewildered fascist, Neville. W. Smith, wrote a lengthy letter to *The Labor Daily,* which it published, denying that the movement had ever sent letters to its offices. Referencing the 'threatening' facsimile published by the newspaper purporting to be from his movement, Smith stated:

> I should like you to understand clearly that NO letters are official unless under the above letterhead which is distinctive, nor unless signed by Capt. Hatcher himself or through me, or by our accredited agents in Sydney in which case similar letterhead to this will be used.

Smith asked the newspaper for help in 'tracking down the writer of these offensive epistles'. In so doing, Smith explained, 'you would not only be doing us a great service by vindicating us, but you would be assisting to rid the community of many undesirables, who are making trouble but have not the courage to side with one party or the other.' Smith even complimented *The Labor Daily* for 'stand[ing] as the voice of the true Labor Party, for we sincerely trust that the Communists are as obnoxious to yourself as to us'. He also excused the newspaper's 'drastic attacks upon us [as] purely the result of enthusiasm piqued by the approaching elections'.[180]

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[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] 'Violent Fascist Outbreak', *The Daily Standard* [Brisbane], 12 November 1925, p. 1; 'Was It Fascists?', *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* [New South Wales], 12 November 1925, p. 2; 'Saw It. But Didn't Help', *The Sun* [Sydney], 12 November 1925, p. 13.
[180] '"The Sword if Necessary". Again the Fascisti', *The Labor Daily*, 14 November 1925, p. 1.

More convincingly, however, is the police report on the supposed office attack. The report identified the 'strange feature[s]' of *The Labor Daily*'s story. First, although many members of staff witnessed the event, no one intervened to help Spedding. Several were questioned as to why they did not go to his assistance. One told the police that he attempted to do so but was held back by other employees. Second, despite an intense scuffle taking place, nothing was 'stolen, broken or damaged in any way' in the building. Third, a puzzled sergeant Sheehy said that despite the group allegedly being armed, there had been no intention to damage or injure anyone. If they so desired 'it would have been a very easy matter to have cleaned up the lot'. Forth, as the sergeant also pointed out, the fuse on the explosive materials was 'faked before being connected with the gelignite, thus making it ineffective.' Fifth, no detonators were found on the premises. '[N]o one with any knowledge of explosives would be foolish enough to try to explode gelignite without the usual percussion cap.' Six, the police were unable to resume their investigation as the witnesses said that they were unable to identify or describe the 'invaders', beyond stating that they were masked, and were unable to provide details of the getaway vehicle as it had no plates.[181]

However, the incident that captured the most attention, including that of the British press as well as the Australian, revolved around another supposed letter, this time sent from London. Three days before the election, *The Labor Daily* printed a letter supposedly from 'The British Fascisti' in London to Hatcher 'exposing the fact that there is a cunning Fascism's [sic] plot to hand Australia over to the brutal domination of the "Black Shirts"'. The Letter revealed how the federal government had been assisting the Australian BF with their 'organizational work':

> If necessary steps should be taken to precipitate open hostilities with the militant unions. Open rioting would give us an opportunity to smash the unions and cripple Labour politically. In this we have the definite assurance that the present Federal Government would co-operate and will secretly instruct its officers to work in conjunction with our forces […] You need have no fear therefore. Use your force to prevent Labour from assuming office should a Labour victory at the poll eventuate.[182]

[181] 'Was It Fascists?', *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* [New South Wales], 12 November 1925, p. 2; 'Saw It. But Didn't Help', *The Sun* [Sydney], 12 November 1925, p. 13.
[182] 'Big Plot. A Damning Letter. Bruce Implicated', *The Labor Daily*, 11 November 1925, p. 5.

A quotation was included from 'Our present Chancellor of the Excehquer [sic], Mr Austen Chamberlain', who said '"Were Labour [in Britain] returned with a working majority [from the 1925 General Election – which they were not] it would be necessary in the interests of the nation to suspend constitutional government and forcibly present [sic] it from assuming office."' 'Fortunately', the letter continued, 'the last elections made the position safe in England, but in Australia the position is different. Labor is in power in four states and our experience has been such that almost any means would be justified in preventing it from ruling Federally.'[183] Surely, as the various sources suggest, the publishing of the letter was a deliberate attempt by the newspaper and Labor to turn the public against Bruce and his party.

Fortunately, for Bruce, the letter was riddled with glaring errors, which he readily exposed. Two days after it was printed, Bruce, in a speech to the nation, identified the various inaccuracies. According to the Australian prime minister, the heading of the paper differed from the actual letterheads used by the British Fascisti, the wrong address had been used, the phone number was invalid and, perhaps most glaringly, the letter was dated *before* the announcement of the election had been made. Furthermore, Austen Chamberlain was not Chancellor of the Exchequer but was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Bruce pointed out that 'had the letter been written in London, as it was alleged to have been, there would have been no possibility of such an error'.[184]

The BF from both countries became embroiled in the scandal. Bruce had secured a sworn affidavit from Hatcher in which he swore that he had

> never received such a letter or any letter containing similar sentiments; that he had never written to the British Fascists inviting or requiring a reply in such terms; that he never communicated with or received any communication from any person of the name of A. Kirby Hewlett, and that he was of the opinion that the letter was an attempt to ascribe to British Fascists a communication which was never authorised or sent by the organisation.[185]

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[183] Ibid.
[184] 'Fascisti. Amazing Canard. Exposed By Mr. Bruce', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 13 November 1925, p. 11. The speech in which Bruce's exposes the letter was covered by other newspapers. For example, 'Impudent Forgery. Malicious Fascisti Letter. Election Tactics Condemned. Mr. Bruce Shatters A Canard; *The Daily Mail* [Brisbane], 14 November 1925, p. 7; 'Labour Canard. "Malicious Forgery."', *Argus* [Melbourne], 13 November 1925, p. 19; 'Forged "Fascist" Letter', *The Times* [London], 13 November 1925, p. 12.
[185] Ibid.

Denouncements also came from London. Hewlett, the alleged sender of the letter, had resigned from the BF months before the date printed on the correspondence and gave a statement denying that he had never communicated with Australia, 'completely shatter[ing] Labour's […] canard.' BF president Blakeney and, vice-president, Admiral Armstrong, both denied that any such letter had been sent, describing how 'the sentiments expressed were contrary to the principles of the organisation.'[186]

Bruce was clearly upset by this 'impudent and malicious forgery'. Describing the attack as a 'despicable attempt to discredit the Ministry', the Australian PM announced that 'There have been many slanderous misstatements made during this campaign [...] but none so utterly mischievous as this'.[187] Incensed by the newspaper's actions, the government sought legal advice from the Attorney-General, John Greig Latham, as to whether it was possible for successful action to be taken by the Government against the editor of *The Labor Daily* in respect of the letter. Latham warned against undertaking such procedures:

> I am […] of opinion, that although the words used appear to be defamatory, in view of the fact that no injury appears to have been suffered either by Captain Hatcher or the members of the Ministry by reason of the publication of the letter, the success of an action for libel brought by any of those persons would be doubtful, and even if an action were successful, the measure of the damages would be very small. I think, therefore, that it would be inadvisable for any such action to be brought. As regards criminal proceedings, they will only lie if the libel tends to a breach of the peace by the person libelled. There appears to have been no such tendency in this case and, I think, therefore that criminal proceedings would be futile. I am of opinion that it is not likely that successful action could be taken against the Editor of the Labor Daily in respect of the publication of the letter in question.[188]

As a result, no legal action was taken. However, the scheme by Labor backfired. As reported by *The Times* [London], the letter was regarded as 'an extremely clumsy attempt to injure the Government on the eve of the election.'[189] Labor's attempts to link Bruce and his government with the BF and, as a result, lead Labor to power were

[186] Ibid; 'Forged "Fascist" Letter', *The Times* [London], 13 November 1925, p. 12.
[187] 'Fascisti. Amazing Canard. Exposed By Mr. Bruce', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November 1925, p. 11.
[188] J. Latham (14 January 1926), 'Opinion No 1379', *Legal Opinions*, [https://legalopinions.ags.gov.au/legalopinion/opinion-1379], accessed 2 July 2019.
[189] 'Forged "Fascist" Letter', *The Times* [London], 13 November 1925, p. 12.

unsuccessful as Bruce's party won 14 seats more than Labor, forming the next government. In fact, the farcical and sinister effort to smear Bruce likely appalled the Australian public; therefore, costing the Labor Party votes.[190] The effect the malicious campaign had on the Australian BF was to elevate the movement into the public sphere, albeit briefly.

The General Strike occurred in Britain in 1926, lasting just nine days before the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called it off with little violence having occurred. Therefore, Lintorn-Orman's vision of her movement gallantly saving the country from the clutches of Communism and 'proving ourselves as true fascists' never materialised.[191] In fact, the General Strike had a disastrous effect on the movement. First, in the run-up to the Strike, the movement suffered a major split. To mobilise a non-striking workforce in the event of a strike, the government created the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS). Before the BF could join the OMS, a few days before the strike, Prime Minister Baldwin's government insisted that it relinquish the name 'fascism' from its title first as well as remove its militant element and support the principle of parliamentary democracy. One faction, headed by Lintorn-Orman, favoured an outright rejection of the government's proposal; the other agreed to accept it. Following a close vote on the Grand Fascist Council (40 to 32) in favour of the Lintorn-Orman faction, a number of senior figures, including Blakeney, resigned to form the British Loyalists, who accepted the government's edict.[192] Second, the peaceful and relatively nondescript General Strike, as opposed to the BF's prediction, was evidence to many that no 'outside force' was likely to succeed in harbouring significant unrest, let alone a full-blown revolution, in Britain. Therefore, interest in the BF declined.

In an attempt to attract much-needed members to the organisation, the BF set up branches across Ireland in an attempt to capitalise on the discontent in the country.[193] In the late 19th century, there was a growing demand for home rule in Ireland, which eventually led to the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) followed by the Irish Civil War (1922–1923). By the time the BF arrived – the Free State Command in 1923 and the Ulster Command in the late summer of 1926 – Ireland was divided in two: Northern

[190] The threat of a BF takeover continued post-election. See, for example, 'The Boast of the Fascisti and Bruce's "Dictatorship of Six"', *Truth* [Perth], 28 November 1925, p. 1.
[191] 'Irish Headquarter Notes. Dublin', *The British Lion*, 28 August 1926, p. 4.
[192] *British Fascism 1918–1939*, p. 65.
[193] The Dublin branch had been active sometime before this.

Ireland remained in the UK while their Southern counterparts broke away to form the Irish Free State. As Northern Ireland was (and still is) part of the UK, it has to be excluded from analysis of 'transnationalism'; instead the regional exchanges should be categorised as 'transregionalism'. However, to exclude Northern Ireland from this study, and focus exclusively on the south, would result in an incomplete investigation as the two are, at least in part, interwoven. The fascist movement 'regret[ted] the inane division of our common country into two separate administrative areas, but as British Fascists, we recognise no boundary line between loyal British subjects.'[194] Much of the bloodshed had ceased by 1926, but incidents of sectarian conflict still existed, something that the BF intended to exploit; therefore, transforming the movement's political fortunes.

Behind the unrest was, according to the BF, 'the Soviet Worm'.[195] The fascist group's main recruitment drive was to instil fear in the population by claiming that a communist uprising was imminent and only by supporting fascism could it be prevented. BF publications regularly 'exposed' 'Moscow Plots' in Ireland. For example, over the summer of 1928, *The British Lion* ran a piece on the 'Red Army activities in Belfast and Dublin', claiming that 'cargoes of arms and ammunition' were being smuggled into Ireland from 'ports on Russia's European frontier'. Men and young boys were being 'lured' into the ranks of the Red Army where they swore an anti-British oath before being trained as revolutionary 'street war experts', using the imported weapons. Although Moscow is still trying to bring about a revolution in Britain, the article claims, it is finding more 'fertile soil' among the Communist Republicans of Ireland.[196]

In a bid to attract support for the BF among the British public, Mrs Harnett, the District Officer of the Ulster Women's Units, was summoned by the party to address meetings held in London. As the principal speaker, she explained the political and social landscape in Southern Ireland. Harnett's job was to emphasise the threat of a communist uprising in the UK made possible through Southern Ireland. During a meeting at Kensington Town Hall in early 1928, she depicted Southern Ireland as 'seething with Germans and Bolshevists', considering the country 'an enemy at [the UK's] back door'. Harnett described how 'the enemy' was gaining a foothold in the country:

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194 'Dublin', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926, pp. 15–16.
195 'Ulster Command', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926, p. 14.
196 'Moscow Plot in Ireland', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 (no date), pp. 6–7.

> The acceptance of a German tender for the Shannon electricity scheme had had very disturbing results for the local population. German workmen could now go to the homes of people in Southern Ireland, cut down trees, demolish walls, or even pull down houses if they wished, and the owners could do nothing because the intruders were backed by the authority of the Government.[197]

Harnett then ramped up her warning, describing Southern Ireland as a 'German colony'. 'Half the shops in Dublin had been bought by Germans, and they had enormous stores of their own where they used German token money.' She claimed that Germans were intermarrying with the native population, despite the effort of priests to deter it lawfully. '[I]t doesn't matter if they try to stop it legally; the result will be just the same' – communist children raised as revolutionaries.[198]

Certain members of the public were outraged by Harnett's depiction. Following the meetings, *The British Lion* reported, 'a stream of abuse had arrived at GHQ pointing out that it was wicked to refer to the growing menace to the Empire in Ireland as it was all past history'. The BF dismissed the remarks, reminding its readers of a quotation from the 'Arch Red Marx' that 'Ireland is the Achilles heel of England', and pleaded with readers 'not to be gulled by false talk of peace and quietness'.[199]

Branches in Ireland were clearly under the control of GHQ in London. In late 1927, Lintorn-Orman, her Chief of Staff, Miss Ray, and leading members from Western Command embarked on a 'grand tour' of the Irish divisions – Belfast, Newry, Newcastle, Kilkeel and Dublin – undertaking a number of 'important' duties. Lintorn-Orman held inquiries into the conduct of certain members, dismissing several from the Women's Unit in Belfast. While in Dublin, the delegates were chaperoned around the city by local branch members, before inspecting the fascists' new headquarters and addressing the unit. The Western Commander, Captain Rowlandson, mentioned 'matters of particular interest to this Command, and delivered several well-deserved homilies and pieces of advice regarding Fascism.' To ensure the fascists adhered to BF policy and ideology, he gave a lecture to the Irish unit on what the British movement

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[197] 'Irish Free State as a German Colony: Ulster Fascist's Picture', *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1928, p. 19.
[198] Ibid.
[199] 'The Irish Gunman', *The British Lion*, April 1928, p. 7.

stood for. The Dublin men's unit won the accolade for being 'undoubtedly the smartest in the organisation, as well as being one of the best-disciplined commands'.[200]

Each branch was expected to disseminate BF propaganda to the Irish public. Country Commander, Captain E.G. Morgan, who 'set about the propagation of British Fascism' in Ulster, was commended for 'spreading our propaganda [including] the sale and distribution of *The British Lion*' while the Kilkeel branch sold the *Lion* at local fairs, undertook ordinary drills and put on First Aid Classes. GHQ was particularly impressed with the efforts of, Cadet Fascist, D. H. Harnett for selling £2 12s. 4d. worth of Fascist matches during his Easter holidays.[201] In fact, in any fundraising that a branch undertook, a significant proportion of the money made went to GHQ. For example, Kilkeel raised £7 by hosting a Christmas carol card party; nearly half of the proceeds went to London.[202]

BF publications and local Irish newspapers identify how it was the duty of each branch to attract new members and supporters to the movement as well as fundraise. Kilkeel district, for example, held cake sales, carnival dances and sold flowers. To cheer in the New Year of 1927, Belfast headquarters organised a whist drive and dance at the Strandtown Unionist Club Hall, followed by another dance later that month, which attracted about 150 members.[203] It appears that the Dublin command was not as successful in fundraising and recruiting as their Northern counterparts were. The branch's main fundraising strategy appeared to be sending requests for money to contributors to local newspapers, whose addresses were printed. Mr John Souter of 24 Colchester Street, St. George's Square, Dublin, wrote to *The Evening Herald* in early 1925 asking if readers would help him identify the origins of the first tennis ball. The paper duly published his letter including his address. Among the many responses Souter

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[200] 'GHQ Visit to Ulster and Irish Free State Commands', *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 9; 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 14; The lecture on behaviour may have been a result of two members who, a short time earlier, were found by the party to be 'Guilty of conduct prejudiced to the Cause of Fascism'. One of the guilty party was dismissed; the other demoted: 'Dublin Area', *The British Lion*, October–November 1927, pp. 15–16.

[201] 'Ulster Command', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926, p. 14; 'Ulster Womens [sic] Unit', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 1928, p. 12.

[202] 'Ulster Women's Units', *The British Lion*, April 1929, p. 16.

[203] Ulster Womens [sic] Unit', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 1928, p. 12; 'Ulster Women's Units', *The British Lion*, April 1929, p. 16; 'Ulster Fascists' Dance', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 20 January 1927, p. 6.

received, enough to make a book he claimed, was 'a request to hand over five pounds to an organisation calling itself the British Fascists'.[204] That said, the Free State division did undertake at least one conventional fundraiser. On 24 September 1927, under the leadership of Divisional Officer, C.E. Thompson, members put on a concert consisting of various artists. The financial results were, according to one member, 'most satisfactory' and people were 'eager' to know when the next one was.[205]

However, *The British Lion* reveals the hostility shown towards a pro-British, fascist movement in Southern Ireland which at the time made progress very difficult. In late 1926, the premises occupied by the Dublin branch were set on fire, probably deliberately, making the venue unusable. Due to 'the political atmosphere' that they faced, proprietors were reluctant to rent to the BF and it was not until a year later when new offices were found.[206] The division regularly wrote to *The British Lion* complaining of the problems that confronted them, bemoaning the 'difficulties here, in the Irish Free State, which are not in evidence in other Commands'.[207]

Due to the 'difficult problems owing to the political antagonisms that are rampant' in the country, recruiting and raising 'badly needed' funds was an almost impossible task.[208] GHQ acknowledged the issues that the Irish Free State command encountered. 'It must not be forgotten that conditions in Ireland are such that it not only is trebly difficult to organise but in many cases is attended by personal risks to the officers and the members, who are true Fascists in every sense of the word.'[209] Lintorn-Orman also showed sympathy to the Dubliners by pronouncing that Southern Ireland was 'probably the most difficult place to organise Fascism in Europe'.[210]

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[204] 'First Tennis Ball', *The Evening Herald*, 17 February 1925, p. 6.
[205] 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, October–November 1927, pp. 15–16.
[206] Meanwhile, they used 'unsuitable' temporary accommodation. 'Irish Command', *The British Lion*, 22 January 1927, p. 13; 'Irish Command', *The British Lion*, 5 February 1927, p. 8; 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 14.
[207] 'Irish Headquarter Notes. Dublin', *The British Lion*, 28 August 1926, p. 4; 'Dublin', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926, p. 15; 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, Issue 32 1929, p. 14; 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, October–November 1927, p. 15.
[208] 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, October–November 1927, pp. 16–17.
[209] 'GHQ Visit to Ulster and Irish Free State Commands', *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 9
[210] 'GHQ Visit to Ulster and Irish Free State Commands', *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 9.

Southern Ireland was clearly a dangerous place for a pro-British group to operate in during this period, particularly one that was 'fully awake to the absolute necessity of keeping alive the respect and honour due to the Imperial Emblem, the Union Jack, so that future generations of loyal Irishmen will not lose any of their inherited respect for our great heritage, the Empire.'[211] The bloody Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) and the years preceding it, saw atrocities committed by both sides. Therefore, when Eire gained independence from the British state, hostilities towards their old rulers remained. Antagonisms were always evident, particularly each year before and on Armistice Day, 11 November, when violence erupted. However, the issue that the Republicans had was not the honouring of the war dead, many nationalists had also served in the British armed forces, but the overt display of loyalist sentiments such as the singing of 'God save the King' and the selling of memorial Poppies by the Royal British Legion.

Local, national and international newspapers reported on the 'numerous ugly incidents, free fights, and occasional truncheon charges by the police', that occurred during the yearly events.[212] Across the city, Union Jacks were stolen, trailed in mud and 'torn into shreds', and poppies were 'snatched' from wearers and 'torn off the bonnets of motor-cars and trampled underfoot'.[213] Stones and stink bombs were thrown by angry mobs chanting 'Up the Republic'.[214] On Armistice Day 1925, ex-British soldier, Charles Oates, who was marching with other men from Grafton Street into College Green, died of a heart attack after a bomb, thrown by Republicans, exploded near the marchers.[215] On parade-day 1928, three bombs targeted the statues of previous English kings: William III, Edward VII and George I, causing damage to the sculptures but, remarkably, not injuring anyone. Following the explosions, police raided premises across the city, seizing 'three machine guns, a large quantity of ammunition for them, several thousand rounds of rifle and revolver ammunition, 36 bombs, 300 detonators

[211] 'Dublin', *The British Lion*, 25 September 1926, pp. 15–16.
[212] 'Lively Scenes in Dublin', *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 November 1926, p. 14.
[213] Ibid.
[214] 'Smoke Bombs During Dublin's Silence', *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 November 1926, p. 14;
[215] 'Ex-Soldier's Death in Dublin: Heart Failure After Bomb Incident', *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1925, p. 10;

and various other military equipment', undoubtedly to be used by Republicans against their 'oppressors'.[216]

The Dublin branch of the BF made its presence known during the yearly commemorations. In the weeks preceding the 1926 event, they undertook a fundraising campaign to commemorate the war dead. On 11 November 1926, a wreath was laid at the Wellington Monument in Phoenix Park beneath 'the weather-beaten wooden Celtic Cross, specially brought from the Flanders's Fields, where it had marked the graves of thousands amongst our 50,000 heroic Irish dead.'[217] The Dublin fascists made it clear that they would not tolerate agitators, instructing members instead of parading to mingle with the crowd for the purpose of maintaining order and enforcing (if necessary) the two-minute silence.[218]

Trouble ensued on the day. Higginbotham claimed that in the weeks before 'the glorious 11th', a 'discordant extremist body calling itself The Anti Imperialist Association' endeavoured to 'disturb the equanimity of loyal citizens with dire threats of force to be used against the promoters of what they were pleased to term "an Imperialist display on Poppy Day"'. Throughout the day, BF members went on picket duty in the principal streets and guards were placed at the local Poppy Depot in Dawson Street. Despite labelling republican efforts to disrupt the day as 'futile', Higginbotham admitted that the BF was involved in fights with them: '[T]ussles took place throughout the principal streets for Flags and Poppies, but in almost every case the agressors [sic] were defeated in their objectives'. He singled out one member for praise for recovering a small Union Jack single-handed from an attacker who had supposedly snatched it from 'the person of a loyal citizen'. According to Higginbotham, as a result of their

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[216] 'Three Bomb Blasts Startle Dublin', *The New York Times*, 12 November 1928, p. 21. In addition to the *New York Times*, *The Times of India* and *The Washinton Post* reported on the incidents: 'Armistice Day In Dublin', *The Times of India*, 17 December 1926, p. 19; 'Irish Bombs Seized After Vandalism: Paraders Are Attacked', *The Washington Post*, 12 November 1928, p. 3 Newspapers across Australia also reported on the disturbances. Although separate from the British, Eire was still part of the British Empire, something that Republicans detested. Eire left the British Empire and the Commonwealth in 1949.

[217] C.W. Higginbotham, 'Remembrance Day in Dublin', *The British Lion*, 4 December 1926, pp. 10–11.

[218] 'Dublin', *The British Lion*, 20 November 1926, p. 15.

‘gallant’ efforts, the Dublin BF earned the respect gratitude of the officials of The British Legion.[219]

As a result, a friendly relationship developed between the Irish Free State Command and the Legion. In-between Armistice Day 1926 and 1927, a series of tournaments took place between the two groups. The Dublin BF welcomed a tennis team sent by the Legion. A series of matches took place, the hosts winning every one. In return, the Legion arranged a billiard tournament between them and the fascists, winning three games out of four. In addition, the Legion was invited to the concert held by the BF, proving ‘so popular’ by all that attended.[220] The relationship between the two had clearly become close as the Legion asked the fascists to work with them in an official capacity.

In the lead up to Armistice Day 1927, the Organising Secretary of the British Legion, who foresaw trouble, approached the Dublin fascists to ‘obtain our services as a bodyguard for the Legion banners and standards that were to be carried in th[e] procession.’ Although the BF ‘furnished special guards and patrols for all the Flanders Poppy Deports in the city’ between 5 and 12 November, they refused to assist the Legion due to the organisation’s demand that the fascists refrain from wearing ‘Fascist badges or any other indication that we belonged to the organisation’.[221] This identifies that despite the Irish fascists – and the BF in general – outward display of loyalty to the Crown, including its willingness to fight for the cause, fascism was perceived, even by its allies, to be an essentially foreign and ‘un-British’ movement.

The Ulster fascists were also embroiled in street fighting with their Republican enemy, which was reported widely in the press. The first public meeting of the Belfast branch of the BF, held at Clarence Place Hall in late November 1926, resulted in a riot. The *Belfast Evening Telegraph* and the *Larne Times* devoted several columns to the melee.[222] Reporters present predicted ‘stormy scenes’ when they saw a large police

[219] ‘Remembrance Day in Dublin’. Unsurprisingly, Higginbotham’s depiction is in contrast with contemporary newspaper reports, which state that the Republicans were at least in part successful in disrupting proceedings.
[220] ‘Irish Free State Command’, *The British Lion*, October–November 1927, pp. 15–16.
[221] ‘Irish Free State Command’, *The British Lion*, December 1927, p. 14.
[222] Belfast’s Mass Meeting’, *The Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 23 November 1926;

presence outside the building before the event had begun. During the meeting, when the speaker, Captain Morgan, condemned socialism, a mass brawl ensued in the crowd. Morgan jumped down from the platform and began attacking hecklers who were being ejected by a large body of stewards. 'Words led to blows, and in a few minutes the scenes were most disorderly', a reporter from *The Manchester Guardian* wrote. 'Blood was spilled' but the only serious casualty of the evening was Morgan who was hit with a 'loaded stick and had his arm dislocated' before being taken to hospital. The pressmen jumped on the table allocated to them to see all the fighting. Their attention was fixed on an 'interrupter' who 'jumped on a chair and threw himself into an attitude of defence […] but eventually the interrupter was bowled over and, dishevelled and heated, carried with a rush to the door and flung out, amidst the victorious cheers of the Fascists.' Eventually, order was restored and the meeting continued.[223]

The anti-fascists in attendance were not the only ones hostile to the BF. Many in the audience were concerned about the Irish contingent being subservient to London. Captain Turner-Coles, the movement's Chief of Staff at GHQ, who spoke at the meeting, had been informed, in the way of a note passed to him while on stage, that 'the organisation meant good jobs and fat salaries' for those in London. Turner-Coles assured the crowd that 'at GHQ only two persons were paid, the editor of the British Lion, the Fascist journal, and their secretary, and neither were paid wages higher than that of a labourer.' In his speech, Herbert Jackson, chairman of the Ulster Fascists, assured the crowd that 'the British Fascists in Ulster were going to come into the open and let their aims and ideals be known.'[224]

This it did. Three months later, the Socialist party held a meeting at the Ulster Hall in Belfast, where two socialist MPs from Glasgow were principal speakers.[225] Despite tight security, consisting of both police and party stewards, Ulster members of the BF smuggled themselves in. Part way through the meeting 'a woman in the centre of the end gallery rose and unfurling a Union Jack waved it'. As the lady was 'being gradually

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'Belfast Meeting Scenes – British Fascisti Launched', *Larne Times*, 27 November 1926, p. 6.

[223] 'Riot At Belfast Fascist Meeting: Chairmen's Arm Broken', *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1926, p. 9.

[224] Ibid.

[225] George Buchanan and the Reverend Campbell Stephen, both represented the Independent Labour Party.

dragged along, still waving the flag, in the middle of a struggling mass of people […] a crowd of young men stood up and began to sing in strong volume, "Rule Britannia"'. In the brawl that followed, the police 'with extraordinary difficulty' managed to wrestle the fascists out into the corridor where they continued singing to the annoyance of those in the hall who could 'plainly hear the strains of "Rule, Britannia"'.[226]

Following their ejection and, much to their annoyance, the locking of the doors behind them, the fascists congregated outside of the hall and held a 'public demonstration', which attracted hundreds of people.[227] 'A huge Union Jack formed a background for the speakers, who used the window-sills as a platform.' Addresses denouncing Socialism 'in all its moods and tenses' were met with cheers from the onlooking crowd.[228] The Belfast branch claimed that it had enrolled over fifty new recruits that evening. 'It is, therefore, obvious', according to the *British Lion*, 'that British Fascism has gone about its work in Ulster's capital with a will'.[229]

As well as running battles with Republicans and communists, the BF did have an impact on Irish society, socially and politically, which is identified in the local and national press as well as BF publications. The fascist movement was particularly aggrieved at the British government's refusal to ban anti-British 'revolutionary material'. The BF claimed that 'seventy publications in this country directed towards revolutionary purposes' were targeting the 'weak spots' of society. It is 'the hearts and heads of little children […] that the Communists are attacking by stealth today':

> [T]housands of British children are falling week by week under the dreadful influence of these people, and are being taught blasphemy, sedition and class hatred and scorn for the marriage tie; to ridicule religion, to be disloyal to the King and to hate all those who are not of their own way of thinking.[230]

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[226] 'Anti-Socialist Scenes in Belfast: Ulster Hall Uproar', *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 12 February 1927, p. 7.
[227] This figure was given by the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*; the BF put the figure at 'about a thousand'.
[228] 'Anti-Socialist Scenes in Belfast: Ulster Hall Uproar'.
[229] 'British Fascism in Ulster: The Work of the Command', *The British Lion*, 19 February 1927, pp. 3–4.
[230] The BF claimed that 15 Communist Sunday Schools operated in London, attended by up to 100 children, and 25 in other parts of the country: 'Communist Sunday Schools: England's grave danger', *The British Fascists*.

As well as regular complaints voiced through their main publications, in September 1924, the BF produced a six-page pamphlet on the 'grave danger' of 'Communist Sunday Schools' which were 'held in private houses and elsewhere, in many parts of the country'. The fascists claimed that a 'very large and extensive literature is published and distributed among the children in these Communist Schools, while oral teaching is given on similar lines. The literature includes weekly and monthly papers, song-books and all sorts of propaganda.' Extracts from a pamphlet titled *How to conduct a Proletarian School*, supposedly published in Glasgow shortly after the establishment of the Communist International in March 1919, identifies the key objectives of the schools:

> To teach the children the ideal of the revolution should be the primary object of a Socialist Sunday School. All other teaching is of no avail […] A boy and girl should be learned (sic) a real live, red-hot revolutionary speech to take about ten minutes […] Our work is to train the children of the working class to accomplish the revolution.[231]

Concern over Communists schools went far wider than the BF. Members of both Parliaments and religious organisations argued for these schools and journals, such as the *Young Communist* and *Young Worker*, to be banned. Subsequently, Lord Danesfort (Sir John Butcher) tabled the Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children Bill in the House of Lords in June 1924 to 'prevent the teaching of sedition and blasphemy to children under sixteen years of age.' The Bill, Danesfort explained, was aimed at 'the regular type of Communist propaganda, common to all Communists in all countries, teaching which was described by Mr Winston Churchill as the vile garbage of atheism and revolution.' The Bill passed by 102 votes to 20 in the Lords and by 213 votes to 85 in the Commons, with many prominent individuals supporting it – including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks – before being defeated at the Report Stage in the Commons in July 1927.[232]

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[231] The BF publication also includes extracts from 'Ten Proletarian Maxims'; Communist children's magazines, which 'delights in the foulest blasphemies'; 'papers specially prepared and published for Children', which emphasised that 'Capitalism must be destroyed at all costs, even if it means the use of force. Force means hatred. We preach the gospel of hatred'; a book of 'proletarian poems' titled 'A Child's Reading'; and posters that were 'pasted up' in a 'Communist School at Southwark, in London', which read 'Fight Damn it, Fight!'. Many of the fascist's quotes were taken from a speech delivered by Lord Danesfort (Sir John Butcher) in the Lords months earlier: 'Communist Sunday Schools: England's grave danger', *The British Fascists*.

[232] 'Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children Bill (Second Reading – Lords)', *Hansard*, 3 July 1924 Volume 58; 'Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children

To counter 'the Red lotion poured into these small children', the BF set up schools of their own, as this was the 'only practical method of fighting the Red Sunday Schools and Clubs'.[233] More than a year after the first 'Juvenile Branch' was held by Mrs Eslip at Homles Road School, Kentish Town, on the evening of 8 September 1925, Jackson announced the intention of the Irish BF to form 'Children's Clubs' in Ulster 'to teach the young the best ideals of citizenship'.[234] The first of these clubs opened on 23 March 1927 at the Church Army Labour Home, Oldpark Road in Belfast, and the following month the Belfast division boasted a membership roll of almost 1,000 children 'to whom they taught the glories of the British Empire, and the teaching of Ulster's bulwark, the open Bible.'[235] The Ulster kids clubs remained active until mid-1930.[236]

It is, of course, impossible to measure how successful the fascist youth clubs were in the 'prevention of the spread of sedition amongst our children'.[237] Formed primarily to deter the younger generation from falling prey to the 'Red Menace', the clubs in Ireland also took on a philanthropic character, which undoubtedly had a positive impact on Irish society. For the working class, 1920s Belfast was a grim place to be. '[T]here were appalling slums, over-crowded and unsanitary alleyways, rack-rented millworkers hovels, byres and stables used for human habitation'.[238] On 22 December 1927, *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post* described how the Fascist Children's Club (FCC) gave about 250 poor children a 'Christmas treat' at P.E. School, Avoca Street, Belfast: tea was provided, a Christmas tree erected and toys were distributed by a fascist dressed as Santa Claus to the children.[239]

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Bill (Second Reading – Commons)', *Hansard*, 11 March 1927 Volume 203; 'Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children Bill – Clause 1', *Hansard*, 1 July 1927 Volume 208.

[233] 'Communist Sunday Schools: England's grave danger', *The British Fascists*.

[234] 'N.W. 5 Women's Branch', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 26 September 1925, p. 1; 'Belfast Meeting Scenes – British Fascisti Launched', *Larne Times*, 27 November 1926, p. 6; 'Belfast's Mass Meeting', *The British Lion*, 4 December 1926, pp. 4–5.

[235] 'Belfast', *The British Lion*, 27 June 1927, pp. 14–15; 'British Fascists. First Children's Club in Belfast', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 24 March 1927, p. 11.

[236] 'British Fascists', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 19 January 1931, p. 10; 'Who Began Fascism in Great Britain?', *British Fascism*, 1 March 1932, pp. 1–2.

[237] 'British Fascists Children's Clubs Department', *British Fascism*, May 1934, p. 9.

[238] Charles Brett, *Housing a Divided Community* (Dublin, 1986), p. 18.

[239] 'Fascist Treat to Children', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 22 December 1927, p. 10.

The Ulster fascists opened the 'Hunter Moore' FCC on 4 January 1929. According to *The British Lion*, fifty children attended the first week, ninety the second. As a late New Year's treat, children were given tea and presents.[240] Over Easter, the *Belfast Newsletter* reported, the club entertained 160 young people at its premises in Belfast and provided them with tea and presents.[241] In July, at the invitation of the Earl and Countess of Kilmorey, who were keen to assist the BF with their philanthropy, an outing was arranged for the children to spend a day at Mourns Park, County Down. A 'splendid' programme of sports was arranged and prizes presented, and 'dinner and tea' were provided for the children.[242] *The British Lion* printed a photograph of the 'summer treat', identifying at least a hundred children and staff present on the day.[243]

To create and maintain the FCCs, the branches had to fundraise. The raising of money began before the first club opened. A series of dances were organised by the Women's Units Ulster Command to raise funds for their branches, part of which went to the 'loyalty teaching' FCCs. According to *The Northern Whig And Belfast Post*, the fourth dance attracted 'a very large attendance'. Interestingly, it appears that the Ulster division trialled the children's clubs before deciding to open one officially. The experiment proved successful as no less than 150 children attended one club on the evening of Thursday 17 February.[244] On 28 October, clearly impressed with the commitment shown by the Irish BF, GHQ 'subscribed' £15 (equivalent to almost £1,000 in 2019) for the Ulster FCCs, 'with the promise of an endeavour to collect sufficient to have a permanent paid member of staff for this branch of Fascism.'[245] The clubs became so successful that public meetings were held to obtain more workers.[246]

However, their endeavours did not always run smoothly. The following year, in the days leading up to Christmas, a party of BF toured some of the villages and small towns of South Down, the part of Ulster that is near the Free State border, to raise funds for the FCC. Their activities included 'singing carols in the streets' and, 'as usual with the

[240] 'Ulster Women's Units', *The British Lion*, April 1929, p. 16.
[241] 'British Fascists', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 11 April 1929, p. 6.
[242] 'Fascists' Children's Outing', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 3 July 1929, p. 8.
[243] 'Children of the Hunter Moore F.C.C., *The British Lion*, Issue Number 32 1929, p. 6.
[244] 'British Fascists: Women's Ulster Command Dance', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 19 February 1927, p. 8.
[245] 'GHQ Visit to Ulster and Irish Free State Commands', *The British Lion*, December 1927, pp. 9–10.
[246] F. Waring, 'Ulster Women's Units', *The British Lion*, April 1929, p. 16.

British Fascists', they finished every performance with the singing of the National Anthem. The vehicles that took them from place to place flew Union Jacks from the radiators. Several days later, a male member of the 'carol party' was 'accosted after dark' by an unknown man, who warned him that 'if he ever dared again to "drive about the country flying the Union Jack, singing God save the King in the streets" he would "get a good kicking"'. In addition, a woman member was 'mobbed' by a crowd of young men for flying the Union Jack on her car, the mob stamping the emblem of the I.R.A. on her car windscreen.[247]

Although the Irish fascists created and organised their own children's clubs, GHQ still officially controlled them. In December 1927, the Belfast clubs, by this time there were two – ran by Mrs Adair and Miss Bristowe – were inspected by Lintorn-Orman and Ray. The pair commented on the 'vital necessity for this work [as] proved by the terrible state of the slum children who are the members of the clubs'. Both clubs sang God Save the King in a 'hearty manner, especially considering that until the F.C.C. started the children did not know the National Anthem.' Furthermore, GHQ made it clear that it had authority over the clubs' finances and dictated who could visit them: 'All contributions to this fund are guaranteed to be spent on nothing but the development and maintenance of Fascist Children's Clubs. Accounts may be inspected at GHQ and those interested in this branch of the Organisation may visit the Clubs, and see for themselves how their money is spent.'[248]

The BF was also involved directly in Irish politics. Another example of the Ulster fascists attempt to defeat its enemy was its engagement in the Belfast Municipal Elections held in January 1927. The branch decided to offer its assistance to those Unionist candidates who they considered ardently 'Anti-Socialist'. A circular letter was sent from the Area Commander, Frank T. Williamson, to eight chosen Unionists, detailing how the BF was prepared to support them. The fascists were willing to advertise for the candidates and provide them with vehicles. In addition, 'we are appealing in the papers for all Anti-Socialist voters to record their votes on Saturday in

[247] Irish Loyalist, 'The Achilles Heel: The Truth about Ireland', *The British Lion*, March 1929, p. 6.
[248] 'British Fascist Children's Clubs', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 32 1929, p. 14.

favour of those candidates who are, we feel certain, as anxious as we are to see the Bolshies out of this province'.[249]

In a contest that *The Times* labelled 'a straight fight for and against Socialism', the Unionists won the elections convincingly, increasing its seats and vote share.[250] The BF claimed credit for this victory. *The British Lion* printed 'remarks' from an unnamed successful candidate who, when thanking the Deputy Returning Officer, said that his party at the election 'had received voluntary support. That had never happened before […] In that election there was one party that had worked with great determination – the British Fascists.' A defeated Socialist candidate, Mr Haslett, apparently blamed the Ulster fascists for his loss, claiming that 'imported movements' influenced the vote. One Unionist candidate who refused the Command's assistance lost his seat. Conceitedly, the BF commented: 'He will know better next time'.[251] Apart from an appearance by Ulster Unionist MP for Queen's University, Sir John Campbell, at a BF meeting alongside Lintorn-Orman in 1928, the BF's support for the Unionists was not reciprocated.[252]

Towards the end of the BF's life, when the movement was 'rapidly fading into obscurity', transnationalism continued to be a fixture.[253] Despite its claim of good recruiting in Ireland and issuing a number of awards and commendations to its Irish members, sources suggest that by the beginning of the 1930s, the BF in Ireland reflected the movement's steadily declining fortunes more generally.[254] For example, the Ministry of Home Affairs (Northern Ireland) reported that, instead of being occupied by 'prominent' individuals, the new governing body of the Belfast branch – the BF's flagship branch in the country – consisted of 'two clerks, a tramway driver and an

[249] 'British Fascism in Ulster: The Work of the Command', *The British Lion,* 19 February 1927, pp. 3–4.
[250] 'Belfast Municipal Elections: A Unionist Gain', *The Times*, 17 January 1927, p. 14.
[251] 'British Fascism in Ulster: The Work of the Command', *The British Lion,* 19 February 1927, pp. 3–4.
[252] 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', p. 73.
[253] TNA KV 4/331, 'Fascism in Britain', 22 August 1933, (12).
[254] *British Fascism,* June 1930, p. 4; 'British Fascism In Northern Ireland', *British Fascism*, February 1931, p. 8; 'Irish Freestate Command', *British Fascism,* September 1931, p. 8; 'Honours for Ireland', *British Fascism*, October 1931, p. 7; '11th Birthday of British Fascism', *British Fascism,* May 1934, p. 8.

assistant in a pawnbroker's shop'.[255] As Loughlin remarked, this 'registered a distinct lowering of social class, indicative of a "lack of public support and enthusiasm".' Apart from the children's clubs, 'the activities of the organisation are practically nil in Belfast.'[256]

'Hunter Moore' FCC was still operating successfully into the 1930s, attracting two hundred children every Friday. Local and BF newspapers continued to report on the club's activities. On Armistice Day 1930, three members of the FCCs Cadet Corps, in uniform, laid a wreath on the Belfast Cenotaph. This was the first time that uniformed cadets of the BF had taken part in a public ceremony. An event held by the BF attracted press attention the following month. A 'sale for work' fundraiser took place in the Lounge of the City YMCA, Wellington Place, to give children a Christmas treat. Contributions were received from sympathisers, including Mrs Hunter-Moore, founder of the club, the Countess of Kilmorey and many 'well-known ladies and gentlemen', while several of the Belfast bakeries and restaurants donated cakes and buns to the event. Lintorn-Orman also attended the gathering.[257]

In the following years, activities of the fascist clubs continued to feature in local newspapers. The *Belfast Telegraph* reported on the clubs annual outings – arranged by the BF's County Commander Mrs Waring and the Newcastle Company Commander Mrs Persse – to Mourne Park, Kilkeel. The children, numbering two hundred, marched through the town, and then 'thoroughly enjoyed themselves' playing sports 'in the beautiful demesne' before having tea. In December 1932, the *Belfast Telegraph* covered a bazaar organised by Waring in aid of the 'Hunter Moore' FCC. Similarly, in December 1933, the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph* covered a sale held in Kilkeel Courtroom to raise funds for the club. A photograph of the club's officials – including

[255] E. Gilfillan (? Signature obscure) to Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, May 25, 1929, PRONI, HA/32/1/509: cited in 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', p. 72.
[256] Ibid.
[257] 'Avoca Street Children's Club', *Northern Whig*, 15 December 1930, p. 1; 'Belfast Children's Club. Fascist Sale of Work in Aid of Christmas Treat', *Belfast Newsletter*, 16 December 1930, p. 11; 'British Fascism in Northern Ireland', *British Fascism*, February 1931, p. 8.

Waring, Kilmorey and Hunter-Moore – accompanied both pieces.[258] In one of the last articles written by the BF, Lintorn Orman devoted her column to the significance of the British Fascist Children's Clubs, describing them as 'one of the most important works of the Organisation.'[259]

The membership numbers of the Irish branches are unknown. The Dublin division appears to have had attracted the least interest. In his article titled 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascists Movement', Loughlin puts the figure at around 100 members at its height.[260] *The British Lion*, proud of its Dublin outfit for persevering through 'difficult times', devotes its front page of a 1929 issue to a photograph of 'Officers of the Irish Free State Command, British Fascists', numbering 12.[261] In contrast, Northern Ireland attracted considerably more support given the pro-British and anti-Communist sentiment that was more prevalent in the region. The *Irish Times* reported in August 1927 that the Belfast command had reached 1000, not an insignificant number considering that the branch had only been open for a year.[262] The statistics of other units in Ulster are difficult to estimate. On her tour of the island, Lintorn-Orman remarked that the County Down divisions had a large number of recruits, most likely to in be in the hundreds; the Newcastle branch had 'a long waiting list of loyal citizens anxious to join up and do practical work against the Empire's enemies.'[263]

Nevertheless, the BF failed in its mission to attract the 'hearty cooperation of every loyalist' in Ireland.[264] By the time the BF expanded the organisation to Northern Ireland in 1926, Unionism was already entrenched in the country, leaving little space politically

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[258] 'Belfast Fascist Club', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 July 1932; 'Happy Day at Kilkeel', *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 July 1931, p. 4; *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 December 1932, p. 16; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 16 December 1933, p. 8.
[259] British Fascist Women's Units and British Fascist Children's Clubs', *British Fascism*, April 1934, p. 7.
[260] Loughlin cites the figure to an issue of *The British Lion*. However, the date he has given appears to be incorrect: 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', p. 70. A photograph of the 'Officers of the Irish Free State Command' in 1929 numbers 12: front cover of issue number 32.
[261] Photograph: 'Irish Free State Command', *The British Lion*, Issue 32 (1929), p. 1. Quote: p. 14.
[262] '1,000 Belfast Fascists', *The Irish Times*, 30 March 1927, p. 7.
[263] 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', p. 72; 'Newcastle Company M/U Ulster', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 1928, p. 12.
[264] 'The Fighting Spirit', *The British Lion*, 23 October 1926, p. 10.

for the British movement. The ceasing of the Boundary Commission the previous year, the body that decided on the precise delineation of the border between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland – signed off by representatives of the Irish Free State, Northern Ireland and the British government – resulted in a Unionist regime capable of defending its constitutional position. In effect, the BF was marginalised by the Irish Prime Minister James Craig and his Ulster Unionist Party.[265] South of the border, particularly in Dublin, during the interwar period was a risky place for individuals expressing outward loyalist views and therefore it was no surprise, given the turbulent atmosphere and hostility that was commonplace towards the British at the time, that the Dublin branch was unable to match the recruitment numbers of their northern counterparts.

The BF's greatest overseas 'successes' were undoubtedly in Australia and Ireland. However, the movement reached other parts of the Empire. In 1927, a women's unit was set up in India. Mrs Simpson was appointed Company Officer from 4 February and members who happened to have the addresses of members residing in India were requested to forward their names and addresses to the Assistant Chief of Staff, Women's Units, GHQ, so that they could be drafted to Indian Units. Despite the BF's claim to have units in India, it is likely that Simpson was the only active member in the highly populated country as nothing further was mentioned in the BF newspapers. Interestingly, there was no mention of a men's unit.[266]

The movement was particularly pleased to receive interest from South Africa. In response to the sending of some Fascist literature to one of its members there, the BF received 'a most generous response' from Mr A.W. Jones of Lake Chrissie, East Transvaal: 'Not only did the gentleman send a donation, but conveyed his cordial good wishes to the British Fascists, at the same time requesting that copies of the "British Lion" should be sent to him regularly, as well as Fascist literature'.[267] However, similar to their exploits in India, it appears that no further developments materialised through the connections.

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[265] Craig was the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, reigning between 1921 and 1940.
[266] 'Women's Units', *The British Lion*, 19 February 1927, p. 13. 'India', *The British Lion*, May 1927, p. 15.
[267] 'Donation From South Africa', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 [no date] 1928 p. 11.

Although the BF failed in its quest to 'expand and rise in every corner of the Empire', support appeared to come from unusual places.[268] A branch formed in Buenos Aires by Mr J. H. Petter was reported in *The Fascist Bulletin* (June 1925). The article claimed that 'a substantial nucleus established' had already been established there and enrolments were 'coming in splendidly'.[269] In September 1925, a member living in China approached the BF requesting to set up a branch there.[270] In 1926, the BF was establishing a branch in Genova, Italy. According to the paper, the BF representative in Italy, Captain G. Strina, was carrying out the task with the 'greatest possible energy and enthusiasm, which can only be rewarded by the success of the movement […] The Catechism which he has formulated for all prospective recruits is as convincing as it is necessary, and such thoroughness must certainly "get here"'.[271] Letters were also sent to *The British Lion* from supporters in countries such as Madeira and Rhodesia, commenting on recent articles published in the newspaper.[272] Despite the hype, nothing further was mentioned in the newspapers on the interested parties. Therefore, interest must have faded away soon after.

A simple explanation can be given as to how the BF was able to put down, albeit quite shallow, roots abroad. With its fierce patriotism, the BF appealed to certain individuals with strong emotional attachments to Britain, most notably the British diaspora communities. In Australia – aside from Northern Ireland, the most successful of the BF's overseas exploits – the BF had a presence in the most Anglophone areas (Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania), where many established English migrants resided as well as recent arrivals.[273]

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[268] C.W. Higginbotham, 'Fascism – An Empire Need', *The British Lion*, 9 October 1926, p. 7.
[269] 'British Fascism in Buenos Aires', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 27 June 1925, p. 3.
[270] 'British Fascists Abroad: Letter From Fascists In China', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 12 September 1925, p. 1.
[271] 'Overseas', *The British Lion*, 14 August 1926, p. 10.
[272] 'Correspondence', *The British Lion*, April 1928, p. 11.
[273] The Australian census of 1921 identifies a considerable number of British born settlers residing in the aforementioned areas of Australia. The following figures include England, Scotland and Wales only: New South Wales: 222078; Victoria: 133041; Queensland: 102124; South Australia: 40431; Tasmania: 11389. For these, and many more, population statistics, see the Australian Bureau of Statistics' website at [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012014?OpenDocument], accessed 2 July 2019. Choose 'Country of Birth' spreadsheet followed by Table 8.9.

In Ireland, the BF did have a longstanding branch in Southern Ireland. However, the movement's endeavours were considerably more prosperous in the North due to the pro-British sentiments held by many of its inhabitants. In its first 'Overseas News Bulletin', *The British Lion* announced that British citizens resident in Italy were the target for recruitment by the 'Legion of Fascists' in Genova.[274] Furthermore, a letter received by the BF from the British fascist in China urged GHQ to create a headquarters in China of British Fascists. The unnamed author offered to enrol members from established British communities in Hong Kong, Shanghai and other ports: 'I think it is quite possible I could secure in time a very large number'.[275] The author suggested that Britons abroad were rich pickings for the BF: 'Even the most hardened sinner at home, after he has been abroad for a number of years turns out to be the most patriotic of Britons. This was proved only too well during the Great War.'[276] As Jones declared, 'We look forward to the time when our movement has spread wherever English is spoken, and every link with our overseas dominions is a step in the right direction.'[277]

The BF's hatred towards Bolshevism also appealed to some. For example, the BF member in China suggested that 'this [1925] is an excellent time for enrolling members in view of the present disturbances here, which are […] entirely due to Bolshevism. In fact, a Bolshevist was caught in Shanghai […] [H]e was the accredited agent of the Government sent over for the purpose of undermining British prestige in China.' The fascist also bemoaned the British government's disinterest in the matter, turning to the BF instead.[278] Complaints of Russian meddling were commonplace in Shanghai and

[274] 'Overseas', *The British Lion*, 14 August 1926, p. 10.
[275] Hong Kong was established as a Crown colony in 1843, following the victory against the Chinese Qing army in the First Opium War in 1841. Following this victory, Britain also created a community in Shanghai and five ports (including Shanghai) were opened to foreign merchants.
[276] 'British Fascists Abroad: Letter From Fascists in China', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 12 September 1925, p. 1. There was also a settlement of Britons in Argentina in the 1920s (and before). Many went as industrialists and major landowners before the country's turn to nationalism in the years leading up to the Second World War.
[277] 'Donation From South Africa', *The British Lion*, Issue Number 27 [no date] 1928 p. 11.
[278] 'British Fascists Abroad: Letter From Fascists In China', *The Fascist Bulletin*, 12 September 1925, p. 1.

Hong Kong at the time.[279] The fear of a Bolshevist takeover was also a grave concern of BF members in Australia and Ireland, as aforementioned.

A number of reasons explain the failure of Britain's first fascist movement. Firstly, the creation of the OMS by Baldwin's Conservative government to take over the jobs of striking workers during the General Strike of 1926, not only 'stole the thunder of the British Fascists', but left the movement badly split, a sizable disgruntled faction left to form a new movement.[280] Secondly, the strike failed to produce the Bolshevik uprising that the BF had assured its members would greatly assist them to obtain power. This lack of a communist plot removed many of its members' overarching fear: the Bolshevik takeover of Britain. As a result, the movement's membership numbers fell considerably from probably a few thousand in the mid-twenties to a matter of hundreds within a few years.[281] Thirdly, a number of fascist groups emerged in the late twenties and early thirties, most notably, the formation of the IFL (1929) and, more significantly, the BUF (1932). Skidelsky has noted, that the remainder of the BF's membership was 'mostly eager to join Mosley', marginalising the movement further and leaving it with a membership roll of just 300; or, as Mosley jibed, 'three old ladies and a couple of office boys'.[282] The company's accounts identified this dwindling support. Revenue dramatically fell from £6,848 in 1925 to £604 in 1928 and to an average of approximately £330 in the next five years.[283] Furthermore, the rivalry with the BUF resulted in 40 or 50 of Mosley's men raiding the BF headquarters, 'undoubtedly thoroughly smash[ing] it up', causing £25 (almost £1,700) of damage, which the perpetrators, although found guilty, were not made to reimburse.[284] To recoup some of their losses, the BF launched a circular to raise £25,000 but ended up losing money as the cost of the colour printing was more than the donations received.[285] Finally, and the

[279]'Find New Evidence of Soviet in China', *The New York Times*, 12 July 1925, p. 3; 'Strike at Shanghai Spreads: Marines Ordered to Scene', *The Washington Post*, 5 June 1925, p. 1. 'Conditions in Shanghai Mills: Political Influence at Work', *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 June 1925, p. 13; 'The Crisis and the Need in China', *The Observer*, 23 August 1925, p. 8. Furthermore, a debate on the 'Chinese Trouble' took place in parliament.
[280] 'British Fascists', *The Times*, 1 March 1934, p. 7.
[281] *Oswald Mosley*, p. 291.
[282] Ibid., p. 291; 'British Fascists', *The Times*, 1 March 1934, p. 7.
[283] 'British Fascists Limited', *The Times*, 20 July 1935, p. 4
[284] 'Rival Fascist Bodies', *The Times*, 30 September 1933, p. 12.
[285] 'British Fascists', *The Times*, 1 March 1934, p. 7.

final nail in the coffin for Britain's first fascist movement, was the death of its founder, Lintorn-Orman, in March 1935. The movement officially dissolved soon after.[286]

Considering the relative insignificance of the BF (in numbers and influence), it was remarkable that they made any transnational headway at all. Of the countries of which they had the most impact on, the governments of the time – through their policies and ideology – prevented (unintentionally) the BF's growth and played a major role in its decline abroad. Bruce's government in Australia, for example, displayed – through policies and rhetoric – contempt for militant left-wing politics and suppressed it significantly. Furthermore, under Bruce, Australia strengthened its ties with Britain and the Commonwealth. Together, these played a leading role in the BF's failure to advance and its ultimate decline, the few remaining supporters became disinterested in the movement and left. The major ideological unpinning of the BF – pro-British, pro-Empire and anti-Bolshevism – mirrored that of the Australian government's. Likewise, in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Government captured the majority of support from loyalists. The vast majority of the Australian and Northern Ireland public sympathetic to the views held by the BF would surely support an established and respectable party instead of an obscure and a politically insignificant movement with its roots elsewhere.

An overarching problem with the BF abroad was that the movement was British. Its name was 'British', its headquarters were in Britain, and the majority of its policies were focused on Britain. Therefore, the pool of support for an essentially British movement came exclusively from Briton's abroad (an exception was Southern Ireland where the appeal was meant to be loyalism, but being a British movement presented many problems for the Irish outfit). Consequently, this was a significant drawback to recruitment as the majority of the population of other countries is not British. The failure of one-man units abroad in their quest to build a following for the British fascist movement in their respective regions is evidence of this. For the BF, being a British movement abroad was perhaps its greatest strength but also its greatest weakness.

Transnationalism can be applied to the BF in a number of ways. Throughout its existence, it was heavily influenced by ideas from abroad specifically from Fascist Italy

[286] 'British Fascists Limited', *The Times*, 20 July 1935, p. 4; 'Law Notices', *The Times*, 26 July 1935, p. 4.

and later Nazi Germany. In fact, it is plausible that the BF would not have come into existence if not for the triumph of Mussolini and his Blackshirts in Italy – Lintorn-Orman may have diverted her energies on anti-Communism elsewhere or stayed away from politics altogether. The BF was not only a receiver of ideas that spanned across borders, but they also disseminated their own that transcended national boundaries. Furthermore, BF transnationalism also incorporated the physical. BF Branches overseas were formed and patriotism and anti-Communism was spread in foreign lands.

There are similarities and differences between the BF and the other two British fascist movements examined in this thesis: the Imperial Fascist League and the British Union of Fascists. As with the IFL and the BUF, BF transnationalism did spread across national boundaries. Although continental fascism had a significant impact on the three British fascist movements, each differed in the extent of the influence, the factors of the influence and to which regime they favoured. The BF's principal influence was Italian Fascism, which was consistent throughout its lifetime. From Fascism it adopted its name, symbolism, violence and military tactics and later corporatism became central to the movement's ideology. In the second half of its existence, the movement copied extremism antisemitism from the Nazis.

Another key difference that distinguishes BF transnationalism from that of the IFL and the BUF is its lack of physical links with either fascist power. The transnationalism between the BF and Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was almost exclusively ideological – very few relationships were formed with Italian or German fascists. Furthermore, the BF did not have a presence in either Fascist state. This is because when Hitler consolidated power in Germany and Mussolini focused on Italian foreign policy and 'opened up' Fascism to the world it was 1933. By this time, the BF was a spent force and all but bankrupt and of no interest to the Fascist powers – other far right and fascist movements in Britain were by now considerably more important – and, even if the BF desired connections at that time, they were in no position to build them or form branches outside of Britain. This is in contrast to the other case studies, which had many physical connections with fascists and, to varying levels of success, operated in Fascist countries. Therefore, the periods in which the case studies operated had a major impact on the transnationalism of each movement.

Despite a consensus among historians that the BF should not be considered fascist (for various reasons), this chapter has challenged this viewpoint. When measured against Roger Griffin's fascist minimum – 'Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism' – the BF is fascist. There can be little doubt, and historians concur, that the BF was a populist ultra-nationalist movement, but historians do not accept that the BF harboured revolution intent – a crucial ingredient to fascism as identified by Griffin. However, many in MI5, including the respected Major General Sir Vernon Kell, considered the movement dangerous and harmful to the state and democracy. Certain national newspapers noted its threat to democracy and the potential for the movement to use violence to achieve power. Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the movement's revolutionary aims is found in the pages of its own publications. Almost immediately after its inception, high-ranking members, including the founder Lintorn-Orman, discuss ridding all political parties and destroying democracy. This became even more obvious following the change in personnel in the Grand Council in the early thirties. Replacing parliamentary democracy with a fascist corporate state was a recurring feature in the movement's literature. Therefore, the BF should be considered fascist.

There is no debate or confusion over whether the IFL and the BUF were fascist; no historian doubts this. Various explanations may account for this: a) revolutionary intent only became publicly central to the BF's ideology following the change in personnel in the Grand Council and the rise of the Nazis. Before this, even though revolutionary zeal had always been part of the BF's make-up, other issues most notably anti-Communism may have taken precedence over it. b) the lack of thorough investigation in to the BF's ideology by historians – due to its perceived ultra-conservativism and affiliation to the Tory party (i.e. stewarding Tory meetings in its early days) historians have overlooked its palingenetic aspect. In addition, the BF's aims differed from the IFL and the BUF's. Although the three groups were fiercely anti-Communist, the BF's overarching aim was to protect the Empire from the 'Red menace'. The IFL and the BUF hated Communism, but they were not single-issue movements as the following chapters explain.

## Chapter Two: 'Thank God for Hitler!'[287]

The IFL was first and foremost a White supremacist, antisemitic movement, and its transnationalism centred on this. The IFL incorporated the Italian Corporatist system into its ideology. Unlike Mussolini, however, Leese saw this modern, anti-democratic system as a way of ridding Jewish influence from his country. The rise of the Nazi Party in Germany – particularly its election success of September 1930 – impacted the IFL considerably. Initially, Leese was reluctant to unleash the full extent of his racism on the British public for fear his movement would be rejected and ridiculed, as the majority of Britons had not yet awakened to the idea of racial politics. Hitler's 'success' resulted in a realisation for Leese that a racist party, only open to members of pure 'Aryan' decent, was able to attract considerable public support. From then, Hitler was the movement's messiah, while Mussolini was subject to a campaign of scorn and ridicule for ignoring, or in some cases rejecting, antisemitism, until 1938 when Italy introduced racial laws. Therefore, Mussolini but particularly Hitler had a major impact on IFL thought.

The IFL's transnationalism also contained a myriad of physical links and influences. By far the most important was its relationship with the Nazis, where strong connections were built with many lasting for the remainder of the movement's lifetime. Due to its overt White supremacist ideology and hard-line antisemitism, the Nazis considered the IFL a natural ally and used the Jew-hating British movement as its mouthpiece in Britain. In fact, the IFL essentially operated under Nazi influence. Evidence suggests that the Nazis funded the IFL regularly during the thirties. By so doing, this indicates that the Nazis had a vested interested in the IFL; therefore, adding an important aspect to this transnational relationship. Regular columns in the IFL's newspaper were devoted to prominent Nazis to disseminate Hitlerism and to glorify its work in Germany, while large sections of *The Fascist* sold Nazi propaganda such as Nazi literature – including the infamous *Der Stürmer* magazine – and Swastika-laden merchandise. The IFL even visibly promoted Nazism by undertaking such activities as erecting giant swastika flags on building in London and instructing its members to don Swastika armbands while in public. As part of this relationship, the IFL was invited to Nazi Germany where

[287] *The Fascist*, 28 May 1938, p. 2.

members attended and spoke at rallies and even had a presence at the Nazi HQ, the Brown House.

Another key aspect of the IFL's transnationalism was its role as a worldwide anti-Jewish influencer. Due to its rabid hatred of Jews and avid pro-Hitlerism, the IFL proved to be a popular movement for like-minded groups and individuals abroad. Due to his extensive research and writing on the subject, Leese was seen as an expert on the Jewish question and IFL material was printed in or referred to in literature published by antisemitic ideologues and movements overseas. Connections were formed between the IFL and these individuals and groups and, as a result, the IFL became a hub of transnational activity, selling racialist propaganda on behalf of its friends from abroad while inviting them to attending gatherings and/or give lectures usually at its HQ in London.

Chapter Two attempts to enhance the scholarship of the IFL by examining the movement's transnational influences and connections, an area that has largely been unexplored by historians. The leader of IFL was the eccentric veterinary surgeon, Arnold Leese. Leese's 'political awakening' began in 1926 when he heard the monetary theorist Arthur Kitson, who lived in the same town (Stamford, Lincolnshire) as Leese, address political meetings. Under Kitson's tutorage, Leese learnt that there was 'something affecting the lives of men, women and children everywhere, and which existed as an unrecognised evil manipulated in secret by a few people greedy for Power. In fact, I saw that control of the issue of Money *was* Power.' Kitson had introduced Leese to 'the Jewish Menace'. The virulent antisemite also introduced Leese to the proto-fascist publishing society, The Britons, founded by the Jew-hating pioneer, H. H. Beamish. Here he got a copy of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which identified a Jewish plot to take over the world:

> Everything in this little book rang true; I simply could not put it down until I had finished it. When I came to investigate further, I realised how little information was really available for [a] detailed study of the subject; want of knowledge among the public was the result of a deliberate conspiracy of Jewish silence; I [was] determined to break that silence and to make the knowledge public property. […] I have been conducting research on the Jew Menace ever since'.[288]

[288] Arnold Leese, *Out of Step; Events in the Two Lives of an Anti-Jewish Camel-Doctor* (Guildford, 1951), pp. 47–50. Also, see '[Kitson's] Obituary', *The Fascist*, November

In some of the academic work on transnationalism, scholars have stressed 'transnational personalities', whose biographical identity reflects a history of cross-border activity.[289] Both Kitson and Leese fall into this category. Leese became an expert on camels while working as a veterinarian in India. He later toured Africa curing them of diseases. Leese served as a Veterinary Officer to Army Service Corps Units in the First World War, plying his trade mostly in France. He also spent time in Somaliland collecting camels to assist the British plight in the Middle East.[290]

In contrast, Kitson was heavily aligned with the United States. His racist ideas were profoundly influenced by the US populists of the late nineteenth century. Many populists believed that Jews made up a class of international financiers who were crippling the rest of society.[291] Kitson's was particularly impressed by William Jennings Bryan – a three-time Democratic Party nominee for President of the United States. Byran was fiercely opposed to the US move to the Gold Standard on the grounds that Jewish interests were behind the system. On 14 February 1895, the then Congressman told the House: 'We cannot afford to put ourselves in the hands of the Rothschilds [the Jewish banking giants …] I only ask that the Treasury shall be administered on behalf of the American people and not on behalf of the Rothschilds and other foreign

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1937, p. 2. For Kitson's work, see, for example, *A Scientific Solution of the Money Question* (Boston, MA, 1895); *The Money Problem* (London, 1903); *Unemployment; the Cause and a Remedy* (London, 1921). The aforementioned are available on archive.org. For background on Kitson, see Leonard Wise, *Arthur Kitson* (London, 1946).

*The Protocols* was a forgery circulated by the Czarist Russian secret police in the early years of the twentieth century. It is a true piece of transnational literature having been written by many hands from Russia to France. The literature on the *Protocols* is extensive. See, for example, Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, 1970); John Gwyer, *Portraits of Mean Men: A Short History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, 1938); Benjamin W. Segal, *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1996).

[289] See, for example, Emilia Palonen, 'The Politics of Street Names: Local, National, Transnational Budapest', in Marnix Beyen & Brecht Deseure (eds.), *Local Memories in a Nationalizing and Globalizing World* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 63; Fridrun Rinner & Roland Issler, 'Contemporary Weltverkehr or World Traffic of Comparatist Scholars: World Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association', in Lisa Block de Behar et al (eds.), *Comparative Literature: Sharing Knowledges for Preserving Cultural Diversity* Volume 3 (Oxford, 2009), p. 10.

[290] *Out of Step*, pp. 28–35. The National Archives house Leese's personal files during the First World War. See References: WO 374/41523 and WO 372/12/52935.

[291] Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (London, 2004), p. 170.

bankers.'[292] Kitson was so impressed by Bryan that he worked for him in the Presidential election campaign of 1896 of which was centred on rejecting the US adoption of the Gold Standard.[293] Almost twenty years later, Kitson was still banging the drum for Bryan. In 1914, he wrote an article for *Fortnightly Review* – one of the most prominent and influential magazines in Britain – titled 'William Jennings Bryan' in which he lauded the American politician for his monetary thinking.[294] As Alec Marsh states, Kitson's relationship with Bryan linked American Populism to English monetary reform movements.[295]

Aside from Kitson's influence, Leese was greatly impressed with Mussolini and his Italian Fascist movement, *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF). He had watched the 'bloodless revolution' with interest. He was in awe of the Duce who through determination had rescued Italy from the chaos that Liberalism had apparently caused. Leese hoped that Mussolini's movement would end 'political humbug' and his declaration of 'My Aim is Reality' appealed strongly to Leese.[296] So impressed was Leese that he wrote a pamphlet titled *Fascism for Old England* (c.1923). In it, he argued for an alternative voting system that would result in a less individualistic society.[297] This would be achieved by forcing every man to contribute a day's wage for the right to vote. It appeared to Leese, 'good realism that what a man had to pay for, he would value and that the electors would become a body of people who would vote for the country instead of for their own selfish interests'.[298] For a brief time, Leese was a member of the British Fascisti (BF) – representing them as a town councillor – but left soon after, as Rotha Lintorn-Orman's movement lacked what he believed to be fascism.[299] Unperturbed, Leese formed the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) in 1929.

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[292] William J. Bryan, 'The Bond Issues and the Banking Syndicate', in Harold Moulton (ed.), *Principles of Money and Banking* (Chicago, 1916), p. 135; Richard Metcalfe, *The Great Fight for Free Silver: An Interesting History of the First Great Struggle in which the Fearless and Brilliant Leader of the People Championed the Cause of Humanity in the Memorable Campaign of 1896* (Edgewood, 1897), p. 454.
[293] Alec Marsh, *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson* (University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, 1998), p. 80.
[294] Arthur Kitson, 'William Jennings Bryan', *Fortnightly Review*, October 1914.
[295] *Money and Modernity*, p. 80.
[296] *Out of Step*, p. 49.
[297] Arnold Leese, *Fascism for Old England* (self-published, c.1923).
[298] *Out of Step*, p. 49.
[299] Ibid.

Like the BF, the IFL has received scant attention from historians, particularly when compared with Mosley's BUF. Richard Thurlow declared that 'No-one wastes any time in explaining why such quixotic and eccentric movements as the British Fascisti in the 1920s and the Imperial Fascist League in the 1930s were minute elements on the political fringes.'[300] Of the limited historiography on the IFL, which ironically includes Thurlow, the discussion has largely been on the movement's marginality. Gerald Anderson, for example, claimed that it was merely a bodyguard for its eccentric Director-General (Leese).[301] Alan Sykes has all but dismissed the IFL by suggesting that it numbered only hundreds and was more or less a paper movement.[302] Experts have agreed that Arnold Leese and his organisation were overshadowed by his political nemesis, Mosley, in terms of resources and recruits. This, they argued, pushed groups such as Leese's into the political wilderness.[303] However, Kenneth Lunn made a strong point when he explained that to concentrate on the major players and political successes limit our understanding of the broader picture of the lives and communities who were involved, willingly or not, with these marginal misfits.[304]

Equally as important, a number of scholars have explored the movement's racism. In his chapter on IFL racism, John Morell argued that the reason for Leese's adoption of fascism as a political ideology was that he had found a regime that would defend and encourage the 'indigenous Aryan stocks' in Britain.[305] Of the five pages that Sykes devoted to the IFL in his survey on *The Radical Right in Britain* (2000), all are on

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[300] Richard Thurlow, 'The Failure of British Fascism', in Andrew Thorpe (ed.), *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain* (University of Exeter Press, 1989), p. 67.
[301] Gerald Anderson, *Fascists, Communists and the National Government: Civil Liberties in Great Britain, 1931–1937* (University of Missouri, Columbia, 1983), p. 49.
[302] Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain: Social Imperialism to the BNP* (London, 2000), pp. 47–51.
[303] David Baker, 'The Extreme Right in the 1920's: Fascism in a Cold Climate, or "Conservatism with Knobs on"?', in Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (London, 1996), pp. 12–28; Cronin, 'Introduction: "Tomorrow We Live" The Failure of British Fascism', in *Failure of British Fascism*, p. 7; Michael Biddiss, 'Migrants, Minorities, and Mosleyites', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4:1 (1981), pp. 110–113; Richard Thurlow, 'The Failure Of British Fascism', in *Failure of Political Extremism*, p. 67.
[304] Kenneth Lunn, 'British Fascism Revisited: A Failure of Imagination?', in *Failure of British Fascism*, p. 167.
[305] John Morell, 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League: the Impact of Racial Fascism', in Kenneth Lunn & Richard Thurlow (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (London, 1980), p. 70.

Leese's antisemitism, notably on the court case that resulted in his incarceration.[306] Stephen Woodbridge suggested that 'race and Aryan "superiority" had come to dominate everything Leese did and was fundamental to the IFL's whole purpose.'[307] As Richard Griffiths asserted, the IFL was a 'vehicle for the extreme, and often crazed views of its founder'.[308]

What sets aside the IFL from other British interwar fascist movements was the extent of its antisemitism. In fact, as Nick Toczek notes, Leese was the first person in Britain to link fascism with antisemitism.[309] Thomas Linehan stated that 'The IFL advocated a doctrine of racial antisemitism and Nordic supremacy that would set it apart from the great majority of its contemporaries on the interwar fascist fringe.'[310] Paul Stocker has examined the attitude of the IFL to the British Empire. He argued that the IFL vision of the British Empire was a distinctly racial one based on the biological supremacy of the 'Aryan' coloniser. According to Stocker, a Jewish invasion of British Overseas Territories was the IFL's main fear: '[T]he imperialism of the IFL was overshadowed by their extreme antisemitism. Jewish conspiracy pervaded every single aspect of the IFL's relationship with the British Empire.'[311]According to Linehan, Leese was one of the period's most 'fanatical, uncompromising and idiosyncratic fascists'.[312]

The IFL left a lasting legacy on far-right politics, and subsequently British society, long after the movement had ceased. Its 'scientific' racial ideology and themes were at the forefront of developing modern fascist thinking in Britain. Expert on British fascism, Richard Thurlow connected the IFL racial theory to post-war far-right groups such as the National Front, the British Movement and the British National Party.[313] In his

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[306] *Radical Right in Britain*, pp. 47–51.
[307]Stephen Woodbridge, 'Racial Fascism in Britain', *Kingston University Research Repository*, 2015, p. 30, [https://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/33920/2/Woodbridge-33920-AAM.pdf], accessed 2 July 2019.
[308] Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (London, 2010), p. 96.
[309] Nick Toczek, *Haters, Baiters and Would-be Dictators: Anti-Semitism and the UK Far Right* (Abingdon, 2016), p. 147.
[310] Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 178.
[311] Paul Stocker, '"The Imperial Spirit": British Fascism and Empire, 1919–1940', *Religious Compass* 9:2 (2015), pp. 49–50.
[312] *British Fascism 1918*–39, p. 71.
[313] Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London, 1998), pp. 227–244.

biography (2017) on British neo-nazi, Colin Jordon, Paul Jackson described the considerable impact Leese had on Jordon. He suggested that Leese's 'extreme perspective' held the greatest influence.[314] Furthermore, Leese provided much-needed ideas and ballast that helped Jordon carve out a career as one of Britain's most well-known Nazis.[315] Morell has argued that Leese merits attention if only for his racist thinking, which is still current today and 'firmly allied fascism as developed within Britain to a racist message'.[316] It was Leese's legacy, and not Mosley's, that evolved after 1945.[317]

The chapter is divided into two sections. Part one analyses the ideological makeup of the IFL. Beginning with its formative years in which an idiosyncratic mix of Mussolini's Fascism and Leese's own fascist philosophy – anti-democratic, anti-Communist and White supremacist – dominated IFL thought. Attention then turns to the impact of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party on the British movement. It argues that Hitler's election success of September 1930 influenced the IFL significantly. With newfound confidence that a racialist party might make headway in European politics, Jew-baiting became central to its policy and activities. This can be seen in a number of ways, including the dissemination of pro-Hitler propaganda and the adoption of Nazi insignia. Both fascist leaders had a profound impact on IFL thought, firstly Mussolini then Hitler, the latter idolised by the movement for the remainder of its (and Leese's) lifetime.

Part two focuses on transnational physical links and influences relating to the IFL. From September 1930, Leese actively sought connections with influential Nazis in both Britain and Germany. Relationships developed between the two movements and propaganda was exchanged. The IFL effectively became an arm of the Nazi Party shortly after it consolidated power in 1933 and they did Hitler's bidding in Britain. The IFL was given an office at Nazi headquarters in Germany as well as money. Using the topic of war, the section also investigates if the IFL favoured the Third Reich over its

[314] Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London, 2017), p. 41.
[315] Ibid., pp. 82, 186.
[316] 'Leese and the Imperial Fascist League', p. 57.
[317] For further studies, see Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London, 1978), pp. 113–4, 119; Neill Nugent, 'Post-War Fascism', in *British Fascism*, p. 216.

own nation, concluding that it did. The IFL was first and foremost a pro-Hitler movement due to the Führer's 'Aryan' supremacist ideology. Lastly, connections between the IFL and racist fanatics overseas are investigated. It claims that, under Leese's guidance, the IFL developed into a well-respected and important player in the worldwide extreme antisemitic scene.

**'All for the State. None against the State'[318] (1929–1931)**

In its formative years, the IFL was an idiosyncratic mix of indigenous factors – such as anti-democracy, anti-Communism and Leese's racial theory – and Italian Fascism. Robert Benewick has argued that Mussolini had no impact on the British movement's early programme.[319] However, its mouthpiece, *The Fascist*, of which the majority of the content was written by Leese, was decorated with the fasces, the symbol – a bundle of sticks featuring an axe – adopted by Mussolini. In only its second issue, the movement called for the implementation of the Italian Fascist model in Britain: 'The undoubted success of Fascism in Italy naturally caused the minds of serious people in Britain, who were dissatisfied with the trend of events since the War, to turn to this new Philosophy of government with the purpose of ascertaining if it could be applied to their own country.'[320] The trends referred to were an increasingly corrupt, weak, indecisive and self-serving democratic system and 'its kindred infection' of socialism, which aimed to create a stateless world where private property is abolished.[321] The IFL referred to them as the 'enemies' of Fascism.[322] Yet, 'Every disease, sooner or later, brings about the invention of a remedy'.[323] This remedy was Fascism and 'its inventor [Mussolini]' was 'gradually but very surely bringing it to perfection'.[324]

The IFL adopted the Italian corporatist model. This was a quite alien tradition in British politics with few historical precedents. In Britain under an IFL state, the Corporate State would replace the hated parliamentary democracy. A Fascist Grand Council, made up of

[318] This well-known quote from Mussolini appears monthly in the first two years of *The Fascist* under 'I.F.L. Notes' (on page 4).
[319] Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London, 1972), p. 44.
[320] L.H. Sherrard, 'Beware of Imitations', *The Fascist*, April 1929, p. 2.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid. For more on the IFL's hatred of the democratic system as well as its contempt for the Conservative and Labour parties, see L.H. Sherrard, 'Be Hard', *The Fascist,* September 1929, p. 2.

high officials of the corporations and headed by Prime Minister Leese, would coordinate all acts and activities of the fascist regime. The Council would also act as the final Court of Appeal on all questions of the interpretation of the laws. Under the Council would be the Fascist Parliament: the Upper House consisting of members who had distinguished backgrounds in national affairs while the Lower House would represent 'interests rather than citizens'.[325] This 'industrial parliament' would govern with representatives of vocational corporations – the employers and employees of industry – and not of geographical areas, each representative would be chosen by his peers in industry. The industries would be divided into Great Federations – made up of Employers Federations, Employees Federations and Intellectual Workers – working under a 'special' Ministry of Corporations. Trade unions and strikes would be outlawed and excessive profiteering by capitalists prohibited. Disputes that occurred between the federations would be settled by the state. The IFL argued that this corporative organisation of industry would eradicate 'money-making selfishness on the one hand and of Parliament's paralysing interference on the other'.[326] Leese stressed that the 'better organisation of Industry can only be attained through the corporate State […] created by Signor Mussolini'.[327]

Furthermore, the state would dominate public life, as was the case in Italy. Individual interests would be subordinate to those of the state, which held the power. The individual would not be an 'isolated unit' but a member of the community.[328] Since living by the community, citizens would be encouraged to have particular interests, but forbidden to 'seek his happiness in a direction contrasting with the general good'.[329] Press freedom would be abolished as the media, left to its own free will, would disseminate information that went against the views of the fascist state. Printers, publishers, advertisers and financial backers would be made to register with the government while any newspapers that committed 'anti-national offences' would be committing a criminal offence.[330] Leese argued that the liberty of the individual and the

[325] 'The Fascist Corporative State in Britain. The Political Aspect', *The Fascist*, June 1929, p. 3.
[326] Ibid; 'The Fascist Corporative State in Britain. The Economic Aspect', *The Fascist*, May 1929, pp. 3–4.
[327] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 2. For more on IFL philosophy, see 'Fascist Philosophy in Brief', *The Fascist*, June 1929, p. 2.
[328] 'Fascist Philosophy in Brief', *The Fascist*, June 1929, p. 2.
[329] Ibid.
[330] 'Fascism and "The Liberty of the Press"', *The Fascist*, August 1929, pp. 3–4.

liberty of the press meant anarchy; 'both are impossible in a civilised State'.[331] A clear and obvious example of Leese's adoration for the Italian State can be seen by the regular appearance in *The Fascist* – one in every four pages – of Mussolini's well-known slogan: 'All for the State, None against the State.'[332] According to the IFL, fascism was not merely an 'Italian phenomenon', but 'a human and scientific method of government applicable to any civilised nation with equal benefit.'[333]

Leese believed that the conditions in Britain at the end of the twenties were a carbon copy of these in Italy at the beginning of the decade: i.e. a growing resentment towards democracy and the rise of Communism. Leese viewed the IFL as a reincarnation of the Italian Fascist movement. In the first issue of *The Fascist,* Leese explained how at this early stage in the movement's life, the IFL had to seek fascist representation through democratic means: 'we have, at present, to fight, as Mussolini did, with the same loathsome weapons as are used by our democratic adversaries.'[334] The IFL never did put up a candidate for election, preferring instead to act as a propaganda machine until the fall of democracy. Only then would Leese make his move for power.[335] Leese prophesied that in the coming years public apathy towards democracy would result in the British public's demand for change. Fascism would then come face to face with Communism in a fight for power. Fascism would eventually be victorious. He described how 'A large proportion of citizens will "sit on the fence" whilst the same struggle is going on; these same people, the liberal-democrats, will grouse and grumble under the subsequent Fascist regime as long as they live, just as their prototypes have done in Italy.'[336]

To prepare for the coming struggle, the IFL sought to 'build an efficient "militia"' called the Fascist Legions, under the command of the Commandant-General, L. H. Sherrard.[337] Based on the Italian Fascist Blackshirts, the Legions, dressed in black shirts and emblems of the *fasces*, would be made up of the 'best' IFL members.[338] These

[331] Ibid.
[332] Mussolini's quote appears monthly in the first two years of *The Fascist* under 'I.F.L. Notes' (on page 4).
[333] 'Making Britain Safe from Democracy', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 2.
[334] 'A Fine Example', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 4.
[335] 'Guildford Constituency', *The Fascist,* November 1935, p. 3.
[336] 'The Consequences of Boycotting the Ballot Box', *The Fascist*, May 1929, p. 2.
[337] 'Beware of Imitations', p. 3.
[338] Ibid.

'elites' would be trained and given 'the necessary machinery' to ensure that the fascist regime came to power with as little disturbance to the economic affairs of the country as possible.[339] The early days of the Fascist Government would by 'strength, discipline and steadiness' maintain order and suppress any attempt at a counter-revolution either by socialist or democratic forces.[340]

Examination of *The Fascist* identifies the extent to which Italian Fascism inspired the IFL in its early years. Favourable comments on Mussolini and his Blackshirts are in the majority of pages during its 1929 and 1930 issues. The very first article in *The Fascist* lauded the Italian Fascists for their role in the peaceful overthrow of parliamentary democracy in Yugoslavia in January 1929 (known as the January 6 Dictatorship).[341] It claimed that the revolutionary change without the loss of life could not have been possible without Mussolini 'set[ting] the fashion' in 1923: 'The Italians who lost their lives in the cause of Fascism were not merely good Italians but good Europeans; and, although they did not realise it, they were sacrificing themselves not only for Italy but for Europe and, incidentally, for Yugo-Slavia.'[342]

To the IFL Mussolini was 'the man of destiny'.[343] In *The Fascist*, the IFL regularly referred to Mussolini for inspiring and guiding its readership. When discussing its strategic takeover of government, the paper pointed out that Mussolini had forty parliamentary candidates before his revolution. This was an obvious message to its supporters to keep the faith.[344] In an article titled 'Royalty and Fascism', the IFL answered critics who said that 'Kingship in Fascism is a sinecure'.[345] The article explained that 'nothing could be further from the truth' and pointed to the Italian model as evidence: 'It was the king who called Mussolini to form a Government, […] prevent[ed] the use of the Army in opposing the Fascists, […] saw that […] Ital[ian]

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[339] Ibid.
[340] Ibid., Also, see Sherrard, 'The New Constitutional Party', *The Fascist*, May 1929, pp. 2–3; 'Black-Shirt Activities in London', *The Fascist*, May 1929, p. 2.
[341] For an in-depth study on Yugoslavia during the wars, see Dejan Djokic, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London, 2006).
[342] 'Another Parliament Fall: Yugo-Slavia Tired of Humbug', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 1.
[343] 'Royalty and Fascism. The King as the People's Guardian', *The Fascist*, July 1930, p. 1.
[344] 'Parliamentary Candidates', *The Fascist*, May 1930, p. 2.
[345] 'Royalty and Fascism'.

democracy had to go, and that Mussolini was the man of destiny.'[346] The article, of course, praised the Italian king, Victor Emmanuel III, for inviting Mussolini to become Prime Minister of Italy. According to the IFL, the monarchy was a necessity for any fascist state as the king of Italy was the 'guardian of the people, as a King should be'.[347]

At the (indirect) behest of Mussolini, the British movement advised its readers to avoid what it described as 'Bastard Fascists':[348] organisations formed under the 'Fascist' name yet were not fascist. 'Mussolini warns us' about these 'wretched failures', whose leadership, made up of 'the adventurer and the melancholic intellectual', led them to 'disaster and ridicule'.[349] During this period, the IFL was referring to the British Fascists, who were, according to the IFL, nothing more than anti-Socialist, with a membership who joined to help strengthen the Conservative Party.[350] Contrastingly, the IFL considered themselves as true Mussolinian fascists, made up of the conscientious and the unselfish.[351]

A further example of the IFL's devotion to the Fascist state can be seen by the large amount of 'Great works' and 'must reads' on Italian Fascism that featured in *The Fascist*. Reviews on such literature were also commonplace. For example, a column was dedicated to an American professor of religion and philosophy, Herbert Schneider's pro-fascist book, *Making the Fascist State* (1928), which was a must-read for 'serious students'.[352] The book provided a 'laboratory study of the mind and imagination at work in the making of the Fascist State'.[353] It presented the 'most illuminating account of the splits, faction-fights and difficulties met with among Il Duce's followers'.[354] Likewise, British writer and fascist sympathiser, Harold Goad's influential pamphlet, 'What is Fascism', was described as the 'best short work on Fascism'.[355] Not only did the IFL suggest the aforementioned fascist propaganda to its readers, but it also sold them and

[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, April 1929, p. 4.
[349] Leese, 'Fascism in England', *The Fascist*, June 1930, p. 3.
[350] Ibid., p. 4.
[351] Ibid., p. 3.
[352] 'Book Review', *The Fascist*, April 1929, p. 4
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid.
[355] 'Book Review', *The Fascist*, July 1929, p. 3.

other works that glorified Fascism.[356] The IFL claimed that 'If we can distribute far and wide, we shall be doing a great service to the country and to Fascism.'[357]

The IFL reviewed and sold pro-fascist literature to counteract what it saw as a unilateral bias by mainstream newspapers against its Italian brethren and its beloved leader. The movement was frustrated with the British (and worldwide) media for 'misrepresenting' Fascism for 'partisan purposes'.[358] The British fascist movement argued that politicians and the media viewed Fascism as a threat to their respective positions and, therefore, had conspired against the new political creed, brainwashing the British public into thinking that Fascism represented dictatorship, extremism and violence. Columns in *The Fascist* were devoted to countering the 'Democratic Press campaign against Italy'.[359] The weekly satirical magazine, *Punch*, was singled out for its 'continued gibes against the "Duce"'.[360] The IFL informed its readers that Mussolini 'has done a lot more for the service of mankind than even the Editor of *Punch* can ever hope to do'.[361] According to the IFL, the hostile press had 'successfully hidden from the British public the philosophic basis of the Fascist creed although its actual achievements in Italy could not be kept from its readers'.[362]

Yet, this appears not to be the case. An examination on the attitudes of British newspapers and politicians to the Italian regime between 1923 and 1930 suggests that no consensus existed. *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, depicted Mussolini as a potentially dangerous tyrant: quashing free speech, overseeing an unjust and failing education system in which teachers were forced to adhere to a strict Test Act and potentially stockpiling weapons to use in a bid to conquer Europe by force.[363] By 1930, the paper argued, 'the best of Italy is now in exile or in prison'.[364] Likewise, *Punch* was

[356] See, for example, 'Books Which Fascists Should Read', *The Fascist*, September 1929, p. 3.
[357] 'Book Review' (July).
[358] 'B.B.C. Versus the Italian People', *The Fascist*, May 1929, p. 2.
[359] 'Mussolini', *The Fascist*, July 1930, p. 4.
[360] '"Punch" and Mussolini', *The Fascist*, August 1929, p. 3.
[361] Ibid.
[362] 'Fascism in England', *The Fascist*, June 1930, p. 4.
[363] 'The Duce Boasts', *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 May 1930, p. 10; 'Education in Italy', *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 April 1930, p. 12.
[364] 'Education in Italy'.

also heavily critical of the Italian regime. It ran a series of cartoons representing Mussolini as an absurd and idiotic ruler.[365]

However, Mussolini's regime also attracted support in Britain. As Richard Bosworth has explained, conservative opinion on Italy between 1924 and 1935 was far from damning: 'Restraint, order, and success were attributed to Mussolini' by British conservatives.[366] What particularly appealed to conservatives was the Fascists' heroic 'struggle against socialism-communism-bolshevism' and their intense patriotism.[367] Many hoped that Mussolini's movement would morph into 'a real Italian Conservative Party'.[368] A.J.P. Taylor went as far as to suggest that the government's reluctance to deal with Italian aggression in the lead up to, and during, the Abyssinian invasion (see chapter 3) in 1935 came from conservative ideological sympathy with the Fascist regime.[369] The most well-known example of admiration for Fascism is from a speech delivered by, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill:

> I could not help being charmed, like so many other people have been, by Signor Mussolini's gentle and simple bearing and by his calm and detached pose in spite of so many burdens and dangers. Anybody could see that he thought of nothing but the lasting good, as he understood it, of the Italian people, and that no lesser interest was of the slightest consequence to him […] If I had been an Italian I should have been wholeheartedly with you from start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.[370]

British newspapers collectively were far from hostile to Fascism. Conservative papers such as the *Daily Mail*, *The Observer* and *The Morning Post* supported Mussolini's attack on Corfu in 1923.[371] The following year, *The Times*, *The Morning Post* and the

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[365] See, for example, 'The Mussolini Muzzle', *Punch*, 27 February 1929, p. 15; 'If the Dictator Played Golf', 29 May 1929, p. 3; 'Mussolini the Magnificent', 18 December 1929, p. 15.
[366] Richard Bosworth, 'The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920–34', *Journal of Contemporary History* 5:2 (1970), p. 171.
[367] Ibid., p. 168.
[368] Ibid.
[369] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 380–381.
[370] 'Mr. Churchill on Fascism', *The Times*, 21 January 1927, p. 14.
[371] 'Picking another Quarrel', *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1923, p. 8; *The Morning Post*, 31 December 1923. The editor of *The Observer*, J.L. Gavin, was an ardent admirer of Mussolini. He wrote a number of articles defending Italy's foreign policy: 'Peace and Peril', 2 September 1923, p. 10; 'Paper and Fire', 9 September 1923, p. 10; and 'Lessons for the League', 16 September 1923, p. 12.

*Daily Mail* refused to condemn Mussolini over the Matteotti crime (see Chapter 1).[372] *The Times*, for example, dismissed the scandal, claiming that 'homicide is more commoner [sic] in Italy'.[373] By the end of the decade, the same paper hailed Mussolini's 'great daring and great statesmanship'.[374] The *Daily Telegraph* described the Italian leader as an 'uncompromising realist' who had an 'honourable record' on peace and disarmament.[375] The paper was particularly impressed by Fascist labour laws, which it considered a 'daring innovation [inspired by] pure patriotism'.[376] In *Under the Axe of Fascism* (1936), the Italian anti-Fascist, Gaetano Salvemini claimed that the *Daily Telegraph* was one of the most pro-Fascist papers in England.[377] *The Morning Post* marvelled at the 'trim handsome black-shirted lads' while the *Daily Mail* considered the Italian leader a modern day Napoleon.[378] As Bosworth remarked, 'no firm position had been taken' among the British press or politicians on Italian Fascism.[379]

A number of reasons may explain the IFL's 'oversight'. Perhaps the reason for its hostility was the lack of public attention that Leese's movement received during this period. In his typical style, Leese viewed himself and the IFL as more influential on British society than they were and may have been perplexed and annoyed by the little coverage that they received from the national papers. When reading the papers, perhaps Leese missed the sympathetic coverage given to Fascism, although given that he was an avid reader of newspapers – as can be seen by *The Fascist*'s regular attacks on editors, writers and politicians of which the knowledge must have come from the papers – this is extremely unlikely. The most likely explanation is that the IFL blindly believed Mussolini's public gripes to the worldwide press over its supposedly negative reporting on Italian Fascism. Mussolini addressed foreign journalists living in Italy requesting they 'depict the truth as it is […] as it presents itself to your eyes and your

[372] 'Outrage on Italian Deputy', *The Times*, 14 June 1924, p. 10; 'The Dissident Fascisti', *The Times*, 17 June 1924, p. 15; 'Italy's Ordeal', *The Times*, 21 June 1924, p. 13; 'Murdered Senator', *Daily Mail*, 16 June 1924, p. 16; 'Fascisti Scandal in Rome', *Daily Mail*, 16 June 1924, p. 17; 'Italian Mystery Grows Deeper', *Daily Mail*, 17 June 1924, p. 17; Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 252.
[373] 'Italy's Ordeal'.
[374] 'Church and State in Italy', *The Times*, 8 February 1929, p. 15.
[375] *Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1928: cited in 'The British Press', p. 170.
[376] Cited in 'The British Press', p. 174.
[377] Gaetano Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism* (London, 1936), p. 221.
[378] Cited in 'The British Press', p. 173; 'Napoleon and Mussolini', *Daily Mail*, 30 November 1926, p. 8.
[379] 'The British Press, p. 182.

intelligence'.[380] The story was published in the British mainstream newspapers shortly before the IFL made its inaccurate claim.

Evidence of Leese's commitment to Mussolini's brand of fascism can be seen by his role in a transnational organisation funded by the Italian government. Leese was the 'British correspondent' for the *Centre International d' Études Fascistes* (CINEF), advertising the centre in *The Fascist*.[381] Based in Switzerland, the CINEF was, according to the Home Office, 'a sort of elite intellectual "think-tank" on fascism', professing to be independent and impartial.[382] It claimed to provide 'for the general public exact information' on the new political ideology.[383] For example, each year CINEF published a Yearbook that was translated into various languages and accumulated contributions by scholars and politicians from across Europe.[384] Despite its claim to objectivity, the CINEF was a propaganda arm for Mussolini and his Fascist state.

Mussolini employed Major James Strachey Barnes as Secretary General of the CINEF. Barnes, an Englishmen living in Italy and a friend of the Duce, featured in *The Fascist*. Leese 'found great encouragement' in an article Barnes wrote in *National Review* titled 'Fascism'. It gave the IFL belief that 'something can be done' in Britain:

> Major Barnes likens the political outlook of the average British citizen to an elderly bachelor who has fallen into the clutches of his landlady (liberal ideas) and who has never met the right girl ('little Miss Fascism'). The idea that Fascism may be represented by a 'flapper' may help to increase its popularity with the youth we wish to attract![385]

Italian Fascism undoubtedly influenced Leese's movement during its formative years. However, two key differences separate his movement from the Italian model. This, therefore, suggests that the IFL was not a slavish imitation of Italian Fascism but a

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[380] 'Mussolini Challenge to Foreign Journalists', *The Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1930, p. 11.
[381] 'I.F.L. Notes', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 4; 'CINEF', *The Fascist*, September 1929, p. 4; 'Literature For Fascists and Patriots', *The Fascist*, November 1931, p. 1.
[382] TNA HO 144/19069, International Centre of Fascist Studies (140–142).
[383] Ibid.
[384] See, for example, CINEF, *A Survey of Fascism* (CINEF Yearbook, London, 1928). It was advertised in *The Fascist*, September 1929, p. 3.
[385] 'Fascist Articles in the Reviews', *The Fascist*, March 1929, p. 2. Barnes wrote a book of the same name two years later.

movement that had indigenous characteristics. Firstly, although it adopted Mussolini's corporatist model, the IFL argued that the Italian Fascist system was underdeveloped. It claimed that the 'corporate spirit' under Fascism only went as far as incorporating the interests of the employer with the employed equally under the state.[386] According to the IFL, 'the real problem before the Western World is not "Capital versus Labour"; it goes much deeper, and may be expressed by the words "Finance versus Industry".'[387]

In mid-1920, Britain and Italy were among the many countries that returned to the international Gold Standard.[388] The IFL argued that Jewish interests were behind the fixing of currencies and therefore economies. This was, according to the IFL, a key part in their conspiracy to take over the world, as outlined in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The argument of many antisemites, including the IFL, is that wealthy Jewish money lenders conspired together to fix the Gold Standard rate to make themselves healthy profits at the detriment of the nations.[389] 'Moneyed interests', the IFL argued, 'were unpatriotic and hostile to the economic interests of productive industry.'[390] According to Leese, 'the economic system under which both Italy and Britain are suffering […] wants a thorough overhauling.'[391]

Under an IFL state, the Gold Standard would be scrapped. In its place would be the monetary model put forward by Kitson's Economic Freedom League.[392] This called for a 'national money' system to replace the Gold Standard.[393] This would free Britain from

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386 'Politics and Economics', *The Fascist*, August 1929, p. 2.
387 Ibid.
388 The Gold Standard the standard economic unit of account based on a fixed quantity of gold. For more on the Gold Standard, see Barry Eichengreen & Marc Flandreau (eds.), *Gold Standard in Theory & History* Second Edition (London, 2005).
389 'Politics and Economics', *The Fascist*, August 1929, p. 2; 'Finance versus Industry', *The Fascist*, February–March 1930, p. 1.
European Jews became identified with money lending and banking in the Middle Ages with the practice of usury. After the Christian churches banned the practice of lending money with an interest charge, members of the Jewish community profited from lending money to their Christian neighbours.
390 'Disgraceful' *The Fascist*, April 1930, p. 2.
391 'Politics and Economics'.
392 The Economic Freedom League was formed 'to focus attention on economic theories of monetary reform': cited in John Scott & Ray Bromley, *Envisioning Sociology: Victor Branford, Patrick Geddes, and the Quest for Social Reconstruction* (New York, 2013), p. 204.
393 Ibid., 'The Fascist Cure for Unemployment', *The Fascist*, December 1930, p. 1.

the Jewish 'Money Monopolists', restoring national credit to the Crown.[394] In turn, the Crown would act as a trustee of the nation. Moreover, in any country that was linked to the Gold Standard, all other industries were subordinated to banking. This included in Italy under its corporate system. In fact, banking was an industry of its own, paying large dividends whatever the country's economic situation. A 'national money' system would go some way to curtailing 'Jewish control over Anglo-Saxon affairs'.[395]

The second was the role of antisemitism. Richard Griffiths suggested that the IFL 'took a violently anti-Semitic line' from its beginnings.[396] Similarly, Colin Cross has argued that Leese considered himself a 'racial fascist' from the outset, modelling his outfit on *Der Stürmer*.[397] This is unlikely, as *Der Stürmer* was not mentioned in *The Fascist* until much later. Gisela Lebzelter, however, asserted that antisemitism was not a feature of the IFL during its first year.[398] Antisemitism did indeed play a role in IFL ideology from the outset, in contrast to Italy where it was not officially adopted until the late thirties. However, as Linehan pointed out, 'the "Jewish question" did not occupy the centre ground of party policy' during the movement's early years.[399] The IFL did not officially label Jews as the 'enemy' until early 1930 but even then it claimed that 'many Jews are innocent of evil intent'.[400] Nevertheless, an examination of *The Fascist*'s early issues uncovers disdain towards Jews as well as the belief in a Jewish conspiracy operating in the country.

According to the IFL, Jewish money power controlled every important area of British society. Jewish influence, for example, had penetrated into British politics. These 'Jew-controlled party politicians' refused to prevent the 'international alien financier' from

[394] 'Politics and Economics'.
[395] Ibid. The IFL set out its three-point plan for a 'national money' model in 'Politics and Economics'. Also, see 'The Gold Standard Exposed', *The Fascist*, November 1930, p. 1.
[396] *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 96.
[397] Colin Cross, *Fascists in Britain* (London, 1961), p. 122.
[398] Gisela Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918–1939* (London, 1978), pp. 74–76.
[399] *British Fascism*, p. 178.
[400] The full quote on the Jewish enemy is 'the enemy is now the Jew, and the Jew goes about his work differently: 'The Place of Bolshevism in History', *The Fascist*, February–March 1930, p. 3.

controlling the press.[401] Therefore, attacks on the 'Jewish menace' along with democracy and the Gold Standard – both of which the IFL argued were Jew-influenced – 'rarely receive publication or report'.[402] However, a study on newspaper bias undertaken by Andrew Sharf (1964) concluded the opposite. He claimed that the British press as a whole had a slight antisemitic tone in the 1930s.[403] As well as powerful players within the newspaper industry, the IFL also argued that Jews were heavily invested in the British wireless, theatre and cinema through which they were disseminating their propaganda at will.[404] Indignant, Leese declared that 'The whole object of British Politics is the maintenance of British character and its gradual evolution in harmony with British tradition. But all our Parties maintain Jewish character and Jewish policy' of self-interest and Zionism.[405]

One of the key factors to this 'Jewish policy' was Zionism. According to the IFL, there was no dispute between Arabs and Jews in Palestine but, rather, the situation was the result of Jewish financial influence over British politicians. Zionism was a Jewish plot, orchestrated by the elites, to prevent their coreligionists from assimilating with Gentiles and therefore save the Jewish 'race' from disappearing.[406] Leese declared that 'Jews had no right whatever to claim a domicile in the Holy Land, the population of which was chiefly Arab [and] was ignored, and so the British Empire […] foolishly advertised itself sponsor for the interests of the Jew against those Arabs'.[407]

Like many Britons of the interwar period, the IFL viewed the British Empire with immense pride and as a sacred entity worth persevering: 'The History of the British people is a great epic of sacrifice, through which has been built up the greatest Empire the world has seen'.[408] It reminded readers of *The Fascist* that Britain ruled two-fifths of

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[401] 'The Palestine Business. Broken Faith', *The Fascist*, December 1929–January 1930, p. 3; 'Fascism and "The Liberty of the Press"', p. 3.
[402] 'Fascism and "The Liberty of the Press"', p. 3.
[403] Andrew Sharf, *The British Press and the Jews under Nazi Rule* (London, 1964), pp. 196–199.
[404] 'Beware of our "American Cousins"', *The Fascist*, December 1929–January 1930, p. 1.
[405] 'Forgotten Truths' *The Fascist*, September 1929, p. 4.
[406] 'The Palestine Business', *The Fascist*, December 1929–January 1930, p. 2
[407] Leese, 'Zionism', *The Fascist*, October 1929, p. 4.
[408] 'The League of Nations', *The Fascist*, April 1930, p. 4.

the habitable land of the world.[409] As with Britain, however, the Empire was being surrendered to Jewish interests. '[I]nternationalism' [a synonym for Jewish interests], through its 'clever propaganda' sought to weaken the Empire and 'subvert' its subjects'.[410]

The League of Nations, of which Britain played a leading role, was regularly attacked by the IFL. Stocker suggested that the IFL viewed the League as a 'Jewish-dominated threat to the British Empire'.[411] The IFL claimed that it was 'closely allied' to Jewish Money Power and the Gold Standard.[412] Leese argued that the League 'was not a British interest at all' and its 'evil influences' intended to undermine 'Imperial Unity'.[413] In fact, the Paris Peace Conference (1919) – where the main discussion was the creation of the League of Nations – 'forced upon' the victors of the First World War a 'Jewish idea set forth in the second of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published in 1905'.[414] When discussing the League, the IFL claimed that due to Jewish influence and pressure 'no party politician, hunting for votes, dare oppose it'.[415]

In addition to the unhealthy influence that they were perceived to have held over both national and global institutions, Jews were portrayed in *The Fascist* as unpatriotic and a threat to British society, culture and 'race' and were determined to replace the 'indigenous' Briton with their own 'alien' kind.[416] Featured on the front page of the May 1929 issue is a report from an IFL 'correspondent' who attended the laying of a foundation stone at a 'new Jewish settlement' near the Commercial Road in London.[417] The member claimed that 'Greasy caps had to be removed from the heads of their owners' during the singing of the National Anthem.[418] The IFL bemoaned provisions to increase accommodation in London synagogues as this would result in more Jews and more Jewish worshipping.[419] In an attempt to increase the population percentage of

[409] H.H. Lockwood, 'Mr. H. G. Wells and World Peace', *The Fascist*, October 1929, p. 3.
[410] 'The Navy League on Pacifism', *The Fascist*, September 1929, p. 3.
[411] '"The Imperial Spirit", p. 50.
[412] 'The League of Nations', *The Fascist*, November 1929, p. 2.
[413] Ibid.
[414] 'The Palestine Business. Broken Faith', p. 3.
[415] 'Truth from an Unlikely Source', *The Fascist*, June 1929, p. 4.
[416] 'Alien London. Cheap Trip to the Orient', *The Fascist*, May 1929, p. 1.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Ibid.
[419] 'Jolly for us English', *The Fascist*, November 1929, p. 3.

Jews, the fascist movement stated that prominent Jews were advocating birth control among the Gentiles. As a result, this would increase the population percentage of their coreligionists and assist greatly with their mission to turn Britain (and the world) into a Jewish state.[420]

The IFL proposed a solution to counter this apparent growing Jewish influence. They argued that any Jew in favour of Zionism – presumably this meant all Jews as the IFL argued that they were all unpatriotic – was, by definition, not British: 'The Jewish Zionists domiciled in Britain have, by accepting Zionism, deliberately decided to remain National Jews with the interests of the Jewish Race coming first. The term '"English Zionist" is, therefore, a contradiction.' [421] As a consequence of their disloyalty, the IFL demanded that Zionists be stripped of any political power that they held and had their British citizenship removed as 'A Zionist has no more right to British citizenship than a Chinaman.'[422] A short poem printed in the October 1929 issue of *The Fascist* identified the movement's contempt towards the Jew: '"Tis odd; That God; Should choose; The Jews."'[423]

**The Nazi Influence. 'Hail Hitler and his Aryan Policy'**[424]

***Race***

Certain historians have suggested that the IFL's turn towards zealous antisemitism was to distinguish itself from Mosley's variant of fascism. To Leese, Mosley was a 'Bastard Fascist'.[425] He labelled Mosley a 'kosher fascist' and his movement, the BUF, the 'British Jewnion of Fascists'.[426] This is because Leese believed that antisemitism did not play a leading role in Mosley's brand of fascism and therefore Jews must control Mosley and his BUF. According to Linehan, Leese 'tried gamely to carve out a separate niche for his party on the fascist right in 1932 by making the antisemitic and racial components in the IFL's ideology more explicit so as to distance it from the BUF's "Judaic Fascism"'.[427] Likewise, Morell claimed that by taking the IFL to the extremes,

[420] 'Jew Versus Gentile', *The Fascist*, December 1929–January 1930, p. 4.
[421] 'Zionism'.
[422] Ibid.
[423] 'The Chosen Race', *The Fascist*, October 1929, p. 3.
[424] 'Hitler's Work for the White Peoples', *The Fascist*, June 1933, p. 3.
[425] 'Mosley Manifesto', *The Fascist*, January 1931, p. 2.
[426] *Fascism in Britain*, p. 50.
[427] *British Fascism*, pp. 77–78.

Leese hoped to attract members from the radical fringe of Mosley's movement.[428] However, the IFL went from a 'softer' type of antisemitism to all-out hatred for Jews a year and a half *before* Mosley's official conversion to fascism.

The rise of the Nazi Party in Germany altered the direction of the IFL considerably. Racial politics shifted from a feature of its ideology to the central component. Hitler and his movement only came on the IFL's radar when it unexpectedly finished second in the Reichstag election of 14 September 1930, winning 107 out of 577 seats with almost a fifth of the vote share (progressing from the smallest party in 1928 with 2.6 per cent and 12 seats). As a result, Mussolini was replaced as the IFL's Messiah in favour of the Führer and race-based politics dominated the party's ideology. The IFL had always been a White supremacist party, but before the September election, Nordic racial superiority was not a central component, featuring only occasionally in *The Fascist*.

Leese was reluctant to unleash the full extent of his racism on the public. He feared that his movement, which intended to achieve power through electoral means, would be rejected by the British people from the outset as the majority of Britons had not yet awakened to the idea of racial politics. The electoral 'success' of Hitler's movement resulted in a realisation for Leese that a racist party, only open to members of pure 'Aryan' decent, was able to attract considerable public support.

The IFL's turning point can be clearly identified in October's edition of *The Fascist*. Three of its four pages were dedicated to German fascism. Previously, neither Hitler nor his party had been mentioned in its newspaper, appearing to only come on the IFL's radar following their electoral surge. The IFL was clearly inspired now that a (racial) fascist movement had come to prominence in northern Europe: 'German Fascism will now […] help us to demonstrate to the British Public that Fascism is just as natural to a Nordic-Alpine racial mixture like the Germans as it is to an Alpine-Mediterranean mixture like the Italians. In other words, Fascism and Maccaroni [sic] are not inseparable.'[429]

[428] John Morell, 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League: the Impact of Racial Fascism', in Kenneth Lunn & Richard Thurlow (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (London, 1980), p. 58.
[429] 'The German Fascists and Ourselves', *The Fascist*, October 1930, p. 1.

As a consequence of its newly acquired racial hegemonic zeal, a hardening of IFL attitude towards Jews is also evident in October's issue of *The Fascist*. In previous issues, the movement had portrayed Jews as unhealthy and unpatriotic pests who had an unscrupulous influence on British society. With this newfound Nazi-inspired confidence, the IFL now argued that the Nordic peoples, the earth's 'aristocrats', were under attack by the amalgamation of inferior races; particularly Jews.[430] For the IFL, Jews were the 'mongrels' and the 'scum of the earth', hell-bent on dominating the world through their 'money-power' before ridding the globe of gentiles.[431] Leese argued that 'The Jewish problem is one of Nationality; that a Jew can be an Englishman is impossible.'[432] Despite being 'utterly alien to our national life', the Jew was, according to the IFL, dominating British society and public life by financial power alone.[433] '[I]n sympathy with the German Fascists', Leese called for the expulsion of all 'aliens'.[434] Until then, the IFL demanded that Jews be removed from influential positions – such as 'responsible posts in public life' including newspaper editors.[435] The IFL intended to 'rid the country of the Jewish plague'.[436]

For the remainder of the movement's (and Leese's) lifetime, race was the central and overarching theme. Morell stated that Leese was obsessed with the 'Aryans' and the Jews as 'the conflict between whom he regarded as crucial for the future of the world'.[437] Writing in 1935, Leese described race as 'the true basis of politics' in which the 'Aryan' Europeans were the most superior while the Jews the most inferior.[438] The 'softer' cultural antagonism towards Jews – complaining about their behaviour and attitude as well as their apparent unhealthy influence on British society – morphed into an innate zealous hatred towards them that consumed the movement.

The IFL undertook an aggressive anti-Jewish campaign. Hundreds of Swastika, the infamous symbol of Nazism, badges were made and sold to supporters. 'Wear a Swastika Badge by which you commit yourself (1) Never to buy from Jews (2) Never to

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[430] 'A Letter [to the editors of the *Daily Express*]', *The Fascist*, October 1930, p. 2.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid.
[434] 'The German Fascists and Ourselves'.
[435] Ibid.
[436] 'A Letter'.
[437] 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League', p. 61.
[438] 'The Inherited Taint', *The Fascist*, June 1935, p. 2.

employ Jews (3) To do all you can to stop the Jewish invasion of our country.'[439] When discussing 'the Jewish problem' in 1932, as well as Germany's 'numerous long overdue steps [that] are being taken to deal with [it]', the IFL admitted that 'We are getting on: twelve months ago such matters could hardly have been discussed.'[440] This identifies how inspirational the Nazis were to the IFL.

The IFL's extreme antisemitism and admiration for the Nazis was noticed beyond those who supported its cause. The hatred towards Jews was so fierce that the British intelligence services, who began monitoring the movement in the early thirties, considered the IFL a single-issue party. In 1933, for example, the Secret Service claimed that Leese's movement was 'moribund', its 'only ordinary form of activity is the issue of violently antisemitic pamphlets'.[441] The following year, it reported on an IFL pamphlet titled 'To Cyclists and Car Drivers'.[442] In it, the movement stated that many insurance companies are becoming 'Jew-wise' by refusing to lease cars to Jews. The same pamphlet attacked the appointment of the Jew Leslie Hore-Belisha as Minister of Transport, questioning why an '[A]ryan Briton' was not chosen instead. Desperate to disseminate its antisemitic propaganda, 5,000 of these pamphlets were distributed by the IFL to the public free of charge.[443] The IFL's main aim, according to MI5, was to 'enlighten public opinion' on the Jews.[444]

Hatred towards Jews is evident throughout the issues of *The Fascist* post-September 1930. From early 1931, each issue included a section titled 'News from the Jewish Front'.[445] In them, the IFL would attack Jews as well as report on Jewish activities at home and abroad. Crude cartoons depicting Jews as unscrupulous people, 'gross and fleshy with large hook noses', scheming to take over the world featured in the paper's pages.[446] In a lengthy report on the IFL, MI5 remarked that the cartoons 'bore a close resemblance to those published in *Der Stürmer*', the virulently antisemitic Nazi

[439] See, for example, 'Wear a Swastika Badge' on page 4 of every issue of 1935.
[440] 'News from the Jewish Front', *The Fascist*, August 1932, p. 3.
[441] TNA KV 3/58, 'Report on the Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom Excluding Northern Ireland: Appendix I', dated 28 July 1933 (171a).
[442] TNA KV 3 58, 'Report on the Fascist Movement in the United Kingdom Excluding Northern Ireland: Appendix I', dated August/September 1934 (171a).
[443] Ibid.
[444] TNA KV 2/1365, 'The Imperial Fascist League', dated 8 March 1942 (94a).
[445] The first 'News from the Jewish Front' appeared in March's issue of *The Fascist*, p. 3.
[446] TNA KV 2/1365, 'The Imperial Fascist League', dated 8 March 1942 (94a).

propaganda paper founded and published by the Jew-hater Julius Streicher.[447] In fact, the IFL prided itself on the clarity of its position through *The Fascist* comparing the paper to the clear 'utterances' of Streicher.[448] Woodbridge considered Leese's admiration for Streicher and his newspaper so great that he 'saw his own paper, *The Fascist*, as the British equivalent of Streicher's publication'.[449]

The IFL (positively) reviewed and sold considerable amounts of antisemitic literature. This included works written by Nazis. For example, *The Riddle of Jews' Success* by Theodor Fritsch (under the pseudonym Ferdinand Roderich-Stoltheim), appeared to be a particular favourite of the movement for it gave 'a complete character study of the Jew, showing exactly what makes him a disturbing factor wherever he goes'.[450] A further example is a book titled *Terror*. The authors, Adolf Ehrt and Hand Roden, were commended for uncovering the 'ghastly' account of the 'many hundreds' of National Socialists 'done to the death by Jewish Bolshevists before Hitlers [sic] revolution'.[451]

In 1935, a three-part instalment appeared in the movement's newspaper containing the names of British aristocrats who the IFL believed were of 'Jewish blood'.[452] The movement claimed that the public had a right to know who were 'contaminati[ng] and destr[oying] the Aryan aristocracy of this Kingdom'.[453] This provoked a small number of those mentioned to contact Leese denying that they were Jewish. This included the famous actor, Sir Cedric Webster Hardwicke; the business mogul, Sir Bernard Eckstein; and the first president of the European Association in India, Sir D. B. Myers.[454] Consequently, Leese was forced to publicly express his 'sincere' apologies for the

[447] Ibid.
[448] 'Plain Speaking', *The Fascist*, October 1935, p. 1; TNA KV 2/1365, secret report on the IFL by T.M. Shelford, dated 8 March 1942, p. 3, (94a).
[449] 'Racial Fascism in Britain', p. 31.
[450] 'The Riddle of the Jew's Success', *The Fascist*, April 1931, p. 2. This book stayed on the movement's favoured literature list throughout the remainder of its lifetime.
[451] 'Books Received', *The Fascist*, April 1934, p. 4.
[452] 'All-Jew Aristocrats of Britain', *The Fascist*, March 1935, pp. 4–5; 'Our Exotic Nobility', *The Fascist*, June 1935, p. 4; and 'Jewish Penetration of the British Aristocracy', *The Fascist*, September 1935, p. 1.
[453] 'Our Exotic Nobility'.
[454] 'An Error', *The Fascist*, July 1935, p. 1; 'Sir B. Eckstein', *The Fascist*, June 1936, p. 4; 'A Correction and an Apology', *The Fascist*, September 1936, p. 3.

errors.[455] This suggests that the impact of *The Fascist* reached a broader constituency than simply hard-core antisemites.

From September 1930, the IFL developed its philosophy on the British Empire. The movement now championed the 'preservation of Aryan standards in the Nation and Empire'.[456] As Paul Stocker pointed out, given the IFL's overt antisemitism, it is unsurprising that historians have neglected the movement's relationship with the Empire.[457] Stocker devoted a page in his journal article – titled '"The Imperial Spirit": British Fascism and the Empire' – to the IFL's attitude to British overseas territories.[458] In it, he claimed that the IFL provided a 'distinctly racialist perception of the British Empire'.[459] Britain's Empire was, according to the IFL, the pinnacle of the achievements by the Nordic race and evidence that 'Aryan' Europeans were vastly superior to all other creeds. Therefore, the 'Aryans' must display complete dominance over the inferior races.[460]

This newfound confidence can be seen in the IFL's attitude towards the Palestine issue.[461] Previously, as aforementioned, Leese had used *The Fascist* to accuse the establishment of being controlled by Jews. Now, he targeted MPs directly, which was covered by the press. In the evening of 2 March 1933, a number of prominent MPs – including the leader of the Labour Party, George Lansbury, the Solicitor General, Sir Boyd Merriman and Clement Attlee – attended a dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London organised by the Friends of Palestine. During the day, each attendee received threating letters on notepaper headed 'Imperial Fascist League'. In them, they were informed that their names had been noted as 'guest[s] and supporter[s] of the enemies of our country'.[462] Mr W. McKeag, one of the MPs who received the letter, sent it to the Home Secretary and the Speaker of the House of Commons and informed the Home Office.[463] The recipients regarded it as a 'stupid joke' and most 'threw [the letter] into the

[455] Ibid.
[456] Arnold Leese, *Races and Nations* (London, 1934), pp. 9–10.
[457] '"The Imperial Spirit"', p. 49.
[458] Ibid., pp. 49–50.
[459] Ibid., p. 49.
[460] 'The Future Government of India', *The Fascist*, March 1934, p. 4.
[461] During this period, Britain ruled Palestine. However, the period saw tensions between Jews and Arabs (later, Arabs and the British).
[462] 'A Fascist Threat to M.P.s', *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1933, p. 9.
[463] Ibid.

wastepaper basket'.[464] Nevertheless, the incident put Leese and his movement firmly on Parliament's radar.[465]

Shortly after MPs condemned the IFL for the same 'intolerable Jew-baiting' on which the 'Nazi revolution in Germany was based on', Leese and the printer of his newspaper, Walter Whitehead, were charged with seditious libel and public mischief.[466] The newspapers followed the case. The charges were founded on statements published in *The Fascist* that were 'intended and likely to incite ill-will and hostility between Jews and other subjects of his Majesty'.[467] Leese and his co-defendant, who both denied the charges, were acquitted of seditious libel but found guilty on two counts of public mischief and were fined. Whitehead paid the charge but Leese declined and was sentenced to prison for six months. Leese preferred the martyr status and chose to become a political prisoner as his hero Hitler had been a decade ago. In fact, Leese told the judge that 'Hitler [is] a man whom I greatly admire'.[468]

The IFL put forward three possible solutions to the Jewish problem: their extermination; their assimilation; or their compulsory segregation. It preferred the former but conceded that 'pogroms are out-of-date in Britain'.[469] Assimilation was also unacceptable as 'no decent Nordic man or woman could consider seriously [this]'.[470] Therefore, it settled on permanent forced exile to Madagascar for the Jews as to totally isolate them from the rest of the world.[471] According to Toczek, the idea had been mooted by 'enthusiastic member' and zealous antisemite Henry Hamilton Beamish in the 1920s who, during that decade, 'steadily cultivated useful friendships within the ranks of German Nazism'.[472]

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[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid; 'Fascist Message to M.P.s', *Belfast Newsletter*, 3 March 1933, p. 9; 'Intimidation of M.P.s', *Birmingham Gazette*, 3 March 1933, p. 7.
[466] 'Jews and the Fascists', *The Times*, 6 March 1936, p. 7. The newspapers followed the story closely, but *The Times* took the most interest.
[467] 'Today's News', *The Times*, 15 August 1936, p. 11.
[468] 'Attack on Jews', 22 September 1936, *The Times*, p. 11. As a feature of *The Fascist*, Leese published the full transcript of the final speeches made at his trial: 'Special Report', *The Fascist*, October 1936, pp. 3–6.
[469] 'Future Home for the Jews', *The Fascist*, September 1932, p. 1.
[470] 'The Destiny of Jews', *The Fascist*, March 1931, p. 4.
[471] 'Future Home for the Jews'.
[472] *Haters, Baiters and Would-be Dictators*, pp. 35-36.

Through his contacts – the Jew-hating publisher, Theodor Fritsch, and the leading Nazi theoretician, Alfred Rosenberg – Beamish had his Madagascar plan published as an article in *Der Stürmer* in 1926.[473] This was the same as the Nazis' plan for the deportation and settlement of the Jewish community to Madagascar in 1939. However, the reality of the Madagascar plan for the Nazis was fraught with difficulties, especially after their capture of France in 1940. The most overwhelming problem was the transport of millions of Jews to a remote island. Morell suggested that this made it more than likely that Madagascar was no more than an 'elaborate camouflage designed to conceal the Nazis' long-term plan to exterminate the Jews'.[474]

However, the IFL appeared to take the plan seriously only after it reappeared in *Der Stürmer* in 1931. This identifies the considerable influence of the Nazis on the IFL. The article, which suggested that Jews be banished to the sparsely inhabited but huge island nation off the southeast coast of Africa, was transcribed in *The Fascist*: 'Madagascar is particularly suited for the ultimate National Jewish Home; the island has the climate which would suit the Jew and can support 50 million people. In that island, the world's public nuisance, the Jewish Nation, could be isolated and permanently quarantined'.[475] The following year, the British movement officially adopted the 'Madagascar solution' for 'the unwanted' Jews in Britain.[476] For the IFL, Jews should go 'to Hell or Madagascar'.[477]

In the October 1930 issue of *The Fascist*, the IFL promised its readers that 'German Fascism will now get more publicity in our newspapers'.[478] This was most certainly the case. The IFL followed the Nazis very closely for the remainder of its lifetime and supported Hitler's aggressive attitude and hostile treatment towards Jews. After consolidating power in March 1933, one of Hitler's first racial policies was the 're-organisation' of Freemasonry in Germany. Hitler hated Freemasonry, as he believed it promoted the interests of Jews around the world: 'Freemasonry […] has succumbed to

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[473] Ibid., pp. 35.
[474] 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League' p. 69.
[475] Paraphrased by the IFL in 'The Destiny of the Jews', *The Fascist*, March 1931, pp. 3–4. For more on the Nazis Madagascar plan, see Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln, 2004), pp. 81–89.
[476] 'Future Home for the Jews'.
[477] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, January 1938, p. 2.
[478] 'The German Fascism and Ourselves', *The Fascist*, October 1930, p. 1.

him [the Jew] completely, he has an excellent instrument with which to fight for his aims and put them across.'[479] In 1931, Nazi party officials were given a 'Guide and Instructional Letter' stating '[t]he natural hostility of the peasant against the Jews, and his hostility against the Freemason as a servant of the Jew, must be worked up to a frenzy'.[480] Until 1935, when all lodges and branches were to be dissolved and their assets confiscated, freemasonry became increasingly under the control of the Nazis. In a column titled 'Germany and the Lodges' in the December 1933 issue of *The Fascist*, the IFL stated that 'the Old Testament will be cut out of any connection with the New Masonry in which no Jews will be tolerated'.[481] Enthused by this, it prophesied that 'Some-day, British Freemasons will realise how they have been gulled by the "Craft" into a status of Equality with the Racial Scum of the Earth, the Jews.'[482]

The IFL supported other attacks carried out by the Third Reich on Jews. In 1935, for example, the Nazis outlawed marriages (and extramarital relations) between Jews and non-Jews as part of the so-called Nuremberg Laws (The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour). Any person who violated the prohibition faced *Zuchthaus* (prison with hard physical labour). Race-mixing was a major obstacle to the Nazis desire to create a 'pure Aryan' Germany. The IFL defended the Nazis campaign: 'In Germany, misguided Aryans who so far forgot their race as to try to marry Jews find themselves pilloried and, in a few cases, have been committed to the concentration camp where they can reflect upon their folly'.[483] The IFL fully supported Hitler's 'chief aim' to rid the world of Jews.[484]

***Hitler versus Mussolini***

Due to Leese's innate antisemitism, the IFL was slavishly devoted to Hitler after the Nazis came to its attention in September 1930. As well as the many pro-Hitler articles that featured in *The Fascist*, examples of this infatuation are identified in a number of other ways. For example, Hitler's autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written

[479] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* [English Translation] (Boston, 1962), p. 314–315. Also, see David Nicholls, *Adolf Hitler: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara CA, 2000), p. 91.
[480] Otto Katz, *The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror* (London, 1933), pp. 314–315.
[481] 'Germany and the Lodges', *The Fascist*, December 1933, p. 2.
[482] Ibid.
[483] 'Race Consciousness', *The Fascist*, September 1935, p. 1.
[484] 'The Nazi Movement Programme', *The Fascist*, September 1932, p. 2.

while imprisoned in 1925, was the IFL's bible. A translated version was referenced at length regularly in *The Fascist*. Many books on Hitler were sold, reviewed and celebrated. For example, the IFL claimed that the Nazi Heinz A. Heinz's book titled *Germany's Hitler* (1934) was 'by far the best biography of Hitler which has been published in the English language'.[485] As well as 'saving' Germany, the book portrays the Führer as a philanthropist, describing how he personally handed out Christmas presents to disabled children and donated his salary to poor relief work. He was soon to be 'the White Man's' hero when he forces the Jews out of Germany. The IFL 'strongly recommend all admirers of this great spiritual revolutionary to read it'.[486] Leese even recommended a pictorial biography on Hitler featuring 170 'excellent' photographs but complained that not enough antisemitism was included.[487] Anti-Hitler material was dismissed as 'Jewish propaganda' and was certainly not sold.[488] The British fascist movement announced that it was 'not pro-German. But we are pro-Hitler […] whose policy is that of Nordic Fascism'.[489]

Besides its racial theory, a further reason why the IFL was different to other far-right interwar British movements – that may or may not have sympathised with the Nazis – was that it considered itself the British defender of Hitler and attacked those who dared to criticise the Nazi leader. The movement instructed Britons to 'believe nothing they see in the Press about Hitler unless they get it out of *The Fascist*'.[490] It referred to 'Hitler's proverb': 'If you fail to see your name maligned in the Jewish Press in the morning, you have made no good use of your time yesterday.'[491] As well as the many pro-Hitler books that were reviewed and sold by the IFL in *The Fascist*, lectures were also held at its headquarters in London for those who wanted to learn 'The Truth about Hitler'.[492] The IFL considered itself 'Hitler's most genuine friend' in Britain.[493]

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[485] 'Books Received', *The Fascist*, January 1935, p. 3.
[486] Ibid.
[487] 'Book Review', *The Fascist*, September 1931, p. 3.
[488] 'Book Received', *The Fascist*, April 1934, p. 2.
[489] 'Streicher and Skeels', *The Fascist*, December 1933, p. 1.
[490] 'Hitler's Proverb', *The Fascist*, September 1932, p. 1.
[491] Ibid.
[492] See, for example, 'GHQ Meetings', *The Fascist*, April 1933, p. 1; 'GHQ Meetings', *The Fascist*, February 1935, p. 2; 'Meetings in April', *The Fascist*, April 1937, p. 4.
[493] 'A Place in the Sun', *The Fascist*, June 1935, p. 2; 'The Monroe Document', *The Fascist*, January 1938, p. 3.

Individuals, newspapers and organisations who made anti-Hitler comments were targeted by the IFL.[494] When the *Jewish Chronicle* reported the death of Hitler's niece, Geli Raubal, it suggested that she was Hitler's mistress and was expecting his child.[495] The IFL retorted that 'The man who wrote that would do well to hang himself.' [496] Even prominent members of the clergy were attacked. For example, in 1933, Reverend Dean Inge received a letter from Leese (reprinted in *The Fascist*) following Inge's criticism of Nazi racial policy. Before 'condemn[ing] Hitler', Leese demanded Inge educate himself on the topic as 'you are, on your own showing, so ill-equipped with the information necessary for a sound judgment on his action'.[497] With the letter, Leese enclosed 'information' for Inge to read. No reply was received by the IFL from Inge.[498]

In an attempt to shame those hostile to Hitler's racism, a blacklist of individuals who were publicly hostile to Hitler's anti-Jewish policies was created. Described as 'Jew Pollutionists', their names and titles were published in *The Fascist*.[499] Unlike the 'Jewish blood' list, this published list only prompted a single response. Mrs Corbett Ashby wrote to the IFL to make clear her objection to Hitler's antisemitism as an individual and not as President of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship as the IFL had stated.[500] The single response was probably because 1) the list was far shorter than that of the 'Jewish blood' list and 2) many of those on the blacklist genuinely did publicly denounce Hitler.

The hostility towards the press was to continue into the movement's pro-Hitler years. For some time, Leese had claimed that the press was controlled by Jews and worked for Jewish interests. Obviously, given the Nazi party's unashamed and long-rooted history of overt antisemitism, which it expressed openly, the supposedly Jewish-run newspapers would have to be portrayed by the IFL as against Hitler. However, a

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[494] See, for example, 'A Remarkable Discovery', *The Fascist*, February 1936, p. 2; 'A Ridiculous Attack on Hitler', *The Fascist,* February 1936, p. 4; 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, March 1936, p. 2;
[495] 'News From The Jewish Front', *The Fascist,* November 1931, p. 3. For more on Geli and her relationship with Hitler, see Ronald Hayman, *Hitler and Geli* (New York, 1999).
[496] Ibid.
[497] 'Dean Inge A Bad Guesser', *The Fascist,* June 1933, p. 2.
[498] Ibid.
[499] 'Watch These People', *The Fascist,* January 1933, p. 3; 'Our Black List', *The Fascist*, February 1933, p. 1; 'The Black List Grows', *The Fascist,* May 1933, p. 3.
[500] 'Correction', *The Fascist,* February 1933, p. 4.

consensus did not exist on the attitudes of British newspaper on Hitler, as it did not on Mussolini. Using *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* as sources, Eric Lai Chun Yue examined 'British Newspapers' Representation of Nazism' in the 1930s.[501] His results identified contrasting opinions between the two organs.

Yue found that *The Times* viewed Nazism as 'distasteful' and preferred 'traditional' and 'cultural' practices.[502] For example, it held the Nazis totally responsible for the outbreak of violence in Austria in February 1934 and held Hitler responsible for brutal 'Röhm Purge' against Nazi leaders a few months later.[503] Yet, the *Daily Mail* often supported Hitler. It blamed the 'un-nationalistic behaviour' of the Jews for the German Chancellor's 'anti-Semitic boycott' in which notable people, such as Albert Einstein, were forced to leave Germany.[504] In contrast to *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* refused to condemn Hitler's 'Röhm Purge' and blamed 'Socialist conspiracy' for the troubles in Austria.[505] Even in the lead up to the war, the paper refused to criticize the Nazis.[506] According to Yue, 'Scrutinizing the news articles and the editorials of the *Daily Mail* it is easy to come to the conclusion that the paper was a steadfast support of Nazi Germany.'[507]

Following its turn towards Nazism in late 1930, Mussolini was denounced by the IFL for not adopting racial politics. In May 1931, an article was published in *The Fascist* titled 'A Warning to British Readers'. In it, the IFL set out its position on Hitler and Mussolini: 'Hitler is facing the real enemy of the white races, the Jew, Mussolini is not doing so […] we see in the Hitler movement something more far-reaching for the White Man that there is even in the Italian movement.'[508] Without the racial element to it, the IFL considered the fascism of Mussolini 'incomplete' because it ignored race as 'the

[501] Eric Lai Chun Yue, 'British Newspapers' Representation of Nazism, 1930–8', (Master's thesis: University of Hong Kong, 2004).
[502] Ibid., Abstract.
[503] Ibid., pp. 89–92.
[504] Ibid., pp. 83, 85.
[505] Ibid., pp. 89, 93.
[506] Ibid., p. 169.
[507] Ibid., p. 89.
[508] 'A Warning to British Readers', *The Fascist*, May 1931, p. 2.

ultimate basis of politics'.[509] In its typical grandiose style, the IFL claimed that, due to its racial-centred ideology, its fascism was 'more complete' than that of Mussolini's.[510]

Suspicious that Mussolini was not attacking Jews, the IFL declared that Italian Fascism was dominated by Jews. From being its idol in its formative years, Mussolini became a hate figure for the British movement for letting 'Jew Money Power' control Italy and encouraging 'Jewish blood' to 'contaminate' the Italian nation.[511] According to Leese, Jews had cofounded the PNF with Mussolini in 1921 and the Duce had surrounded himself with them ever since.[512] Subsequently, the IFL claimed, Mussolini placed Jews in leading positions in his government. For example, his closest friend was 'the Jewish Financier', Count Volpi; and his son-in-law, Count Ciano, was a 'great friend' of the wealthy Jewish banking family, the Rothschilds, staying with them when in England.[513] From May 1931, the IFL considered Italian Fascism 'represented under the light of a five-pointed star'.[514]

'Jew-friendly' measures introduced under Mussolini incensed the IFL. 'The Jews', Mussolini remarked, 'have lived in Rome since the days of Kings [and] shall remain undisturbed'.[515] In 1931, the Jewish Communities Law came into force in Italy. According to the then Jewish professor of Canon Law at the University of Milan, Mario Falco, the law 'accomplishes, at last, the unification of Italian Jewry, at which attempts have been made continuously since 1865'.[516] The IFL considered this 'sheer poison for the Italian people'.[517] It argued that 'To recognise the Jews as a part of the Nation is a first-class error in Statesmanship […] it will separate the Italian Fascist from the

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[509] 'The German Nazi Programme', *The Fascist*, December 1932, p. 1.
[510] 'Mussolini and Race', *The Fascist*, March 1933, p. 1.
[511] 'Mussolini and the Jew Power', *The Fascist*, December 1932, p. 3.
[512] 'Penetrated', *The Fascist*, May 1931, p. 3.
[513] 'What are the Jews' Harvest', *The Fascists*, November 1935, p. 1; 'What Counts in Italy', *The Fascist*, September 1935, p. 1; 'Here are some of the Secrets of Italy', *The Fascist*, November 1935; 'European Kosher Fascist News', *The Fascist*, January 1936, p. 7.
[514] 'Penetrated'.
[515] Cited in A. E. Samaan, *From a Race of Masters to a Master Race, 1948 to 1848* (Digital Edition, 2012), p. 496.
[516] 'Daily News Bulletin' issued by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 19 January 1931, [www.jta.org/1931/01/19/archive/organising-italian-jewry-text-of-new-jewish-communities-law-published-in-official-gazette-every], accessed 2 July 2019.
[517] 'The Jewish Community Law in Fascist Italy', *The Fascist*, August 1931, p. 3.

German and from the English Fascist by a gulf which cannot be bridged.'[518] The IFL also attacked Mussolini for allowing Jewish immigrants to study at Italian universities and for allowing Jews fleeing Germany to settle in Italy.[519] For the IFL, Mussolini was pro-Jewish and Italian Fascism was essentially Jewish. By 1936, the IFL did not even consider Mussolini a fascist.[520] He was a 'Bastard Fascist'.

However, in 1938 Mussolini began an antisemitic campaign. Carefully chosen (fascist) scientists were employed to investigate race. Published in July 1937, the *Manifesto of Race,* based on pseudo-scientific claims, declared that European races were biologically superior to all others and that Italians were of the 'great' 'Aryan' type.[521] The Jews were singled out as inferior and therefore 'do not belong to the Italian race'.[522] Racial laws were implemented in November prohibiting Jews to 'serve in the military, act as legal guardians, own companies with roles in the national defence, own lands or buildings, employ "Aryan" domestic help, and that foreign Jews would be expelled from the country'.[523] This was the beginning of the so-called Italian Racial Laws, which until 1943 enforced racial discrimination in Italy before the fall of Mussolini.

Historians disagree over the roots and reasons for the shift to antisemitism. Traditional historiography has suggested that transnational factors were behind the abrupt change in policy, namely, a strategic alliance with Nazi Germany.[524] These studies demonstrated the considerable influence Hitler had over his Italian counterpart. However, more recent scholarship has challenged this view, arguing that national circumstances created the shift. Franklin Adler, for example, suggested that Mussolini had defeated all internal enemies (liberalism and communism) by the end of the twenties; therefore consolidating

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[518] Ibid.
[519] 'Italy and Jews', *The Fascist*, May 1932, p. 3; 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, February 1936, p. 2.
[520] 'Fascism in Italy and Germany', *The Fascist*, July 1936, p. 2.
[521] Excerpts are taken from the fortnightly Fascist journal titled *La Difesa della Razza* [The Defence of the Race], 5 August 1938, p. 1, and 20 November 1938, p. 24. These have been translated into English in Sandro Servi, 'Building a Racial State: Images of the Jew in the Illustrated Fascist Magazine, *La Difesa della Razza*, 1938–1943', in Joshua Zimmerman (ed.), *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule* (New York, 2005), pp. 119–121.
[522] *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, p. 120.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* (Milan, 1961); Meir Michaelis *Mussolini and the Jews* (New York, 1978).

an authoritarian dictatorship.[525] With the opposition gone, the focus turned to creating a new society and transforming the Italian people. The racial policy was an aspect of this development.[526] Similarly, Aaron Gillette considered it a part of Mussolini's 'cultural revolution' that had always been promised to the Italian people but not realised.[527]

Following 'a careful comparison of all anti-Jewish laws enacted in various countries from 1933 to 1945', Michele Sarfatti noted how Rome differed from Berlin.[528] For example, violence against Jews never reached the same level under Mussolini as it did under Hitler. In addition, Sarfatti found that Mussolini was 'a step ahead' of Hitler in some areas of legislation.[529] These included the banning of Jewish children from state schools, the removal of foreign Jews from the country and limitations placed on Jews as to the ownership of businesses and real estate. From his findings, Sarfatti concluded that the 'Italian Fascist passage of racial laws in 1938 was the decision of a strong country acting on its own'.[530]

As a result, the IFL discontinued its campaign against the Duce. Yet, he did not receive the adulation from the IFL as he once had during the movement's early years. Instead, Mussolini was viewed with a combination of suspicion and ambivalence. Although commended for no longer fearing 'Jewish Money Power', as indicated by the 'tremendous welcome' he gave Hitler during his visit to Italy in May 1938, he was ridiculed for the 'lateness of his awakening to racialism'.[531] The IFL made it clear that Mussolini could not be trusted to join its fight against Jews.[532] He was mentioned infrequently thereafter in *The Fascist*.

The Italian Fascist newspaper proprietor and a well-known figure in the PNF, Roberto Farinacci was at the forefront of Italy's new racial policies. Therefore, he became the

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[525] Franklin Adler, 'Why Mussolini tuned on the Jews', *Patterns of Prejudice* 39:3 (2005), pp. 286–287.
[526] Ibid.
[527] Aaron Gillette, 'The Origins of the 'Manifesto of Racial Scientists', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6:3 (2001), p. 307.
[528] Michele Sarfatti, 'Characteristics and Objectives of the Anti-Jewish Racial Laws in Fascist Italy, 1938–1943' in Zimmerman (ed.), p. 74.
[529] Ibid.
[530] Ibid.
[531] 'The Continental Struggle against Jewry', *The Fascist*, June 1938, p. 7.
[532] 'The Continental Struggle against Jewry'; 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, November 1937, p. 2; 'Public Mischief', *The Fascist*, September 1938, p. 3.

IFL's new favourite in Italy. Farinacci represented the most radical syndicalist faction of Fascism (anti-clerical, xenophobic and antisemitic), one that believed Mussolini to be too liberal. He was violent, xenophobic, slavishly pro-Nazi and one of the party's most ardent antisemitic proponents.[533] The March issue of *The Fascist* contained a eulogy on Farinacci. It claimed that under Farinacci, who is using his newspapers to lead the 'informative propaganda so necessary in Italy', the anti-Jewish move is in 'excellent hands'.[534] According to the IFL, 'the best news we have to give our readers this month [is] that the Italian anti-Jewish movement is led by such a fine character'.[535] In July, the IFL commented favourably on Farinacci appointment as a Minister of State in the Italian government.[536] Although Farinacci was commended for his anti-Jew work, Hitler was still the IFL's *Übermensch*.

The IFL's attitude towards a foreign nation depended entirely on its approach to Jews. A paragraph in the March 1935 issue of *The Fascist*, likely written by Leese, is an excellent example of this:

> Not so long ago, we were charged with being "pro-Italian," but any readers of our publication today know that once it became clear that Mussolini – whom we once admired – had apparently sided with Jewry, our concern with Italy ceased. So too, if Hitler retracted, we should no longer lean towards Germany.[537]

***The adoption of Nazi symbols and slogans***

German fascism undoubtedly influenced IFL policy and galvanised the movement spiritually, but the IFL also implemented certain unmistakable features and characteristics unique to Nazism. For example, from December 1931, the British movement began using the term 'Hail Hitler' or 'Heil Hitler' at the end of certain articles in *The Fascist* and as the concluding words to speeches at meetings.[538] Cartoons of 'patriots' giving the fascist salute also featured in its newspaper.[539] Both of these examples were adopted in the 1930s by the Nazi Party to show obedience to Hitler.

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[533] For a biography on Farinacci (in English), see Harry Fornari, *Mussolini's Gadfly: Roberto Farinacci* (Nashville, 1971).
[534] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, March 1938, p. 2.
[535] Ibid.
[536] 'Public Mischief', *The Fascist*, July 1938, p. 2.
[537] 'War and the Imperial Fascist League', *The Fascist*, March 1935, p. 6.
[538] For example, *The Fascist*: December 1931, p. 4; June 1932, p. 4; August 1932, p. 3; August 1938, p. 2; October 1938, p. 2.
[539] For example, *The Fascist*: December 1931, p. 4; June 1932, p. 4; August 1932, p. 4; December 1936, p. 1.

From May 1932, the IFL added 'Perish Judah' (death to Jews), the long-time antisemitic rallying cry, to its vocabulary.[540] These examples give a clear indication of the IFL's admiration for – and loyalty to – the Third Reich.

Perhaps the most telling example of this transnational influence and certainly the one that made the greatest impact is the IFL's adoption of the Swastika, the infamous symbol of Nazism. At the end of 1932, the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag by a wide margin and it was very likely that Hitler would shortly become Germany's Chancellor (which he did on 30 January). As a result, the IFL entered the new year with a new masthead for *The Fascist* featuring swastikas. Its emblem became a swastika superimposed on a Union Jack and was a key element of the IFL's identity. The emblem was superimposed onto armbands, becoming part of IFL uniform, flags and its letterheads.[541] Following Hitler's consolidation of power in March 1933, the IFL had swastika-laden merchandise made. As well as badges, tiepins, swimsuits, jerseys and wooden plaques, all swastika decorated, were sold through mail order for the remainder of the movement's lifetime.[542]

In a show of solidarity with the Nazis and to protest Britain's allegedly Jewish policies, the IFL used the Swastika symbol in the form of a giant flag and flew it from buildings attracting the attention of the British public, the Home Office and newspapers. In October 1933, Leese erected a swastika-incorporated flag outside IFL offices in Craven Street, London. After being made aware of this, the concerned proprietor confronted Leese who removed the flag immediately. When interviewed by *The Manchester Guardian,* Mr H. Pinks, the proprietor's representative, cited the swastika on the flag as a concern for the business premises nearby: 'Shopkeepers do not like undue notoriety; and we thought it might cause some inconvenience.'[543] Pinks noted a clause in the lease 'that tenants should not disturb others' and he clearly thought that a Swastika flag flying

[540] For example, *The Fascist*: May 1932, p. 3; July 1935, p. 2; July 1936, p. 3; May 1938, p. 3. For more on the Nazi slogan, see Jacques Delarue, *The Gestapo: A History of Horror* (Barnsley, 2008), p. 20; Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, 1994), p. 110.
[541] For example, *The Fascist*, January 1933, p. 1; *The Fascist*, December 1933, p. 1. On the front page of the October 1936 issue of *The Fascist* is a photograph of Leese wearing the swastika armband.
[542] See, for example, 'For Sale and Wanted', *The Fascist*, July 1934, p. 4; 'Classified Advertisements', *The Fascist*, July 1935, p. 4; 'For Sale and Wanted', *The Fascist*, July 1937, p. 8; 'For Sale and Wanted', *The Fascist,* August 1939, p. 4.
[543] 'Union Jack with Swastika', *The Manchester Guardian,* 19 October 1933, p. 12.

in full view of the passing public ran the risk of causing alarm.[544] The incident attracted the attention of a number of newspapers.[545]

A few months later, under the cover of darkness, several members erected a Swastika flag on the building of London County Hall. This incident attracted wider attention than when the IFL waved a similar flag from its offices because it defaced a public building with what was perceived to be an emblem from a foreign dictatorial power. At least twenty local and regional newspapers covered the story as well as a number of mainstream papers, including *The Times, Daily Herald, Daily Telegraph* and *Evening Standard*.[546] The leader of London City Council, Mr Herbert Morrison, was clearly annoyed at the episode and through the media, he sent a message to Hitler. 'If the Imperial Chancellor of Germany was a wise man, he will tell his fanatical followers in this country to leave British public property alone.'[547] Morrison added that 'it is thoroughly objectionable that the propaganda of foreign political parties should be fastened on to public buildings […] such conduct might easily lead to serious trouble, and it must be stopped'.[548] Gummed round the base of the pole were a number of anti-Jewish mottoes such as 'The reason our flag bears the Swastika is that at present the Union Jack is a flag of the Jews, and the Swastika puts the white man's mark upon it. We are racial Fascists.'[549] After 'flutter[ing] for some hours from a flagpole', the flag was eventually 'hauled down' and replaced with the Union Jack.[550]

The previous examples identify the attitudes of many in Britain towards Nazism. Businesses were concerned that a visible Nazi symbol would offend potential

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[544] Ibid.
[545] These include *Nottingham Journal* (19 October), *The Leeds Mercury* (19 October) and the *Belfast Telegraph* (19 October).
[546] 'Empire Day', *The Times*, 25 May 1934, p. 14; 'Fascist "Nit-Wits" Go Up The Pole', *Daily Herald*, 25 May 1934, p. 3. *Daily Telegraph*, 25 May 1934 & *Evening Standard*, 24 May 1934: cited in *British Fascism*, p. 71 fn. 6. A selection of the regional and local papers that covered the story are as follows: 'The County Hall Flag', *Belfast Newsletter*, 25 May 1934, p. 6; 'Fascist Flag', *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, May 1934, p. 3; '"Jack" with a Swastika', *The Liverpool Echo*, 24 May 1934, p. 7; 'Fascist Incident of Empire Day Celebrations', *Western Mail & South Wales News*, 25 May 1934, p. 8; 'Flag with the Swastika', *Belfast Telegraph*, 25 May 1934, p. 3; 'A Flag with a Swastika', *The Portsmouth Evening News*, 24 May 1934, p. 11. The IFL also reported on the incident: *The Fascist*, June 1934, p. 4.
[547] 'Fascist Flag'.
[548] Ibid.
[549] '"Jack" with a Swastika'.
[550] 'Fascist Incident of Empire Day Celebrations'.

customers, and therefore, deter them from commercial premises. Politicians, such as Morrison, thought that the openly displaying the swastika would insult citizens. They were correct. Certain members of the public felt strongly enough to write to newspapers complaining about the Union Jack being defaced by the swastika. Mr John Hayes of West London, for example, wrote to the editor of his local newspaper to complain after he saw IFL members wearing Union Jack Swastika armbands. 'Sir, – No doubt many of your readers have seen members of the "Imperial Fascist League" wearing an armlet associating our National Flag with an alien device, a black swastika, symbolic of Nazi Germany and its present system of intolerance and truculence. Certainly, this appears gross abuse and unconstitutional.'[551] Hayes called for readers to petition MPs to support an Act to protect the flag against such 'abuse'.[552] No such act was proposed possibly because the circulation of the local paper was so limited that little attention was given to it.

**Nazis in Britain**

In early 1933, Hitler had risen to German Chancellor. By March he had, in effect, turned Germany into a dictatorship. However, the Nazis were active in Britain for more than two years before Hitler became Führer. In October 1930, the Nazis sent their first officially sponsored party member – the UK correspondent of the Nazi newspapers *Der Angriff* and *Völkischer Beobachter* – Dr Hans Wilhelm Thost to London as a show of strength after becoming the second largest political party in Germany.[553] To date, the Nazis focus had been on national issues, attracting much support. Now they intended to improve their image overseas and cultivate better foreign relations. MI5 files and primary sources of prominent Nazis identify Thost's mission as twofold: to attract support for Nazism in Britain as well as inform the Nazis and – through his newspaper – the German people of the happenings in Britain.

Hitler saw Britain as Germany's natural ally. He had gained much respect for the British fighting spirit during the First World War. His confidant, Albert Speer, later recalled that the bravery and determination of the British forces had won Hitler's respect.[554] By 1923, Hitler wanted to launch a joint invasion with Britain against Russia to secure

[551] 'To the Editor, "W.L.O"', *The West London Observer*, 8 November 1935, p. 7.
[552] Ibid.
[553] KV 2/953, file on Hans Wilhelm Thost.
[554] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs by Albert Speer* (New York City, 1971), p. 180.

living space in the east. According to Ian Kershaw, Hitler also foresaw the two powers combining again, this time against France, who, after the First World War, was Europe's most powerful nation.[555] In *Mein Kampf* (1923), Hitler argued that 'the English nation will have to be considered the most valuable ally in the world as long as its leadership and the spirit of its broad masses justify us in expecting that brutality and perseverance'.[556] Even in 1936, when tensions between Britain and Germany were increasing, Hitler told a courtier 'If I had a choice between Italy and England […] I would naturally go with the English […] I know the Englishmen from the last war, they are hard fellows.'[557] As Peter John asserted, 'It is remarkable how, up to two decades later, Hitler's views had changed very little since the publication of *Mein Kampf*.'[558]

As identified in the (Alfred) Rosenberg Papers, Thost was particularly interested in coercing prominent and well-respected British subjects into openly favouring National Socialism. He did this in order to increase the profile and popularity of the Nazis, both at home and abroad. For example, Winston Churchill's niece, Clare Sheridan, was encouraged by Thost to write favourably about Hitler and his burgeoning movement.[559] In a letter to his boss, Alfred Rosenberg, one of Hitler's closest confidants and later leader of Nazi Germany's Foreign Policy Office, the Nazi enthusiast stressed how important it was to 'influence favourably her articles, which will be read by millions in England and America'. He assured Rosenberg that he would be 'able to guide the conversation accordingly'. He also requested that Rosenberg convince *The Times* correspondents in Germany to write more positively about the Nazis.[560] James Barnes and Patience Barnes stated that, within a year of his post, Thost had made great progress in legitimising the Nazis to the British authorities and press.[561]

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[555] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* New Edition (London, 2001), p. 247.
[556] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* [English translation] (Boston MA, 1998), p. 303.
[557] Quote by Friedrich Wiedemann: cited in Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (Oxford, 2010), p. 328.
[558] Extract from Peter John, *Churchill Versus Hitler: War of Words* (Oakamoor, 2012), [www.bennionkearny.com/hitler-views-on-britain-and-british-empire/#_ftn1], accessed 2 July 2019.
[559] Thost to Rosenberg, 23 August 1931, Rosenberg Papers, *Bundesarchiv*, Koblenz: cited in James Barnes & Patience Barnes, *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939: The Fate and Role of German Party Members and British Sympathizers* (Eastbourne, 2010), pp. 4–5.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Ibid., p. 5.

Following Thost's new appointment, the head of the Nazi *Auslandsabteilung* [Foreign Department], Dr Hans Nieland was tasked with creating *Ortsgruppen* [local groups] in foreign cities. These branches abroad were set up with several key aims: to monitor overseas party members; to encourage non-party members with German citizenship to join the groups and, in turn, sign up to the Nazis; to emphasise the Teutonic roots of ethnic Germans; to improve the image of the Nazis in Britain and then, after 1933, the Third Reich to non-Germans; and to provide a communal base so fellow members could build strong relationships with each other while also being informed of party expectations.[562]

Nieland sent a memorandum to all Nazi party members abroad with instructions for setting up *Ortsgruppen*. The memorandum, handed to the British Foreign Office by a concerned London barrister who managed to obtain a copy, was a rallying cry to 'all Party Comrades abroad'.[563] It spoke of fighting 'liberals and Marxists […] who have brought low our once proud Reich'. It also claimed that 'Party Members who are so devoted to the cause at home are sure that comrades abroad will not stand idly by but will join in the struggle to secure freedom within Germany.' Nieland concluded the letter by stating that all *Ortsgruppen* created were to report regularly and directly to him in Berlin.[564]

The first and most important *Ortsgruppen* in Britain was the London branch. Formed in October 1931 by several Nazi members, the leadership was tasked to convert Germans to Nazism. Followers were encouraged to spread Nazi ideology across the wider German community, including businesses, educational establishments, religious centres, clubs and the arts.[565] Thost even delivered a lecture to the renowned Oxford University Union in which, to the heckling of Jews and Communists, he described and promoted National Socialism.[566] By the time Hitler came to power, the group had around 50 to 100 members.[567] As the London branch increased its membership, meetings shifted

[562] Ibid., p. 29.
[563] Nieland's Circular Letter Number 1 of 1 June 1931: cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 3.
[564] Ibid.
[565] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. vi.
[566] Ibid., p. 13.
[567] Ibid., p. 18.

from public locations (for example, cafes and restaurants) to private rooms.[568] Unsurprisingly, activities were Nazi and Germanic themed. For example, amongst the drinking of German beer, singing songs from the fatherland and indulging in patriotic poems, members listened to speakers specially chosen to address the branch with the instruction to instil a 'sense of occasion as well as ideological purity' upon the audiences. German movies were also shown and regular 'bonding trips' were organised.[569] The London *Ortsgruppen* 'provided Party members with a place to congregate with like-minded Germans and share their enthusiasm for the [Nazis]'.[570]

As the 1930s progressed, the *Ortsgruppen* became more Nazified. Hitler wanted to install party discipline across branches. Initially, members were encouraged to appear at meetings and functions. However, after Hitler came to power, encouragement changed to requirement. This new policy attracted the attention of the British press. While interviewing Otto Bene, head of the *Ortsgruppen* in Britain, a reporter from the *Daily Express* asked why a 'young German domestic [had] received a letter demanding to know why she had neither taken part in Nazi activities in London; nor contributed to the party funds'.[571] Thost replied by asking for the complainant's name and address, which the reporter refused to provide, citing concern for the young German's safety.[572] In an attempt to avoid media attention and potential agitators, non-members became increasingly unwelcome at meetings and events while German Jews and political refugees were banned.[573] In the early days, the Nazis focused exclusively on building *Ortsgruppen*. Later, as a sign of their growing dictatorial intentions, they took over other German community organisations, such as veterans' groups, churches and the YMCA.[574] In this way, Hitler sought to control all Nazi Party members both at home and abroad.

Hitler and his representatives were keen to emphasise that Nazi policy was not to interfere in political or governmental issues abroad, stating that their only interest was

[568] Ibid., p. 9.
[569] Ibid., pp. 8–10, 22.
[570] Ibid., p. vi.
[571] 'London Nazi Meeting Behind Closed Doors', *Daily Express*, 29 August 1934, p. 9.
[572] Ibid.
[573] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 22.
[574] Ibid.

influencing German citizens.[575] This approach was reiterated throughout the thirties, but by the middle of the decade, after initially ignoring *Ortsgruppen* activities, the British authorities became increasingly uncomfortable with the growing number of Germans entering the country and of the activities that some were alleged to be perpetrating, such as espionage. Consequently, a rift appeared between various government bodies. In 1936, MI5 argued that the banning of individuals would merely result in them being replaced with likeminded Nazis and was, therefore, a pointless venture. Instead, they strongly favoured outlawing the *Ausland-Organisation* completely citing their 'dangerous potentialities' if war were to break out.[576] Despite initially disagreeing with the domestic intelligence service's stance, especially the claim that banning Nazi organisations would drive activity underground where it would be more difficult to monitor, the Foreign Office (together with Special Branch) accepted their memoranda the following year and the proposal was put to Cabinet. However, much to the anger of the said authorities, Cabinet refused to action the plea claiming it would aggravate the 'existing difficulties in securing agreement over questions relating to Spain'.[577] In 1938, head of MI5, Maxwell Knight, reversed his position on the expulsion of individual Germans. The Cabinet's rebuff and the Third Reich's aggressive foreign policy on the Continent led him to favour expelling some local Nazi leaders.[578] German journalists were the first targets for removal.[579] By the early stages of the Second World War, mass deportations and incarcerations of Germans (and Austrians) were implemented across Britain.[580]

## Transnational Physical Links and Influences with Fascists Abroad

### *The Nazis*

Examination of IFL publications, MI5 files, police reports and the British press identify transnational physical links and influences with fascists abroad. In fact, the IFL had a

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[575] Ibid., p. 185.
[576] 'Memorandum on the question of the possibility of preceding against the Nazi and Fascist organisations established in the UK.', 9 June 19: cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London*, pp. 178, 181.
[577] Vansittart to Eden, 24 July 1937: cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 185. The Spanish Civil War took place between 1936 and 1939. It is often portrayed as a struggle between democracy and fascism.
[578] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 187. By this time the Nazis had annexed Austria and invaded Czechoslovakia.
[579] For more on this, see Chapter 'German Journalists: First Targets for Expulsion', in *Nazis in Pre-War London*.
[580] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, pp. 251–255.

web of networks with fascists abroad. By far the most important was its relationship with the Nazis. By the time Hitler had consolidated power in Germany, the IFL had already built strong relationships with its German counterparts. Reviews of official Nazi material – including a booklet on Nazi foreign policy – appeared in *The Fascist.*[581] Leese had struck up a friendship with 'Hitler's special representative in London', Thost.[582] Thost wrote an article for *The Fascist* titled 'The Truth about Hitlerism in Germany', appearing on the front page, and delivered a lecture on 'The German National Socialists' at IFL headquarters.[583] The following year, Leese wrote a letter to Thost expressing 'complete sympathy' with the Nazis.[584] The IFL declared, 'with considerable pleasure', its 'growing understanding and goodwill between the German "Nazi" Fascists' and its own movement.[585] By December 1931, the IFL claimed to be well connected to the Nazis.[586]

The IFL was also becoming known in Germany. In August 1931, member and a regular contributor to *The Fascist*, H.H.L. (no further information provided) was in Munich as the IFL's 'Special Correspondent' to report favourably on Hitler.[587] Either Thost or H.H.L. informed Hitler's propagandist and Nazi foreign press officer based near Munich, H.R. Hoffmann (almost certainly Rolf Hoffmann), about the IFL. Subsequently, Hoffman sent articles lauding Hitler and berating Jews to Leese in London for publication in *The Fascist.*[588] Probably due to Hoffman, regional pro-Nazi newspapers in Germany translated articles featured in *The Fascist* to German and published them in their respective newspapers.[589] By doing this, the Nazis hoped to impress upon the German people that they were respected and supported abroad;

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[581] 'German Fascist Foreign Policy', *The Fascist*, January 1931, p. 1.
[582] 'Hitler's special representative in London' was the title given to Thost by Joseph King in his book: *The German Revolution, its Meaning and Menace* (University of Michigan, 1933), p. 98.
[583] 'The Truth about Hitlerism in Germany', *The Fascist*, May 1931, p. 1; 'I.F.L. Notes', *The Fascist*, June 1931, p. 3.
[584] Secret report on the IFL by T.M. Shelford, p. 3.
[585] 'International Nationalism', *The Fascist*, February 1931, p. 1.
[586] 'Germany', *The Fascist*, December 1931, p. 4.
[587] H.H.L., 'The Perils of Rationalisation', *The Fascist*, August 1931, p. 1; H.H.L., 'The German Crisis', *The Fascist*, August 1931, p. 1.
[588] From a German National Socialist (almost certainly Hoffmann), 'Race and Politics', *The Fascist*, January 1932, p. 1; H.R. Hoffmann, 'Adolf Hitler, German Chancellor', *The Fascist*, March 1933, p. 1.
[589] 'The Nazis and "The Fascist"', *The Fascist*, May 1933, p. 3.

therefore, legitimising the movement at home to attract more support. During this period, many links and relationships were established between the IFL and the Nazis.

Relations between the IFL and the Nazis changed considerably almost immediately after Hitler's rise to *führership*. The IFL essentially became an arm of the Nazis, operating under their influence. On 11 January 1934, *The Manchester Guardian* translated into English an article published in *Der Stürmer* referring to a 'secret Nazi movement in England' named the 'Imperial Fascist Guard' (IFG).[590] The IFG was the IFL's 'active section'.[591] Its objectives were threefold: to 'spread national and racial consciousness' in England; to undertake 'propaganda raids'; and to defend IFL meetings from hecklers.[592] The Nazi organ published a report sent by the IFL to Hitler and Streicher on the 'activities' of Nazis in England.[593] IFL member Cecil Serocold Skeels authored the report. In it, he forecasted that Britain would go National Socialist within five years.[594]

Like Leese, Skeels was a fanatical antisemite and a 'trusted member and friend' of the IFL.[595] He was one of the principal liaisons between the British movement and the Nazis during the early years of the relationship, regularly travelling between England and Germany, and appearing at various events. He was present at the Day of German Art in Munich (1933) wearing a 'huge Union Jack armlet decorated with a swastika'.[596] Attended by Hitler, 'Aryan' art was paraded through the streets to celebrate 'Aryan' culture.[597] Skeels became friends with Streicher and, according to the IFL, shared a platform with him at the 1933 Nuremberg Rally – the annual rally of the Nazi Party.[598] In front of 100,000 people, Skeels delivered a fanatically pro-Hitler speech in German:

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[590] 'Nazi Activity in England: Report to Germany', *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1934, p. 3.
[591] Leese, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1934, p. 16.
[592] 'Nazi Activity in England: Report to Germany'; 'Imperial Fascist Guard', *The Fascist*, July 1936, p. 8.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid.
[595] 'Streicher and Skeels', *The Fascist*, December 1933, p. 1.
[596] 'Berlin's British Fascists', *The Observer*, 28 January 1934, p. 10.
[597] 'Day of German Art 1933; Hitler salutes crowds [video clip]', *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*, [https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn560283], accessed 2 July 2019.
[598] 'Streicher and Skeels'.

> The Anti-Jewish Fascists of England, the Imperial Fascist League, whose representative I am, bring greetings to you. We fight with Hitler against the Jews. We know full well that the question before you tomorrow is, 'Are you for the Nordic Race or for the Jewish Nation?'
>
> We desire friendship between Germany and England. We are your Nordic brothers and never again shall war be waged between our peoples. I shall, on my return to England, tell the truth for Germany. You have won, in spite of all! *Our* fight begins. Hail Hitler![599]

Once Skeels had delivered the speech, he left in Streicher's car 'amid loud applause and cries of "Hail England"'.[600] Skeels was praised in *The Fascist* for undertaking 'good work for the Imperial Fascist League in Germany'.[601] However, he was 'thrown out' in early 1934 for joining a non-Jew obsessed movement named the United British Party. Within a month, Skeels was also expelled from that group; this time his antisemitism had led him to be 'dropped like a hot coal'.[602] Following his forced absence from British politics, Skeels devoted himself to the Nazis. During the Second World War, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for sending information to the enemy then subsequently detained under defence regulation 18B.[603]

A report in the July 1936 issue of *Munich Monthly* – the principal organ of the Munich Nazis – forwarded by the UK's Ambassador at Berlin to the then Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, provided further evidence that the IFL was under Nazi control. It stated that an IFL 'agent' was assigned an office at the headquarters of the Nazi Party, named the Brown House. This unnamed member was tasked with attracting British and foreign visitors to the existence and activities of its organisation in Britain in order to enrol members 'in a universal war against international Judea'.[604] Through the IFL, the Nazis intended to, at best, attract support in Britain or at least gain sympathy.

The aforementioned examples of antisemitic and pro-Nazi activity of the IFL certainly attracted attention in Britain. However, it is unlikely that its efforts assisted the Nazis in making a favourable impression on the vast majority of Britons. In fact, it likely did the opposite. Most Britons would have been unimpressed by flags embodied with symbols

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[599] Ibid.
[600] Ibid.
[601] 'One Crowded Hour', *The Fascist*, February 1934, p. 4.
[602] Ibid; 'Serocold Skeels Has To Go', *Daily Herald*, 18 January 1934, p. 1.
[603] 'Accused of Helping the Enemy', *Daily Mail*, 14 February 1941, p. 1.
[604] Secret report on the IFL by T.M Shelford, p. 4.

of a foreign power being waved in public or seeing its members in the street wearing Nazi-emblems. In addition, reading about the leader of such an organisation professing his allegiance to Hitler before being sent to jail for causing public unrest, sending threatening letters to M.P.s and attacking clergymen for speaking out against the German Chancellor, was also unlikely to garner public sympathy. That said, for the small number of Britons that did hate Jews and support Hitler, *The Fascist* was informative, if not influential, to them: reinforcing and crystalising their ideas. Yet, Leese regularly received requests from readers of the organ complaining of its obsessive antisemitism.[605] Of the Britons who were aware of the IFL, the vast majority probably agreed with MI5's assertion that Leese was 'a fanatical anti-semite who regards Jews as the enemy of mankind […] see[ing] their influence in every department of human activity' instead of someone who made convincing arguments for the greatness of Hitler and his Nazi party.[606]

Examination of *The Fascist* identifies an area of disagreement between the IFL and the Nazis. From 1935, the IFL regularly used *The Fascist* to print articles warning the Nazis against claims to former German colonies in Africa now ruled by the British.[607] One such article read: 'However much we may be Fascists, we are first of all Englishmen; because of that, whilst we favour friendship on the highest plane with Nazi Germany, that will not blind us to the fact that our overseas possessions are ours as a sacred trust and must be ceded to nobody.'[608] Another written by Leese and published in 1938 stated that his movement was opposed to the return of the former German territory because 'we are British, not German'.[609]

Leese reiterated this claim in a letter to Hoffmann in 1939. On headed IFL paper, Leese declared how he was

> with you in everything except Colonial policy […] But when it comes to the ex-colonies of Germany, for reasons often given in *The Fascist* I am absolutely opposed to any surrender whatever […] Neither do I like to hear German

[605] 'The Editor's Dilemma', *The Fascist*, July 1931, p. 2; 'Too Much About Jews', *The Fascist*, February 1932, p. 2; 'The Old Complaint', *The Fascist*, February 1933,
[606] Secret report on the IFL by T.M Shelford, p. 1.
[607] See, for example, *The Fascist*: May 1935, p. 2; June 1935, p. 2; December 1935, p. 2; March 1937, p. 3; August 1938, p. 2; November 1938, p. 1.
[608] 'Germany and Colonies', *The Fascist*, March 1937, p. 3.
[609] Leese, 'The Spirit and the Money', *The Fascist*, August 1938, p. 2.

> statesmen say that the Colonies were stolen from them, for they were not stolen; nor has Germany, as far as my investigations go, the slightest grounds, moral or otherwise, for claiming them […] I think that Germany is fitter than anyone else except ourselves to have tropical colonies but not on our cabbage patch.[610]

These examples suggest that the IFL favoured nation over a foreign power. Leese wanted to state publicly that he and his movement were anti-Jewish but pro-British to avoid attention from the British security services who would, Leese believed, expose his and the Nazis' activities and, therefore, impact on the relationship and the IFL's mission of 'Aryan' supremacy. However, an agent working for the Home Office who had known Leese 'intimately for years' disagreed that Leese was 'really pro-British'. Agent 62, as he or she was known, was

> emphatic that Arnold Leese had merely carried out certain instructions given to him several years before the war when German National Socialism was uncertain of its strengths and wanted to ensure the survival of some of its friends in case anything went wrong and Germany lost the war […] He assured 62 that his real views were only known to three [unnamed] people.[611]

Furthermore, two years before sending the letter to Hoffmann, Leese claimed that the movement's post was being monitored: 'We believe there is pilfering or sabotage going on in the Mails and will take whatever steps we can to counteract it, including supplying another address for correspondence.'[612] Therefore, Leese would have undoubtedly been selective in the messages sent from IFL headquarters. He clearly staged the 'disagreement' with the Nazis in his letter to Hoffmann (and in *The Fascist*) to make the British security services believe that he was above all else a patriot defending his country. Although MI5 had been reporting on IFL activities from 1934 – when it began compiling reports on British fascist groups – the Home Office only began monitoring correspondence (sent and received) from the movement's headquarters from early 1939 when war was on the horizon and the potential of a fifth column operating in Britain became a real possibility. As Agent 62 remarked, the IFL was in secret a 'fanatical pro-Nazi organisation.'[613]

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[610] TNA KV 2/1365, a letter from Leese to Hoffmann, dated 13 March 1939 (10a).
[611] TNA KV 2/1365, extract relating to Arnold Leese, dated 12 November 1943, (120a).
[612] 'Special Note for South African Readers', *The Fascist*, January 1937, p. 2.
[613] Extract relating to Arnold Leese.

Further evidence points to Nazi dominance in the channels of funding. The IFL relied on three avenues to finance the movement. The first was Leese himself who regularly contributed to the IFL bank account. The second was from the sale of propaganda advertised in *The Fascist*. The third was through donations. When the police searched Leese's home in June 1940, they found 'cash-books' from September 1930 to August 1933 and from June 1937 to November 1938.[614] According to MI5, who analysed the sources, the 'chief subscriber' was Colonel Macdonald of Brussels, who gave £5 each month to the movement and an additional £50 in November 1938. MI5 described Macdonald as 'having strong Fascist views' and as being an 'intermediary' between fascists in Britain and Germany: 'The suspicion arises that he may have been the conduit-pipe for any funds which the Germans may have thought it worthwhile spending on […] the I.F.L', although the service admitted that they had no evidence for this.[615] However, there is evidence that the IFL did receive funding from the Nazis from as early as March 1931. In April 1931, a column was printed in *The Fascist* thanking the Nazis for 'donat[ing] to our funds' the previous month.[616] The IFL described the payment as 'an instance of the way in which the White Races will eventually get together to fight the Asiatic peril of the present day, which is spelled J-E-W'.[617]

Effectively a branch of the Nazi Party, the IFL did Hitler's bidding in Britain. Lebzelter, for example, considered the IFL a 'devoted mouthpiece' for Nazi ideology in Britain.[618] Readers of *The Fascist* were encouraged to purchase Nazi propaganda from Germany, fees and office addresses were given. This included newspaper subscriptions, transcripts of Hitler's speeches, books, magazines, leaflets. For example, the August 1935 issue of *The Fascist* advertised the full text translated into English of Adolf Hitler's Peace Speech (21 May 1935), which was available from Deutscher Fichte-bund, Hamberg.[619] The IFL claimed that other publications in English on general German problems were also available from the German address.[620]

[614] Report on the IFL by T.M. Shelford, p. 8.
[615] Ibid.
[616] 'Fascist Internationalism', *The Fascist,* April 1931, p. 3.
[617] Ibid.
[618] *Political Anti-Semitism in England,* p. 85.
[619] 'Adolf Hitler's Peace Speech', *The Fascist,* August 1935, p. 4.
[620] Ibid.

As well as the abundance of pro-Nazi books and articles advertised through its newspaper, the IFL also sold other Nazi-related propaganda. Copies of the Jewish Ritual Murder number of *Der Stürmer* (1934) – by now the most widely read paper in the Third Reich[621] – were sold to 'Help The I.F.L. Funds!'[622] Readers of *The Fascist* were also encouraged to purchase Third Reich cultural propaganda from Germany such as stationery, cigarette cards and Christmas cards.[623] Twelve months after the IFL advertised Christmas Cards of Hitler – available to purchase from the Nazi publishing house in Frankfurt, Juengersche Buchhandlung – the IFL copied the idea, selling Christmas cards with a portrait of Leese printed on them.[624]

Members of the British fascist movement visited Germany under the Third Reich. First-hand reports eulogising Hitler's 'achievements' appeared in *The Fascist* and became the feature at GHQ Meetings.[625] Through this, the IFL attempted to provide the 'truth' as opposed to the 'press lies and half-truths' that displayed 'contempt [for] the Hitler regime'.[626] Reports on the brutal suppression of German opinion were denied. Writing in late 1933, an unnamed IFL member claimed that anti-Hitler newspapers were 'permitted to be sold openly from newsstands to anybody who is so misguided as to wish to waste his money'.[627] The military arm of the Nazi Party, the Brownshirts, were depicted as not uniformed bullies but cultured members of the Aryan race who 'seldom carry anything more lethal than banners [and] folded leather case[s] containing a few papers'. The German people were not 'bullied and browbeaten' but liberated. There was no begging on the street, no starvation, five million more employed, and – to the 'horror of Liberals and other muddle-headed morons in Britain' – those who were jobless were 'doing useful and necessary work […] at the same time, regaining physical and moral strength'. For these and many other reasons, 'Britain can do with a dose of it [Nazism]'.[628]

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[621] Randall Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher: Nazi Editor of the Notorious Anti-Semitic Newspaper Der Sturmer* (New York, 2001), p. 1.
[622] 'Help The I.F.L. Funds!', *The Fascist*, August 1934, p. 2; 'Literature', *The Fascist*, January 1938, p. 8.
[623] See, for example, 'For Sale and Wanted', *The Fascist*, December 1937, p. 4.
[624] 'Xmas Cards', *The Fascist*, November 1938, p. 4.
[625] See, for example, '"In Darkest Germany"', *The Fascist*, October 1933, p. 3; 'GHQ Meeting', *The Fascist*, August 1934, p. 4; 'Hitler and Germany', *The Fascist* , March 1935, p. 6; 'Loyalties', *The Fascist*, March 1936, p. 3.
[626] '"In Darkest Germany"'.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid.

To attract support for Hitler among British subjects, the IFL devised schemes to connect Britons to Nazi Germany. The British movement encouraged British people to 'stop going to Jewish cinemas […] and with the money so saved pay an early visit to Germany and learn, on the spot, the truth which our papers are unwilling to tell them'.[629] From 1934, the IFL collaborated with 'a non-Jewish' London travel agent inviting British citizens to 'Come and See New Germany'.[630] With a promise of 'Good Hotels', customers could choose between touring the Rhine and Moselle by steamboat and car for eight days; the Harz Mountains by car for nine days; and Dresden, Nuremberg, Munich and the Bavarian Alps for 15 days.[631] In the years that followed, perhaps as a result of its tours of Germany, the IFL regularly advertised a guest house in the Bavarian Alps for 'Aryan Visitors Only.'[632]

In addition, *The Fascist* was used as a medium for cultural exchanges between the two countries. This included an Au Pair exchange and pen pal requests as well as stamp swapping.[633] An advert in the October 1938 issue read 'The Nuremberg representative of *The Fascist* would like to write to I.F.L. members who would exchange Stamps.'[634] Free German language classes were held at headquarters in London to encourage 'Aryan' British people to build relationships with their 'Aryan' German counterparts.[635] In 1938, the IFL claimed to have 'done more in the last ten years to cement friendship between this country and Germany than any other organisation could achieve'.[636]

The Nazis capitalised on its relationship with the IFL. Due to its fanatically pro-Nazi content, IFL literature was disseminated in Nazi Germany. In 1937, an IFL booklet titled *Mightier Yet!* – 'the official declaration' of its aims and policies – featured in an

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[629] 'The Sunday Referee', *The Fascist*, April 1936, p. 5.
[630] 'Come and See New Germany', *The Fascist*, July and August 1934 [both issues], p. 4.
[631] Ibid.
[632] See, for example, 'Accommodation', *The Fascist*, August 1935, p. 4; 'Accommodation', *The Fascist*, December 1935, p. 4; 'Accommodation', *The Fascist*, January 1936, p. 8.
[633] 'Au Pair', *The Fascist*, February 1935, p. 4; 'For Sale and Wanted', *The Fascist*, November 1937, p. 4; 'Foreign Stamps', *The Fascist*, October 1938, p. 4.
[634] 'Foreign Stamps'.
[635] 'Classes in German', *The Fascist*, September 1936, p. 4.
[636] 'Czech-Mate', *The Fascist*, October 1938, p. 1.

English book series published by Rohmkopf for the study of the English language.[637] *The Fascist* was translated into German by the Nazis and sold through Juengersche Buchhandlung. German readers in England were also able to subscribe to the German translation through their local Post Office provided they paid in German currency.[638] In 1938, to run alongside *The Fascist*, the IFL began publishing a magazine for German and British readerships called *Angles*. The new title was to be issued weekly in Britain and monthly in Germany, available from addresses in Nuremberg and Hamberg.[639] Free IFL literature was also obtainable from both of these outlets.[640] By 1939, all of the IFL's literature was orderable through one address: Herr Emil Rohmkopf, Leipzig.[641]

The IFL appeared to have had a particularly close relationship with Streicher and *Der Stürmer*. As official guests of the leading anti-Jewish organ in Germany, IFL members attended Nuremberg rallies. In addition to Skeels' visit in 1933, four IFL members attended the 1935 rally to which they 'received the most generous hospitality from their genial hosts'.[642] In 1937, two members were present for the celebrations. They claimed to find themselves in a 'free country' where they could wear IFL uniform and Swastika symbols while enjoying the 'heartiest reception from everyone'.[643] The hospitality went both ways. According to MI5 source, Gordon Woods – adjutant to the then deceased Rotha Lintorn-Orman, the founder of the British Fascist – Streicher's son, Lothar, stayed with Leese during his seven-week visit to Britain in 1934.[644] The IFL also assisted Otto Bene, the head of the Nazis in London, in arranging the visit of two young Nazis connected with the German paper the following year.[645] In his 1941 report on the IFL, T.M. Shelford, from MI5's F3 counter-subversion section, remarked that the IFL

[637] Erich Wötzel, *The Imperial Fascist League (Racial Fascism)* (Leipzig, 1937); 'Outlook', *The Fascist*, April 1937, p. 2.
[638] 'German Readers', *The Fascist*, November 1937, p. 2; 'To German Readers', November 1938, p. 4.
[639] 'Notice to German Readers of "The Fascist"', *The Fascist*, August 1938, p. 4.
[640] Ibid.
[641] 'Literature', *The Fascist*, January 1939, p. 4.
[642] 'Guests of "Der Sturmer"', *The Fascist*, October 1935, p. 5.
[643] 'Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, October 1937, p. 2. In 1936, the UK government banned the wearing of political uniforms in any public place or public meeting.
[644] TNA KV 2/1365, extract from an interview with Woods, dated 9 October 1944 (212b).
[645] Report by T.M. Shelford on the IFL, p. 3.

had made every effort to ingratiate itself with the Germans and to make contact with the Nazi Party.[646]

The IFL presented itself as a British first movement. It regularly referred to its members as 'patriots' while the Jewish-run British government were the enemy, not Nazi Germany.[647] Its vision of an ideal Britain was that of a nation free from the 'contamination' of alien influence – a synonym for Jews – who, to enrich themselves, controlled Britain in every sphere: politically, financially and socially (through newspapers and cinemas, for example). Historical accounts of Jewish influence in England feature in the movement's literature. During the mid-Medieval period, the Jew took advantage of the outlawing of usury by the Church.[648] This 'monopoly', the IFL argued, gave them such power they essentially ran the country, 'bully[ing] and oppress[ing]' non-Jews at their will.[649] The 'great' King Edward I and his parliament were eulogised for murdering hundreds of 'the detested and despised Jews' before expelling them from the country in 1290. Contrastingly, Cromwell is condemned for allowing their return, branding his great-grandfather, Horatio Pallavacini, Jewish. The IFL declared that history was repeating itself, that the country was 'over-run' by the hated Jews. The only 'cure' was by (re)implementing the 'same measures now advocated by the Imperial Fascist League […] total expulsion of Jews from these islands'.[650]

Therefore, when discussions of a potential war with Germany began in Britain after Hitler's consolidation of power in 1933, the IFL had to take a position. Did it side with the country that, according to the movement, was controlled by its nemesis, the Jew; or should it support the foreign power in which it was ideologically aligned to and under the influence of? The IFL campaigned for peace between the two powers. They accused Jews of conspiring to create war with Germany to save their coreligionists from the

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[646] Ibid.
[647] See, for example, 'Seditious Libel', *The Fascist*, December 1936, p. 3; 'This New Freedom', *The Fascist*, January 1938, p. 1. In a police report on Leese in the early stages of the war, Detective Inspector Percy Bower stated that Leese expressed his 'hatred' of the British government in general conversation with strangers and in a letter to his bank manager: TNA KV 3/1365, Police Report From Guildford, dated 28 August 1940, p. 1 (8a).
[648] See, for example, Leese, 'Our Ancestors Experiences of "Semitism"', *The Fascist*, June 1934, pp. 3–4; 'Revelations', *The Fascist*, June 1938, p. 6.
[649] 'Our Ancestors Experiences of "Semitism"'.
[650] Ibid.

tyranny of Hitler's regime and of attempting to consolidate world domination, as Nazi Germany was the Achilles heel due to its breaking of Jewish influence within Germany; and of enriching themselves, as the most lucrative profit base for Jews, the arch-capitalists and moneylenders, is through war.[651] The IFL insisted that its members would never fight on the side of Jewry. In fact, if war did break out, Leese claimed, IFL members would arrest the leading Jews: 'If Jews are successful [in causing war] there will be war upon them here in England, We shall see to that.'[652]

Months before the outbreak of war, the IFL published a pamphlet titled 'Race and Politics' (1938). In it, the movement stated that nationality is of 'secondary importance' to race. 'The Supreme Political Fact is that Civilisation was established by people of Aryan Race and only by them can it be maintained at its high level. The Supreme Political Object is, therefore, to maintain the strength of this Aryan stock on which the hope of the world depends.' The pamphlet claimed that the overarching threat to the IFL's 'Supreme Political Object' was the Jews as 'The Jew Money Power works from behind the Gentile line, and uses one Gentile Power to destroy the other.'[653]

Although not explicitly stating that it would take the side of Nazi Germany if war were to break out, it was clear where IFL sympathies lay. Britain and France (among others) as well as the League of Nations – all, according to IFL, were controlled by Jews – were constantly berated by the IFL for not allying with Nazi Germany. As opposed to its own country, 'Germany is no longer controlled by Jews, but by Germans and Germans are people of our own race, who we understand and can deal with as White men and equals'.[654] The IFL depicted Hitler as a friend of Europe as he had defeated Jewish Bolshevism, therefore, preventing the takeover of the continent by alien forces.

In April 1938, Leese wrote an article titled 'Who Wants War? Only the Jews!'. In it, the IFL leader argued that Hitler's invasion of Austria the previous month was not an act of aggression by Nazi Germany but an example of its passive foreign policy. The 'Jew-backed government' of Austria was hell-bent on war, claimed Leese, but Hitler

[651] *The Fascist*: 'War and the Imperial Fascist League', March 1935, p. 6; 'The Sunday Referee', April 1936, p. 5; 'Who Wants War?', June 1937, pp. 3–4; Leese, 'Who Wants War? Only the Jews!', April 1938, p. 1.
[652] 'Who Wants War? Only the Jews!'.
[653] Arnold Leese, *Race and Politics* (London, 1938).
[654] 'War and the Imperial Fascist League'.

'marched straight in with overwhelming force, thereby preventing war'. Leese also stated that if any county defended Czechoslovakia – where all land belonged to 'Jewish usurers' – against a Nazi attack, 'we shall see our duty clearly, and that is to oppose any Government which attempts it to the death. If it is necessary for British people to die for a cause, let it be in a righteous one'.[655] If the IFL supported Hitler's invasions of supposedly Jewish controlled countries then why would they not support Hitler in a war with Britain that, according to the IFL, was also run by Jews? The last sentence in 'Race and Politics' instructs readers that 'In all political thought and action, let Race be the guide of his alliance'[656] In the event of war between Britain and Germany the evidence suggests that the IFL favoured Britain's foe over its own country: race over nation.

In Britain, the IFL was identified as being a pro-Nazi movement. As well as the aforementioned reports, other examples of IFL pro-Nazi activity were commented on in the press. Newspapers reported on IFL representatives at Nuremberg giving fascist salutes after laying wreaths on the graves of German soldiers killed fighting in the First World War. They also covered 'excited members' shouting 'Heil Hitler' at anti-Jewish demonstrations' in the UK.[657] In the days leading up to the war, MPs discussed the 'pro-Nazi' and 'anti-British' propaganda being spread by the IFL.[658] Members did not attempt to hide their admiration for the German Chancellor. In September 1934, for example, the *Portsmouth Evening News* published a letter from 'Imperial Fascist W'. In it, the writer stated that 'I belong to an organization that has many similar views to Hitler, and we see eye to eye with most of his difficulties. We have first-hand details of conditions, what Hitler has to contend with in his fight to bring prosperity and peace to his country.'[659] An anonymous reporter from the *Eastbourne Gazette* who had studied the movement summed up the general attitude towards the IFL in Britain: 'Hitler is their God and Jew-hatred their gospel.'[660]

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[655] 'Who Wants War? Only the Jews!'. Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939 unimpeded.
[656] *Race and Politics*.
[657] 'Lonely Fascists', *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 September 1937, p. 8; 'Echo of Great War', *The Scotsman*, 9 March 1936, p. 7; 'Fascist Tribute to Zep. Victims', *The Daily Independent*, 9 March 1936, p. 5; 'Protest Meeting', *The Evening Telegraph*, 10 September 1938, p. 7.
[658] 'Anti-British Work at Home', *The Yorkshire Post*, 1 August 1939, p. 7.
[659] 'The Hitlerites', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 3 September 1934, p. 3.
[660] 'Fascists come to Eastbourne', *Eastbourne Gazette*, 19 April 1933, p. 1.

***Other overseas fascist movements***

The IFL is an excellent example of the extent of transnational exchanges that occurred between fascists operating in various countries during the interwar period. Due to its zeal-like hatred of Jews and avid pro-Hitlerism, the IFL proved to be a popular movement for like-minded groups and individuals abroad. To them, Leese was an expert on the Jewish question, referring to himself as 'a student of Jewry', and *The Fascist* an authority on racial theory and Jewish (and anti-Jewish) activity.[661] When his house was searched in the early stages of the war, police found 'a complete name index of members of the Imperial Fascist League. Many countries of the world were represented in this index, and there is little doubt that Leese has a large and varied following'.[662]

There is limited evidence as to the scope of relationships with fascists abroad (other than the Nazis) or how they began. However, occasional references in *The Fascist* and a small number of security service files provide an insight. Leese clearly set out to build a worldwide movement of 'Aryans' fighting for their race against the hated Jews who were hellbent on destroying it. He 'hope[d] someday that all Racial Fascists will serve under the Swastika symbol'.[663] These overseas contacts appear to have originated in a number of ways. Firstly, antisemitic individuals or groups abroad contacted the IFL directly after reading *The Fascist*. Secondly, antisemitic British nationals abroad who supported the IFL formed relationships with Jew-haters in their respective countries of residence. Thirdly, Leese approached antisemites whose activities were reported on in overseas newspapers of which he was an incessant reader. By the outbreak of war, Leese had created an impressive network of like-minded individuals and groups, all of them seeking to destroy Jewish influence.

By the end of the thirties, Leese had successfully built strong relationships with 'Jew-fighters' from across the global, mostly from English speaking countries. This resulted in a web of transnational activity. Pamphlets, books and periodicals were exchanged between the IFL and influential antisemites with many disseminating IFL propaganda. Perhaps the most notable was the IFL's impact on Canadian Jew-haters, Adrian Arcand and William Whittaker, who regularly reprinted IFL material in their respective

[661] Police Report From Guildford, dated 28 August 1940, p. 1.
[662] Ibid., p. 2.
[663] 'Public Mischief [Empire]', *The Fascist*, October 1938, p. 3.

newspapers.[664] Described by Leese as 'one of the first World-Pioneers of the Aryan Racial movement against Jewish domination', Arcand – the self-proclaimed 'Canadian Führer' – hero-worshipped both Leese and Beamish for their unswerving devotion to the spread of antisemitism, and considered the IFL an authority on the Jewish question, urging his adherents to read writings by Leese.[665] In 1938, Leese was awarded 'honorary membership' of Arcand's movement, and the close relationship between the two continued into the post-war years in which Arcand sought to create an international far right built on common ideas.[666]

Whittaker was equally impressed with the IFL. He described *The Fascist* as 'an education' and declared that there was 'Nothing Kosher about The Imperial Fascists.'[667] In fact, Leese sent Beamish to 'reinvigorate' Whittaker's Canadian Nationalist Party (CNA) in 1936 after the group had received a series of setbacks (i.e losing a defamation case in 1935).[668] Beamish delivered a rabblerousing antisemitic speech at the Winnipeg Auditorium after which the CNA continued to function.[669] Around 25 Jews turned up heckle Beamish and a fight broke out.[670] As a result, *The Jewish Post* denounced the Jewish 'mob', warning them that 'we cannot fight fire with fire'.[671] On his death in 1938, an obituary was published in its newspaper describing Whittaker as a long-time friend of the British movement.[672] The IFL claimed that both these fascists had learnt their radicalism from them.[673] The claim by Leese that '*The Fascist* has been packed with information which cannot be obtained anywhere else [and is an] accurate

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[664] 'Public Mischief [Empire]'; 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, December 1934, p. 3.
[665] Ibid; Jean-Francois Nadeau, *The Canadian Führer: The Life of Adrien Arcand* (Toronto, 2011), p. 272; Fredrick Edwards, 'Fascism in Canada', *Maclean's*, 15 April 1938, [https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1938/4/15/fascism-in-canada], accessed 2 July 2019.
[666] 'Public Mischief [Empire]'; *The Canadian Führer*, p. 272.
[667] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, December 1934, p. 3.
[668] Henry Trachtenberg, 'The Winnipeg Jewish Community and Politics: the Inter-War Years, 1919–1939', *MHS Transactions*, Series 3, Number 35, 1978–1979, [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/jewishpolitics.shtml#footnote], accessed 2 July 2019.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid.
[671] 'Loose Thinking', *The Jewish Post*, 29 October 1936, p. 4.
[672] 'Obituary', *The Fascist*, December 1938, p. 1.
[673] Ibid.

presentation of the real facts of international politics and economics' was supported by his overseas counterparts.[674]

Connections were also formed with fascists in non-English speaking nations. Besides the Nazis, relationships were created with Italian, French, Icelandic, Hungarian, Romanian and Norwegian fascists.[675] The earliest overseas connection and, perhaps, the most interesting, other than with the Nazis, is with Norwegian fascists. In August 1931, the IFL received a letter from the long-running, rabidly antisemitic Norwegian newspaper, *Nationalt Tidsskrift*, edited by the Jew-hating typographer, Mikal Sylten. In it, Sylten praised the British movement for championing White supremacism and antisemitism.[676] The IFL responded by advertising the Oslo-based 'Fascist monthly' in *The Fascist* the following month.[677] The Norwegian paper printed names of known Jews in Norway and abroad, and Jewish foreign-owned businesses in Norway – the IFL did something similar with suspected Jews in Britain. When the Nazis captured Norway in 1940, Sylten issued the representatives with the lists. The lists formed part of the German Gestapo's systematic collection of material on Norwegian Jews.[678] The IFL went on to establish links with Nasjonal Samling, a Norwegian nazi party – founded and led by the infamous Vidkun Quisling – active from 1933 to 1945 (and the only legal party of Norway from 1942 to 1945), sending it anti-war and antisemitic propaganda.[679] This included the 'Jewish International Anthem' in English with a Norwegian translation, a parody of 'Onward Christian Soldiers'.[680]

The IFL became a hub for transnational activity. To assist its Nordic friends, the movement sold their racialist propaganda in Britain. Material from Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, the United States and France was sold from IFL headquarters.[681] Leese made sure that the content was suitably White supremacist and antisemitic before

[674] Leese, 'Our Back Issues', *The Fascist*, October 1938, p. 2.
[675] 'I.F.L. Celebration Dinner', July 1933, p. 1; 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, September 1933, p. 2; 'News from the Jewish Front', *The Fascist*, March 1934, p. 2; 'Literature', *The Fascist*, October 1938, p. 4.
[676] 'Nationalt Tidsskrift', *The Fascist*, September 1931, p. 3.
[677] 'Note', *The Fascist*, November 1931, p. 1.
[678] Kristin Brattelid, *Mikal Sylten: et antisemittisk livsprosjekt* [an Antisemitic Life Project] (University of Oslo, 2004), Abstract [translated by author].
[679] Tore Rem, *Knut Hamsun: Reisen Til Hitler* [Journey to Hitler] (Lativa, 2014), p. 129 [translated by author].
[680] Secret report on the IFL by T.M. Shelford, p. 3.
[681] *The Fascist* 1938: May, p. 3; June, p. 8; July, p. 4; October, p. 4; 1939: March, p. 7.

allowing it to be advertised in *The Fascist*. Despite the 'frequently quoted' IFL material included in the text, Leese refused to stock 'The Case For Australians' by W. G. Selkirk because the author had not fully awakened to racial ideas: 'This effort from Australia is very encouraging; there is much valuable information in it on the World Jew Menace […] But the author is not yet race-wise […] we cannot therefore stock this little book.'[682] Any 'fascist' movement that does not adhere to racial discrimination, the IFL hoped would 'die young'.[683]

Leese was particularly impressed by the work of Arthur Nelson Field, a fanatical antisemite and far-right ideologue, from New Zealand. He saw Fields as a great inventor of antisemitic ideals. Field's 'best-selling' *Truth about the Slump* (1931) and *All These Things* (1936) as well as the periodical *Examiner*, edited by the New Zealander, were sold by *The Fascist*.[684] In fact, in his works, Fields acknowledges materials produced by Leese and the IFL.[685] *All These Things*, seen by conspiracy theorists as a pioneering study on the development of the Jewish plot to take over the world, was described in *The Fascist* as 'one of the greatest events […] on the side of the opposition to Jewish "economic" planning'.[686] Quotations by Field are included in articles in *The Fascist*. For example, Leese quotes Field in a warning to readers: '"if you have no grip on the Jewish question, you have not begun to understand anything of what is happening before your eyes"'.[687]

Marinus La Rooij has examined the relationship between 'New Zealand's most prolific anti-semitic agitator' and like-minded people outside of New Zealand.[688] He has claimed that thousands of copies of Fields books were sold outside of New Zealand in the interwar period including 2,000 copies of *The Truth about the Slump* by London-based investment broker, Alexander Scrimgeour, to distribute among as many 'patriot

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[682] 'Book Notices', *The Fascist*, June 1938, p. 8.
[683] 'The Fascist Outlook', *The Fascist*, September 1933, p. 2.
[684] See, for example, *The Fascist*: August 1935, p. 4; June 1938, p. 8; October 1938, p. 4.
[685] Marinus La Rooij, 'From Colonial Conservative to International Antisemite: The Life and Work of Arthur Nelson Field', *Journal of Contemporary History* 37:2 (2002), p. 236.
[686] 'Sovietism by Stealth', *The Fascist*, May 1937, p. 2.
[687] Leese, 'Are you going to Stand for this again', *The Fascist*, September 1939, p. 1.
[688] 'From Colonial Conservative to International Antisemite', p. 223. La Rooij has written a further article on Field titled 'Arthur Nelson Field: Kiwi Theoretician of the Australian Radical Right?', *Labour History* 37 (2005).

persons as he knew'.[689] It is conceivable that Scrimgeour found out about Field and his work by reading *The Fascist* and purchased the books from the IFL. Leese was more than happy to assist his kindred spirits, whoever they may be, in 'driv[ing] a nail into the Jews' coffin'.[690]

Leese did not garner support in the Empire (or beyond) outside of the small circle of extreme antisemites and Nordic supremacists. Perhaps this is surprising given that Leese knew the empire well having spent a large part of his life there. A number of reasons may explain this. 1) Other countries had their own extremist fringes operating in them. Why would, for example, the Canadian public be interested in the IFL when they had two rabidly antisemitic movements of their own where contact and literature were easily accessible? 2) Due to their small membership and lack of visible impact, IFL attracted very little interest from newspapers abroad – newspapers were the largest outlet for information dissemination in the world at that time – therefore almost all of the people in the British colonies would have been unaware who Arnold Leese or the IFL was. 3) Certain countries like New Zealand and Australia had discriminatory immigration policies that excluded non-White migrants. This, therefore, reduced the need for non-'nativist' fascist imports. Furthermore, such politics was expressed in Australia by 'nativist'-driven groups like the New Guard paramilitary militias after the First World War.

Perhaps the main reason why Leese's Imperial Fascist League drew so heavily on overseas influences, particularly from the Nazis later on, was that Leese (and his mentor Kitson) had such weak roots in the UK. Dependency on the 'Protocols', imported ideas of Jewish 'money power' and foreign Nazi precedents seem to show a transnational movement that lacked nativist roots, which probably contributed to its smallish membership. In that sense, transnational accounts for it as an import. That said, the IFL should not be seen as irrelevant to wider politics or society. To understand societies as a whole, the minor players have to be examined. The IFL, for example, had little impact on high politics or 'mainstream' society. Yet, its scientific brand of racism significantly influenced other far-right movements, particularly in the post-war period. Directly or indirectly, the IFL brought fear to the doorsteps of non-Whites and their communities, most notably Jews.

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[689] Ibid., p. 235.
[690] 'Books Received', *The Fascist*, June 1935, p. 2.

The IFL was arguably the most transnational of the case studies investigated in this thesis. The IFL's transnationalism was similar to the BF and BUF's in that it was heavily influenced by Italian Fascism and Nazism. However, what distinguished Leese's movement from the others in this respect was its unadulterated adulation for Hitler, which is reflected in its literature and activities, and its ideological kinship with the Führer, which was based on Aryan supremacy and antisemitism; so much so that the IFL was the most respected of three British fascist movements by the Nazis. In addition, the IFL was the only case study investigated here to exhibit dislike (to put it mildly) for Mussolini and Italian Fascism, which it did for a large period of its lifetime.

Although the IFL did not desire or attempt to expand its physical presence overseas, unlike the other two movements, which formed branches outside of the UK, it was possibly more influential than both of them on the transnational level through its paper-based activities. Through his writings and dedication to the cause, Leese was considered an expert Jew-fighter by racialists and *The Fascist* an authority on the Jewish question. Because of this, Leese and his movement developed a large following among Aryan supremacists and ardent antisemites across the globe. As a result, the IFL formed relationships with many likeminded individuals and groups overseas, and it became a hub for the Aryan-supremacist movement.

Even though Leese favoured a foreign power (i.e. Nazi Germany) over the UK government and political system, and supported a Nazi takeover of Britain, the IFL was an ultranationalist movement. It believed that Britain would benefit positively if National Socialism replaced its parliamentary democracy, and if Jews were eradicated from the country (and the planet), it would make for an incorruptible, prosperous place. This aim of revolution in order to achieve a national rebirth (palingenesis) is an integral element to Griffin's fascist minimum. Therefore, the IFL fits Griffin's minimum and should be considered fascist.

## Chapter Three: 'The Man Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune'[1]

Mosley was a power-hungry dictator in waiting. Frustrated that his ambitious plans to solve unemployment in Britain were rejected by the political class of which he was a part, Mosley believed that the only way he would be able to force his will on the British people was through revolutionary means. Italian Fascism - with its strong leadership principle, low unemployment and Corporatism - was an ideal ideology to model his new movement on, replacing parliamentary democracy, which he grew to loath. Before its official inception, Mosley had incorporated the Fascist name, emblem, attire, salute and system of government into his new movement.

During its existence, BUF transnationalism centred mainly on the quest for finances. To flourish, Mosley's movements required vast sums of money, far more than they could muster in Britain. He saw the Fascist and Nazi regimes as not only natural allies of the BUF but also lucrative sources of income that were able to provide the funds required to grow his movement and thus create the fascist revolution in Britain that he craved. Initially, Mussolini ploughed millions of pounds in today's money into the BUF in return for unconditional and wholehearted support from the movement. As a result, the BUF became obsessively pro-Fascist. The relationship dynamics are most evident in the BUF's 'Mind Britain's Business' campaign, which saw Mosley and his followers take to the streets and auditoriums of Britain to drum up public support to deter the country from interceding on behalf of Abyssinia after Italy invaded it (Britain was obliged to come to the aid of the African country under League of Nation rules).

For the first half of its existence, Mosley played a delicate balancing act between Italian Fascism and German Nazism – who were involved in a power struggle to be the most powerful and prominent on the world stage – with the intention of obtaining funds from both. Antisemitism was a key ideological difference between the two regimes at the time – the Nazis were ardent Jew-haters, while the Fascists publicly decried the discrimination. The BUF, keen to court them both, was in a quandary over how to navigate the Jewish question so not to alienate either of the powers, and a review of the BUF's literature uncovers this. The BUF only fully committed to antisemitism publicly

[1] Quote by the BUF's Director of Political Organisation, F.M. Box, who was aware of overseas payments to Mosley: TNA HO 144/20145, 'Report to the Home Office', 23 October 1935, (12–13).

when Mussolini's funding was due to stop. Then, through its commitment to Jew-hatred and Hitler worship, Mosley was determined to curry favour with the Nazis, who later provided funds and other benefits to the BUF.

Of the many fascist organisations in British history, the vast majority of academic attention has focused on the British Union of Fascists (BUF). From the early post-war period to contemporary times, a wealth of local and regional case studies have been written spanning the breadth of the country (Scotland to Devon).[2] This follows the traditions established by historians of the Labour party, popular radicalism, and the broader British left, with which some of this work intersects and where the interest lies in charting the local dimension to broader platform movements. These were very much micro-level case studies deriving from local studies which were popular from the 1950s onwards in economic and social approaches to the British past. For example, Asa Briggs *Chartist Studies* (1959) argued the case for the priority of the local case study in understanding political movements from below through the locality in which they were embedded. This spawned a whole industry of case studies about radicalism and the

[2] For example, John Brewer, *Mosley's Men: The British Union of Fascists in the West Midlands* (London, 1984); Craig Morgan, 'The British Union of Fascists in the Midlands, 1932–1940', (PhD Thesis: University of Wolverhampton, 2008); Thomas Linehan, *East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex, 1933–1940* (London, 1996); Andrew Mitchell, 'Fascism in East Anglia: the British Union of Fascists in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, 1933–1940', (PhD Thesis: University of Sheffield, 1999); C. J. F. Morley, 'Fascist Promise and the Capitalist Alternative: An Analysis of Sussex Coast Fascism Between the Wars', (Master's thesis: university unspecified, 1982 – copy held at the Wiener Library, London); David Turner, *Fascism and anti-Fascism in the Medway Towns, 1927–1940* (Rochester, 1993); Dave Renton, *Red Shirts and Black: Fascists and Anti-Fascists in Oxford in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1996); Trevelyan Scholarship Project, *The British Union of Fascists in Yorkshire 1934–40* (1960); Stuart Rawnsley, 'Fascism and Fascists in Britain in the 1930s: A Case Study of Fascism in the North of England in a Period of Economic and Political Change', (PhD Thesis: University of Bradford, 1981); Nigel Todd, *In Excited Times: The People Against The Blackshirts* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995); Gordon Stridiron, *Blackshirts in Geordieland* (London, 2013); Philip Coupland, 'The Blackshirts in Northampton, 1933–1940', *Northamptonshire Past and Present* 53 (2000); Todd Gray, *Blackshirts in Devon* (Exeter, 2006); Stephen Cullen, 'Another Nationalism: The British Union of Fascists in Glamorgan, 1932–40', *The Welsh History Review* 17:1 (1994), pp. 101–114; Henry Maitles, 'Blackshirts Across the Border: The British Union of Fascists in Scotland', *The Scottish Historical Review* 82:213 (2003); Stephen Cullen, 'The British Union of Fascists in Scotland', Proceedings of the Association of Scottish Historical Studies (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 116–123; Liz Kibblewhite & Andrew Rigby, *Fascism in Aberdeen: Street Politics in the 1930s* (Aberdeen, 1978).

early Labour party.[3] In addition to the more localised work, national membership and support have also been of interest.[4] Fresher perspectives have focused on the party's ideology. Its vision for a corporate state, attitude towards antisemitism and the leader's philosophy are all areas of interest to historians.[5] Expert on British fascism, Richard Thurlow claims that the BUF was 'intellectually the most coherent and rational of all the parties in Europe'.[6]

The BUF has also attracted examination from a cultural viewpoint. The party's vision for a theatrical and musical renaissance, the meanings and functions of the movement's political uniform and the Blackshirts' leisure time have all enriched this cultural approach.[7] In addition, Mosley's movement has appeared in popular fiction. For

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[3] Asa Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959). The point is adroitly made in Shelton Stromquist, 'Claiming Political Space: Workers, Municipal Socialism, and the Reconstruction of Local Democracy in Transnational Perspective', in Leon Fink (ed.), *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 303–328.

[4] David Shermer, *Blackshirts: Fascism in Britain* (New York, 1971); G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History* 19:4 (1984), pp. 575–606; Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts! Fascists and Fascism in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2005); Stephen Dorril, *Black Shirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London, 2006).

[5] Gary Love, '"What's the Big Idea?": Oswald Mosley, the British Union of Fascists and Generic Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42:3 (2007); Bret Rubin, 'The Rise and Fall of British Fascism: Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists', *Intersections* 11:2 (2010).
For debates on antisemitism, see the chapter titled 'The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932–40', in Stephen Cullen, *The British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940: Ideology, Membership and Meetings* (unpublished MLitt thesis: University of Oxford, 1987); 'The BUF and British Society' particularly subsection 'the turn to anti-semitism', in Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London, 1998), p. 62; 'British Fascism and anti-Semitism', in Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918–1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester, 2000). For more extensive analysis, see Daniel Tilles & Salvatore Garau (eds.), *Fascism and the Jews: Italy and Britain* (Edware, 2011); Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–1940* (London, 2015).

[6] *Fascism in Britain*, p. 62.

[7] For culture, see Thomas Linehan, 'A Host of "Decadent" Phenomena', in Roger Griffin & Matthew Feldman (eds.), *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science* Volume 1 (London, 2004); Philip Coupland, 'The Black Shirt in Britain: The Meanings and Functions of Political Uniform', in Julie Gottlieb & Thomas Linehan (eds.), *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London, 2004); Helen Pussard, 'The Blackshirts at Belle Vue: Fascist Theatre at a North-West Pleasure Ground', in *The Culture of Fascism*; Roger Griffin, '"This Fortress Built Against Infection": The BUF Vision of Britain's Theatrical and Musical Renaissance', in *The Culture of Fascism*.

example, *Tarzan and the Blackshirt* (2016), a juvenile fiction novel by Andy Croft, tells the story of how a budding friendship turns to hate when, Irish boy, Alf, joins the *Blackshirts* much to the horror of his Jewish friend, Sam. Set in London's East End in the 1930s, it tackles issues such as racial tension, gang crime and right-wing antagonism.[8] The movement was even subject to several spoofs. Diana Mitford's oldest sister, the famously left-wing and vociferous opponent of fascism, Nancy, wrote a satirical novel *Wigs on the Green* (1935) in which she mocked the BUF as 'the Union Jackshirts' led by the Poor Old Führer 'Colonel Jack' (Mosley). Unsurprisingly, the book deeply offended both Mosley and Diana.[9] An even more humorous imitation was the comic fiction writer P.G Wodehouse's *The Code of the Wooster* (1938). Wodehouse poked fun at Mosley, as 'Roderick Spode', and his 'Black Shorts', who went around shouting 'Heil Spode'.[10] Interestingly, associate professor and author of *Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Twentieth-Century British Fiction*, Judy Suh has argued that much middlebrow British fiction, despite its reputation for non-political content, theorised the rise and fall of fascism from the 1930s to 1960s.[11] According to Suh, anti-fascist counterstrategies were firmly located within middlebrow genres associated with women writers (such as domestic fiction, melodrama, country house novels, and family sagas). The party has also been the focus of several pictorial books.[12]

The BUF has prompted several other modes of investigation. For example, Martin Durham and Julie Gottlieb have examined the role of women in British fascism, largely concerning themselves with Mosely's organisation.[13] According to Mosley, the BUF

[8] Andy Croft, *Tarzan and the Blackshirt* (Nottingham, 2016).
[9] Nancy Mitford, *Wigs on the Green* (unknown, 1935).
[10] P.G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Wooster* (unknown, 1938). During the Second World War, Wodehouse was trapped in France by the German advance. Subsequently, he became a broadcaster for Nazi radio in Berlin, which angered many in his home country. Following the war, he resided in the United States. For more on Wodehouse's wartime activities, see Colin Holmes, *Searching for Lord Haw-Haw: The Political Lives of William Joyce* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 389-391.
[11] Judy Suh, *Fascism and Antifascism in Twentieth-Century British Fiction* (London, 2009). In this book, Suh explored politics in the novels of Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Olive Hawks, Phyllis Bottome, Muriel Spark, George Orwell, Jan Struther, Nancy Mitford, Elizabeth Bowen, Betty Miller, P.G. Wodehouse, and others.
[12] K.M. Thompson, *The Blackshirts: A Portrait Gallery* (London, 2006); Robert Edwards, *Sir Oswald Mosley: A Pictorial History of the Blackshirt Movement* (London, 2002); Jeremy Booker, *Blackshirts-on-Sea: A Pictorial History of the Mosley Summer Camps 1933–1938* (London, 2000).
[13] Durham has written extensively on the subject. This includes a chapter titled 'Blackshirt Women' in his book *Women and Fascism* Second Edition (New York,

had ‘been largely built up by the fanaticism of women […] Without women I could not have got a quarter of the way’.[14] He declared that his party had a higher percentage of women candidates than any other.[15] Although the percentage of women that made up the membership is unknown, approximations by scholars are between a fifth and a third.[16] Of fascist imperial policy in interwar Britain, the BUF has commanded the most attention. Liam Liburd has claimed that the BUF was an outlet for ‘unreconstructed imperialism’. He argued that the essential ingredient to Mosley’s vision of a fascist rebirth was the imperial ‘new fascist man’ carved out of the legacy of earlier imperialists.[17] In his article ‘The Pivot of Empire’, Evan Smith examines the BUF’s attempt to build a ‘New Empire Union’. This, he argued, demonstrates that pro-imperialism was central to the ideology of the BUF.[18] The mass of academic work on the fascists has prompted research on their arch-nemeses antifascism, significant political events revolving around the *Blackshirts* and more obscure subjects such as farming and ecology.[19]

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2006); ‘Women and the British Union of Fascists’ in Tony Kushner & Kenneth Lunn (eds.), *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1990); ‘Gender and the British Union of Fascists’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 27:3 (1992); ‘Women and the BUF, 1932–1940’, *Migrants and Minorities* 8:1&2 (1989). Although titled *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement* (London, 2003), Gottlieb focus is largely on the BUF. Also, see Gottlieb, ‘‘‘Motherly Hate’’: Gendering Anti–Semitism in the British Union of Fascists’, *Gender and History* 14:2 (2002). For an oral history account, see Stephen Cullen, ‘Four women for Mosley: Women in the British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940’, *Oral History* 24:1 (1996).

[14] Quote from the interrogation that followed his arrest in 1940: TNA HO 283/14, Notes of Hearing: Second Day, 3 July 1934 (101).

[15] Ibid.

[16] *Fascism in Britain*, p. 96; *The British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940*, p. 47; *Women and Fascism*, p. 36.

[17] Liam Liburd, ‘Beyond the Pale: Whiteness, Masculinity and Empire in the British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940’, *Fascism* 7:2, pp. 275–276.

[18] Ewan Smith, ‘The Pivot of Empire: Australia and the Imperial Fascism of the British Union of Fascists’, *History Australia* 14:3 (2017).

[19] *In Excited Times*; Tony Kushner & Nadia Valman, *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-fascism in British Society* (Elstree, 1999); Nigel Copsey & Andrzej Olechnowicz (eds.), *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (Basingstoke, 2010); chapter titled ‘Opposing the British Union of Fascists’ in Keith Hodgson, *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919–39* (Manchester, 2014); chapter titled ‘Opposition to Fascism 1936–45’ in Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Abingdon, 2000); Philip Coupland, *Farming, Fascism and Ecology: A Life of Jorian Jenks* (Abingdon, 2016). Jenks joined the British Union of Fascists, becoming one of the Blackshirts’ leading figures. As with Mosley, he was imprisoned without trial during the war.

Included in the immense amount of literature on the BUF is the party's flamboyant and charismatic leader, Sir Oswald Mosley, who 'probably had the greatest intellectual gifts […] of all the fascist chiefs'.[20] The leader himself appears to have instigated academic research into his colourful life by releasing his autobiography, *My Life*, in 1968. Shortly after, in his controversial biography *Oswald Mosley*, Robert Skidelsky published a sympathetic portrayal of Mosley and his political escapades. Today, biographies are still being published by authors attempting to investigate issues such as the 'true nature of Mosley's relationship with the Nazis and to challenge the prevailing view of Mosley's descent into anti-Semitism', and to demonstrate the ways in which 'Britain's home-grown fascist icon remained a committed, unrepentant fascist and anti-Semite until his final days'.[21] In 1998, Channel 4 aired a controversial biopic on the fascist leader titled 'Mosley'. The release of *My Life* also prompted an array of autobiographies by those close to Mosley.[22] His wife Diana and his son Nicholas have told their life stories, as have prominent disciples of Mosley such as Richard Bellamy, Jeffrey Hamm, John Charnley, Robert Saunders and Nellie Driver.[23] Active antifascists of the time have also written of their resistance to the *Blackshirts*. [24] All of these works have a significant focus on Sir Oswald.

Despite the BUF 'arguably receiv[ing] more retrospective notice and [being] the subject of more painstaking historical analysis than its impact on the 1930s alone might merit',

[20] Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London, 2005), p. 75.
[21] These include Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* **(**Basingstoke, 2010); David Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931–81* (Manchester, 1987); Nigel Jones, *Mosley* (London, 2005); *Black Shirt* – first quote from cover; Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (London, 2007) – second quote from cover.
[22] For a critical view of the film and subsequent debate with the executive producer, see 'Mitch Mitchell on Oswald Mosley', *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tng3le4ZKwk], accessed 2 July 2019.
[23] Diana Mosley, *A Life of Contrasts* (London, 1977), and *Loved Ones: Pen Portraits* (London, 1985); Nicholas Mosley, *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family: Rules of the Game and Beyond the Pale* (London 1994); John Charnley, *Blackshirts and Roses* (London, 2012); Jeffrey Hamm, *Mosley's Blackshirts: The Inside Story of the British Union of Fascists, 1932–1940* (London, 2013); Richard Bellamy, *We Marched with Mosley – The Authorised History of the British Union of Fascists* (London, 2013); Robert Saunders, *A Tiller of Several Soils* (unpublished, 1946); Nellie Driver, *From the Shadows of Exile* (unpublished, undated).
[24] Morris Beckman, *The 43 Group: Battling with Mosley's Blackshirts* New Edition (Stroud, 2013).

several factors may explain the fascination with Mosley and his party.[25] The periodic releasing of previously confidential files relating to British fascism, with large sections devoted, directly or indirectly, to the BUF and Mosley have brought more light to the field and continue to stimulate debate. During the 1980s and especially the 1990s, a wealth of documentary evidence was released by the Home Office on the activities of Mosley and his cohorts' in the interwar period. More recently, the British Security Service has released files on the BUF's funding arrangements, available at the Public Record Office in Kew, and a number of universities and libraries have established special collections that house primary material relating to fascism.[26] Furthermore, BUF newspapers and other relevant materials have been digitised by a number of online research companies. UK Press Online, for example, hosts the 'Mosley Press Personal' package, which features complete collections of *Action, Blackshirt,* and *Fascist Week.* While, the British Online Archives house the 'The British Union of Fascists: newspapers and secret files, 1933–1951' collection, which includes *Action, Blackshirt, Fascist Week* and *The East End London Pioneer,* as well as government files relating to Oswald and Diana Mosley.[27] This, therefore, makes original research easier for historians (and future scholars) to undertake.

Although Mosley and his men have dominated scholarship in this area, several other lesser-known individuals and groups have occupied a small but important fraction of the plethora of literature on interwar British fascism. A recent biography of William Joyce, better known as 'Lord Haw Haw', by Colin Holmes, challenges existing works that focus on the Nazi propagandist, which have reflected not only Joyce's frequent calculated deceptions, but also the suspect claims advanced by his family, friends and apologists.[28] Holmes' work, alongside David Baker's biography of A.K Chesterton,

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[25] Gottlieb & Linehan, 'Introduction: Culture and the British Far Right' in *The Culture of Fascism,* p. 1.
[26] These include the universities of Sheffield, Southampton, Birmingham and Bradford; libraries such as the Weiner Library, the British Library, and the LSE Library; and archives, such as the London Metropolitan Archives.
[27] www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/open/services.jsp; www.microform.digital/boa/collections/9/the-british-union-of-fascists-newspapers-and-secret-files-1933-1951.
[28] *Searching for Lord Haw-Haw*; Mary Kenny, *Germany Calling: A Personal Biography of William Joyce Lord Haw-Haw* (Stillorgan, 2003); Nigel Farndale, *Haw-Haw: The Tragedy of William and Margaret Joyce* (London, 2005); Peter Martland, *Lord Haw Haw: The English Voice of Nazi Germany* (Crawley, 2003); Francis Selwyn, *Hitler's Englishman: Crime of Lord Haw-Haw* (Abingdon, 1987).

uncovers a variety of responses to the rise of Nazism from within the BUF. More recently, Henry Hamilton Beamish, John Beckett and Henry Williamson have also been the focus of books, while a limited amount of scholarly attention has been directed to the Britons, the British Fascisti and the Imperial Fascist League.[29]

Another admirer of the Italian dictator was the British aristocrat and prominent politician of the time, Mosley himself. This chapter will examine the transnational aspects of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). Its leader, Oswald Mosley, was the most intelligent, charming and well connected of all his counterparts, while the BUF was by far the most prominent, successful and best supported far-right group in interwar Britain – considerably more so than the British Fascisti and the Imperial Fascist League. For these reasons, the BUF commands continued scholarly attention.

The chapter is divided into a number of sections. It begins by analysing Mosley's pre-BUF years. Unlike Arnold Leese, Mosley may not have been, what some academics term, a 'transnational personality'. However, he did have a history of cross-border activities. The transnational influences that Mosley adopted, based largely on economics, laid the groundwork for his eventual conversion to fascism. In addition, accusations from his contemporaries about his continental dictatorial leanings were commonplace before his fascist inception. Then, the BUF's vision of a corporate state is examined. The BUF's economic and political model was significantly influenced by the Italian system, but it also had its own idiosyncratic elements. In fact, in many ways, it was more advanced than the Italian Corporate State. Attention then turns to how Mosley

[29] David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A.K.Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, 1996); Guy Yates, *Henry Williamson: The Artist As Fascist* (independently published, 2017); Nick Toczek, *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators: Anti-Semitism and the UK Far Right* (Abingdon, 2015); Francis Beckett, *Fascist in the Family: The Tragedy of John Beckett M.P.* (Abingdon, 2016); Graham Macklin, 'The Two Lives of John Hooper Harvey', *Patterns of Prejudice* 42:2 (2008); John Morell, 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League: The Impact of Racial Fascism', in Kenneth Lunn & Richard Thurlow (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (London 1980); chapter titled 'The Arrival of Fascism: The British Fascisti and the Imperial Fascist League' in *British Fascism, 1918–1939*; chapter titled 'Fascist Movements, Anti-Semitism and Germany' in Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (London, 2010); chapters titled 'Boy Scout Fascism' and 'Boiled Shirt Fascism' in *Hurrah For The Blackshirts!*; chapter titled 'The British Fascists and the ''Jew Wise'', 1918–1939' in *Fascism in Britain*; Paul Stocker, 'Importing Fascism: Reappraising the British Fascisti, 1923–1926', *Contemporary British History* 30:3 (2016); James Loughlin, 'Rotha Lintorn-Orman, Ulster and the British Fascist Movement', *Immigrants & Minorities* 32:1 (2014).

courted Mussolini from the outset in an attempt to not only create solidarity and brotherhood between the Italian Fascists and the BUF but also to extract financial support. Eventually, Mussolini agreed to fund the BUF in exchange for unequivocal support. Perhaps the most telling example of this agreement is the transnational dimension behind the BUF's 'Mind Britain's Business' campaign, which aimed at keeping Britain out of conflicts with Fascist powers. This, along with a number of other examples, demonstrates that the BUF did not just stop its activity at British shores. Following this, sections on BUF branches abroad and BUF imperial policy are investigated. Finally, the section titled 'courting the Nazis' examines the impact Hitler and his Nazi movement had on the BUF. By examining the party's literature and speeches, declassified Home Office reports, mainstream media outlets and eyewitness accounts, it is clear that the BUF was significantly funded, inspired and aided by overseas fascist movements. Accordingly, this chapter will argue that the BUF was part of a transnational movement.

**Pre-BUF**

Scholars such as Thurlow have insisted that the BUF (and all British fascist groups) grew out of its own national traditions. Undoubtedly, the national scene contributed to the formation of the British movement. However, important overseas connections and influences are often overlooked.[30] Radical economic policies had been part of Mosley's remedy for combatting unemployment in Britain since before his first election contest. In his 1918 election manifesto, he insisted that 'High wages must be maintained. This can only be achieved by high production based on increased efficiency and organisation. A high standard of life must be ensured by a minimum wage and reduced hours, which are proved to increase rather than curtail production' and therefore create jobs.[31] Unsurprisingly, as his time in politics grew and he matured, Mosley's thinking developed. As he explained in his autobiography, 'my economic thinking was first

[30] For example, despite Mosley dedicating a whole chapter of his autobiography to his American industrial fact-seeking tour, Thurlow does not mention it; Pugh contributed one sentence to it; his son, Nicholas, devoted approximately half a page of his near 600-page biography on Mosley to the tour, claiming simply that it gave support to his father's proposals.

[31] Keith Laybourn (ed.), *Modern Britain Since 1906: A Reader* (London, 1999), p. 181; Oswald Mosley, 'A Soldier M.P' (1918), in Michael Quill (ed.), *Revolution by Reason and Other Essays by Oswald Mosley* (New York, 1997).

developed by a study of Keynes more in conversation with him than in reading his early writings, for he did not write General Theory until the thirties'.[32]

Examination of contemporary newspapers, writings of those close to Mosley and Mosley himself suggest that Mosley was a transnational actor before his turn towards fascism. As he also noted, besides Keynes, his trip to the US over the winter of 1925–1926 significantly influenced his economic thinking. According to Mosley, the primary purpose of the trip was to study industry and to meet those who created it. He visited almost every industrial centre of America and, by his own admission, learned a lot from these experiences. These experiences ranged from going down coal mines in Pittsburgh to analysing the pig culling trade in Chicago and in Sears Roebuck's mail order business. One of the most interesting experiences of his life was, he claimed, his visit to the Ford factory in Detroit. Here he saw his vision for a demand side, high wage economy in action: 'Mass production for a large and assured home market is the industrial key'. This only reinforced his desire for a similar strategy in Britain.[33]

Another 'new fact' struck him while at Ford, resulting in his rejection of classic economic teachings. He saw the exploitation of 'backward' immigrant labour. These 'primitive […and] illiterate' types were performing the simplest of factory tasks (turning screws and fixing bolts) which 'normal labour' found too monotonous. Consequently, they were leaving the factory in droves. He related this situation to the cotton industry of Lancashire and the woollen trade of Yorkshire of which India, Hong Kong, Japan and China 'knocked out our traditional trades with rationalised machinery, supplied by our English counties for their own destruction in open competition on the world and even on the British market'. Later, in a Pittsburgh factory, he experienced the opposite. A small number of highly skilled workers were operating modern machinery. This, in turn, resulted in unemployment for the many less or unskilled workers. He believed the future of the world market lay in these US factories. Therefore, 'One thing

[32] Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London, 2006 /original 1968), p. 150. The Keynesian principle was for a planned economy. For Keynes's seminar work, see John Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (London, 1936) [Penguin Books have released a recent reprint]. For excellent scholarship on Keynes, see Robert Skidelsky's three-volume biography (1983, 1992 & 2000).
[33] *My Life*, see section 'Roosevelt and American Industry', pp. 163–176.

was clear: those grave problems could not be left to settle themselves,' the state needed to intervene.[34]

Another positive Mosley discovered during the tour was how the private enterprise corporation worked successfully as a non-profit entity. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York, for example, had no profit motive. Mosley explained that the management was salaried only so the twelve-million policyholders benefited handsomely. Many of the poorest immigrants were well looked after from the moment they entered American shores through to their 'well-provided' funerals.[35] Although Mosley did not explicitly say it, his apparent enthusiasm for the scheme, which he later berated Britain for not considering, leads one to think he would have favoured the introduction of a similar scheme in Britain to assist those in squalor.

However, what appears to have impressed him the most during the trip were the 'brilliant' economists who sat on the Federal Reserve Board. The Federal Reserve (formed in 1913) is (still) the foundation and guarantor of the US central banking system. It was created as a central body to control the nation's monetary system, with the aim of avoiding economic crises. Mosley described the Board's officials as 'the best brains in America…[and] they surpassed anyone he saw in American politics.' According to Mosley, they were fully informed on Keynesian thinking and were intending to apply similar techniques to the American economy (although were later refrained from doing so by politicians). When assessing the background of his economic thinking and subsequent action, Mosley rates Keynes and those on the Federal Reserve Board as 'fifty-fifty' influences.[36] Following his return to Britain, Mosley wrote an article titled 'Is America a Capitalist Triumph?' Here, he suggested, the 'America technique' could hold the key to increased growth which, in turn, should eliminate poverty and unemployment. He championed the 'amazing feats of mass production' and claimed high wages was the 'thinking medicine with which we must dose British industry'.[37] The American journey had 'completed the period of experience in my early

[34] Ibid., pp. 169–170.
[35] Ibid., p. 175.
[36] Ibid., pp. 174–175.
[37] Oswald Mosley, 'Is America a Capitalist Triumph?', *New Leader*, 2 April 1926.

life'.[38] Throughout the remainder of the twenties, Mosley worked on and promoted his radical economic policies.

His turn to fascism began to appear after his resignation from the Labour Government in May 1930 following its refusal to adopt his ambitious state-sponsored reforms to address the challenge of rising unemployment.[39] Following his resignation, Mosley proposed even further state intervention and, crucially, an overhaul of the parliamentary system, which isolated him further from party and government. In July, he attacked the 'Parliamentary machine', which 'was designed in the old, easy-going days, when politics were not filled with stark reality, and when they were to a large extent a game between "ins and outs"'. 'Today', he argued, 'the Government [has] the great dynamic age bearing down upon them, they must have a machine with which they could do the job'.[40] At a luncheon given by the Association of British Manufactures for the Printing and Allied Trades in Holborn in late October, Mosley announced his desire to transform the 'nineteenth-century debating chamber' into a 'twentieth-century business assembly'.[41] He suggested that the Government should work as a board of directors and Parliament should be the shareholders.[42] The following month, he published a new memorandum in which he wrote

> a movement which aims not merely at the capture of political power, [but] grips and transforms every phase and aspect of national life to post-war purposes; a movement of order, of discipline, of loyalty, but also of dynamic progress; a movement of iron decision, resolution and reality; a movement which cuts like a sword through the knot of the past to the winning of the modern state.[43]

[38] *My Life*, p. 176.
[39] In the run-up to the election, Labour promised to tackle long-term unemployment in the staple industries. Joblessness was the defining issue of the day, and Ramsey MacDonald's party had been elected on the promise to conquer unemployment. For more on his resignation, see the article titled 'Unemployment', *The Times*, 21 May 1930, p. 16.
[40] 'Sir O. Mosley on Parliament', *The Times*, 21 July 1930, p. 14.
[41] Cited in Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London, 1972), p. 65.
[42] 'Sir O. Mosley on "A New Situation"', *The Times*, 30 October 1930, p. 9.
[43] Oswald Mosley, 'Untitled Memorandum', 19 November 1930: cited in *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 6.

He followed the memorandum with a call for 'decisive policy and action – An immediate policy is required, more drastic and determined than any policy yet by Government […] we want action now'.[44]

Consequently, newspapers began drawing parallels with Mosley and Hitler and Mussolini. The *Daily Worker*, once a supporter of Mosley's form of socialism, attacked him for dropping socialism for fascism. They branded him an enemy of the working class and claimed 'Mosley-Mussolini [would give] Parliament the sack, abolish unemployment benefit and put a 20 per cent, import duty on wheat, [and] no one may strike against it!' The paper suggested that such strikers would either be shot or imprisoned.[45] The *Daily Worker* described Mosley as 'Something of a Hitler' because of his 'demagogic and anti-Socialist' rhetoric.[46] Similarly, *The Manchester Guardian* considered Mosley a potential Hitler of the Labour Party: 'The parallel is not so absurd as it sounds, for […] resemblance might be found between the crude aspirations of the "Nazis" and the new Socialist Imperialism to its own Imperative needs, to which Sir Oswald Mosley is drifting'.[47] The *Daily Express* stressed that Mosley 'visualises a political dictatorship'.[48] Similarly, the *Spectator* commented

> A few years ago […] he was pledged to the "nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange." To-day the Utopia, desirable or otherwise, of State ownership, has faded over the horizon: he is thinking, like a practical politician, of our present emergencies and of "desperate remedies." State control and supervision, on the War-time scale, he is prepared for in Peace time; and a Peace Cabinet with the powers and the vigour of a War Cabinet. There are elements of Fascism in his thoughts to-day.[49]

Those close to Mosley also observed his authoritarian rhetoric. George Catlin, once his researcher, later claimed that Mosley responded to his own ineffective Labour conference speech of October 1930 by declaring to those sharing the same hotel as him

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[44] '"We Want Action"', *Daily Worker,* 11 December 1930, p. 3.
[45] 'Act is Based on Tory', *Daily Worker,* 23 December 1930, p. 1.
[46] 'A British Hitler', *Daily Worker*, 9 October 1930, p. 1; 'Something of a Hitler', 21 October 1930, p. 3.
[47] 'British Hitler', *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1930, p. 5.
[48] 'The Prime Minister as "An Outsider', *Daily Express,* 6 December 1930, p. 9.
[49] 'Sir Oswald Mosley by "Amrcus"', *Spectator,* 28 February 1931, p. 15. Other newspapers that drew parallels with Mosley and Hitler and Mussolini included: *Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 1930; *New Statesman*, 13 December 1930, pp. 292–3; 'Moslini', *Punch*, 17 December 1930; W. Rust, 'The Mosley Manifesto', *Labour Monthly,* January 1931; *Time and Tide,* 21 February 1931.

that ‘this means dictatorship!’[50] The previous month, the former Tory MP, Cuthbert Headlam, wrote in his diary that Mosley ‘professes a policy which he thinks would enable him to become an English Mussolini’.[51] Refuting the allegations by claiming that this was ‘exactly the opposite of what I have in mind’, Mosley explained how he had ‘merely suggested introducing into parliament the methods of twentieth-century business instead of the methods of a nineteenth-century debating society’.[52] The aforementioned examples suggest that Mosley was conceived as either a fascist or at the very least on the road to becoming one before his ‘official’ venture into fascism sometime later.

Besides fascism, it appears that Mosley was also taking an interest in Communism. In early 1930, he observed the ‘rationalisation’ being undertaken with ‘“peculiar intensity by Communist Russia”.’[53] Later that year, in a bid to impress her husband, Cynthia Mosley secured an audience with the exiled Soviet politician, Leon Trotsky, who she sought inspiration from. In her letter to the man who facilitated the transfer of all political power to the Soviets, she told of her admiration for Trotsky and described his book as one of the most inspirational she had read. This ‘great’ man, she declared, was ‘one of the enduring figures of our age’.[54] In a letter to her husband, she marvelled at the ‘queer intangible new spirit’ of Russia where everyone was equal and no class structure existed.[55] She also dismissed reports of poor health and living conditions as ‘bunk from beginning to end’.[56] Around this time, his close friend and governmental private secretary, John Strachey, who Mosley described as ‘One of my close political associates […] [and] one of the best analytical and critical intelligences I have ever known’, was also touring Russia.[57] Sympathetic to Communism, Strachey thought

[50] George Catlin, *For God’s Sake Go* (London, 1972), p. 85.
[51] Stuart Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries, 1923–35* (Cambridge, 1992), 25–28 September 1930.
[52] Cited in *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 153.
[53] ‘Socialist Rationalisation’, *Daily Worker*, 27 February 1931, p. 6.
[54] Letter from Cynthia Mosley to Trotsky, in Nicholas Mosley, *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family; Rules of the Game and Beyond the Pale* (London 1994), p. 161.
[55] Letter from Cynthia Mosley to Oswald Mosley, in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 164.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London, 2006 /original 1968), pp. 34 &155. Strachey was a frequent visitor to Russia. He had also visited in 1928. Mosley was the best man at his wedding.

Britain should seek a closer relationship with the Soviet Union.[58] Undoubtedly, Mosley was interested to hear his wife and best friend's experiences. What appears clear is that Mosley, frustrated by his failure to have his radical economic proposals accepted by government and his party, was taking an active interest in European political systems that wholeheartedly rejected democracy.

Frustrated by his party's refusal to adopt his radical plan, Mosley quit Labour, turned his back on the 'old gang' of mainstream politicians, and, with a number of other dissidents, formed the New Party on 1 March 1931.[59] The New Party's programme, the Mosley Manifesto, was built on the leader's ideas. Mosley believed that he had sufficient support in parliament and across the country to overthrow the status quo and implement the ideas that had previously been rejected by his peers. He was adamant about turning the House of Commons from a 'talk-shop to a work shop'. Mosley became more outspoken in his attempts to undermine and challenge parliamentary democracy. For Mosley, Britain's move from a great industrial centre to the present parliament was 'like going from one world to another', complaining of the latter's refusal to modernise in the world. Since the First World War, Mosley declared, the great measures needed to satisfy the people had been 'beaten' by the 'talking shop' at Westminster. At the formation of his New Party, he stressed that the country was on 'the road to disaster'. In contrast, he guaranteed that his policy challenged the position of all parties and the traditions of the British political system.[60]

Throughout the year, the New Party moved closer to a fascist model. The *Daily Worker* was adamant that Mosley's new movement was fascist from the outset: 'The policy of the "New Party" is such a mixture of Fascism and demagogy that Sir Oswald has not been able to find a name to describe it: its present title is obviously only a stop-gap.'[61] The party's policy, according to the paper, was for 'Parliament to go into the background in favour of economic councils and investment boards – like Mussolini's "Syndical" organisation' of which the 'inner Cabinet' of five or six ministers will be a

[58] John Strachey, 'Lest we forget, peace with Russia', *New Leader,* 3 November 1929.
[59] Mosley explains at length his annoyance at the Labour Party for refusing to implement his plan in *My Life*, chapter 'Resignation'.
[60] Oswald Mosley, *A National Policy: an Account of The Emergency Programme Advanced by Sir Oswald Mosley M.P* (London, 1931), p. 7.
[61] 'Mosley Forms New Party', *Daily Worker,* 2 March 1931, p. 1.

'dictatorship'. The *Daily Worker* considered the movement 'Pure Fascism'.[62] Even New Party founding members, who denounced fascism, began to notice Mosley's drive towards a more continental movement. In June, Strachey and Allan Young, who both desired wholesale economic and political cooperation with the Soviet Union, were aghast to hear Mosley announce his vision for a Corporate State.[63] They were 'squirming impatiently' while listening to Mosley speak 'soulfully of the Corporate State of the future'.[64] As Matthew Worley has claimed, 'Mosley's embrace of the corporate state had already brought him ever closer to Mussolini's Italian model.'[65] The following month, a number of members – including Young and Strachey – resigned from the party, citing the 'growing fascist tendencies in the party' of which they had been unable to prevent.[66] When analysing the New Party, the *Daily Worker* observed how 'The Fascist outlook and character […] is becoming more and more manifest.'[67]

Many of Mosley's followers in the New Party also indulged in foreign affairs. As already noted, Strachey and Young took a keen interested in Communism. However, key figures such as the Sitwell brothers – Osbert and Sacheverell – were Italophiles and Cecil Melville favoured Nazi politics.[68] For his part, the diarist and confidante of Mosley, Harold Nicolson attended Anglo-German meetings and pursued diplomats and journalists from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the Italian *Lavoro Fascista* to educate himself on continental political practices.[69] Delegates travelled to Germany with instructions from Mosley to bring back information on the Nazis and study their methods and their organisation.[70] Importantly, another Mosley confidante, Robert Lockhart, claimed that Mosley was 'very interested in Hitlerism and has made a close

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[62] Ibid.
[63] 'Workless Give New Party a Rough Passage', *Daily Worker*, 3 August 1931, p. 1; Strachey & Alan Young Blow the Gaff', *Daily Worker*, 31 August 1931, p. 3.
[64] Jack Jones, *Unfinished Journey* (London, 1937), pp. 263–264.
[65] *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, pp. 62–63.
[66] 'Parliament's Task', *The Times*, 27 July 1931, p. 10.
[67] 'Port Glasgow Workless Give Mosley the Boot', *Daily Worker*, 28 August 1931, p. 4.
[68] C. F. Melville, 'A Balkan Monarch Takes a Chance', *Action*, 12 November 1931, p. 11.
[69] *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 157.
[70] 'Mosleyits Find out How Hitler does it', *Daily Herald*, 6 June 1931, p. 1; 'Sir O. Mosley's Two Principle Advisers', *Daily Herald*, 8 June 1931, p. 3.

study of it'.[71] Analysis of the party's short-lived newspaper *Action* (i.e. pre-BUF) confirms Lockhart's remark.[72]

However, the General Election of October 1931 marked the moment when Mosley took a completely different direction. Any hope of electoral success for the New Party was shattered; out of the mere 24 candidates that stood, all were unsuccessful, with only two winning enough votes to have their deposits returned.[73] The election loss was a crossroad in Mosley's life. His high hopes of building a movement that would lead him to power were dashed within a year. Despite promising to 'retire from public life for ten years' if the New Party failed, Mosley decided that to leave politics would be to abandon his country at a time of 'crisis'.[74]

Although not to the same extent as in many other countries, the Great Depression of 1929 hit Britain hard.[75] Between 1929 and 1933, its world trade fell by half, heavy industrial output declined by a third, while employment profits plummeted in nearly every sector. By mid-1932, unemployment had reached an all-time high of 3.5 million (70 per cent in some regions), with many of those in employment only offered part-time work. This represented more than one-fifth of the working population.[76] Between 1930 and 1932, the notion of 'capitalism in crisis was at peak and talk of revolution and dictatorship gained credence'.[77] Due to the 'old men' of British politics, 'whose idleness, ignorance and cowardice' prevented them from deviating from the orthodoxy of classic liberal economics that emphasised maintaining a balanced budget at all cost,

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[71] Diary entry of 27 August 1931 in Kenneth Young (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Bruce Lockhart* (London, 1973), p. 182.
[72] As identified by *Action*, the BUF followed the developments in Germany, particularly the Nazis, with great interest: 15 October, p. 11; 22 October, p. 25; 12 November p. 3; 19 November, p. 3; 10 December, p. 3; 24 December, p. 24.
[73] For more on this 'debacle', see *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, pp. 120–126.
[74] Harold Nicolson & Nigel Nicolson, *The Harold Nicolson Diaries and Letters 1907–1963* (London, 2004), p. 88.
[75] For example, the Weimar Republic of Germany and Hungry suffered hyperinflation. Poland, Germany and Austria's industrial output fell by almost half. See Patricia Clavin, 'The Great Depression in Europe, 1929–39', *History Review* 37 (September 2000), [www.historytoday.com/patricia-clavin/great-depression-europe-1929-39], accessed 2 July 2019.
[76] For (more) statistics and an overview of the Depression in Britain, see H.W. Richardson, 'The Economic Depression in Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 4:4 (1969), pp. 3–19, and Keith Laybourn, *Modern Britain Since 1906: a Reader* (London, 1999), p. 105.
[77] *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 3.

Mosley argued that Britain would be in ruins if he did not act to save his country.[78] Put simply, Mosley could not turn his back on politics and therefore looked elsewhere to challenge the political orthodoxy that, he believed, blighted his country.

Following the election defeat, Mosley announced his intention, with other New Party members, to visit Italy, Germany and 'probably at a later date Russia'. The members were to 'study the modern movement in all countries'. Mosley explained the modern movement as 'new political forces born of crisis, conducted by youth and inspired by completely new ideas of economic and political organisation'. This was in contrast to the British system, which was still stuck in the previous century.[79] In January 1932, with his gang, Mosley travelled to Italy and was captivated by what he experienced there. He toured the country admiring Fascist achievements. For example, he commented upon the transformation of the Pontine Marshes from a malaria-plagued swamp into a functioning and modern settlement, where 'for the first time since the days of Rome the Pontine waters rush to the sea'. At the time of his visit, this 'great reclamation scheme' employed over 110,000 workers, which undoubtedly impressed Mosley.[80] He also lauded the number of Fascist holiday camp places available to children, child welfare systems and youth training, the state of the roads, the land reclaimed and the 'new psychology of 'solidarita!' instilled in society.[81] He met with prominent Fascist officials, including Mussolini, who he described, in letters to Cynthia, as 'charming and asked a lot of very good questions'.[82] He met, too, with Achille Starace, the Fascist Party secretary and choreographer of many a Fascist spectacle, witnessing first-hand a typically regimented Fascist parade.[83] Nicolson, who accompanied Mosley to Italy, wrote in his diary about how the trip was influencing his companion: 'Tom [Mosley's nickname] cannot keep his mind off shock troops, the arrest of MacDonald [the then

[78] Quotes from Mosley in the New Party's last issue of *Action*: 31 December 1931, p. 2. For more on the political decision making of the early thirties, see Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump; the Labour Government of the 1929–1933* (London, 1967).
[79] Harold Nicolson, 'Action Looks at Life', *Action*, 17 December 1931, pp. 4–5; Oswald Mosley, 'An Explanation by Sir Oswald Mosley', *Action*, 31 December 1931, p. 2.
[80] Ibid; Frank Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria: Italy, 1900–1962* (Yale University, 2006), p. 156. When the work was completed in 1939, the city was named Pomezia and was coined 'the last great city'.
[81] Letter to Cynthia from Rome, 6 January in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 208.
[82] Letter to Cynthia Mosley from Rome, 8 January 1932, in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, pp. 209–210.
[83] Letter from Nicolson to Forgan, 15 April 1932 in Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930–39* Volume 1 (1966).

British prime minister] and J.H. Thomas [an ex-colleague in dealing with the unemployment problem while in government], their internment in the Isle of Wight and the roll of drums around Westminster'.[84]

People close to Mosley pleaded with him not to go down the fascist route. Cynthia, horrified by the thought that her husband could be sympathetic towards fascism, threatened to contact *The Times* and ask them to print a message disassociating herself from his 'fascist tendencies'.[85] Nicolson pleaded with Mosley 'not to get muddled up with the fascist crowd' as 'in England anything along those lines is doomed to failure and ridicule'.[86] The Conservative MP and close friend of Mosley's, Robert Boothby, also tried to persuade him to reject fascism, doing all he could to prevent the 'incredible folly'.[87] Fearing where Mosley was heading, friends on either side of the House even encouraged him to rejoin their respective parties. All efforts were to no avail, as he refused to re-enter the 'machine of […] the older parties' arguing that a return to mainstream politics would be to 'place himself in a strait-waistcoat'.[88] While still in Italy, a jubilant Mosley commented 'we are really learning a tremendous amount, and will be equipped more on return'.[89]

This raises an interesting theoretical point on the potential costs and rewards of fascist transnational activism. The costs may result in mockery, condemnation or potential alienation from relatives, friends, colleagues and even the majority of the nation. It may hinder advancement in both private and professional life or, at worst, inflict ruin upon the individual. However, potential rewards may be great. To ally with big and powerful regimes and movements (or individuals) abroad may lead to new contacts, successful mentors and, arguably the most important gain, large financial subsidies. As Nicolson explained, Mosley was 'prepared to run the risk of further failure, ridicule and assault

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[84] Diary entry of 6 January 1932 in *Diaries and Letters*, p. 106.
[85] Diary entry of 11 December 1931 in *Diaries and Letters*, p. 98.
[86] Diary entry of 24 November 1931, *Diaries and Letters*, p. 97.
[87] *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 206; Robert James, *Bob Boothby; A Portrait* (London, 1991), p. 108.
[88] Mosley was approached by the Tory government's chief whip, David Margesson, to rejoin the party. He was asked by Labour MP, J.M. Kenworthy, to return to Labour and lead the party, see diary entries of 15 March 1932 & 19 April 1932 in *Diaries and Letters*, pp. 112 & 115.
[89] Letter to Cynthia Mosley from Rome, 6 January, *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 209.

[to become] leader of the fascists'.[90] Mosley knew the risks and rewards of transnational engagement and he believed the rewards outweighed the risks.

Mosley returned to Britain with a head full of 'Mussolinian ideas'.[91] He took to the newspapers to heap praise on the Duce and his nation. He 'waxed lyrical' on the achievements of Fascism in the *Daily Mail*: 'every moment possible is wrung from time; the mind is hard, concentrated, direct – in a word, Modern'.[92] For Mosley, Italy and its leader embodied a bright new future, and he called for a similar 'modern' movement in Britain.[93] An alarmed Nicolson foresaw the influence that Mussolini's Italy was having on him: 'If Tom would […] retire into private life for a bit and then emerge fortified and purged – he will still be Prime Minister of England. But if he gets entangled with the boys' brigade he will be edged gradually into becoming a revolutionary.'[94] Within a few months of being back on home soil, much to the despair of Nicolson and others, Mosley took the 'revolutionary' route and formed his own fascist party: the British Union of Fascists (BUF).

Why did Mosley choose to adopt Italian Fascism over Nazism, or even Bolshevism? Mosley may have been impressed by the planning principles of the Soviet state, but he considered Communists the enemy of Britain. He said he would use 'every means to crush' a Communist uprising in his country.[95] During 1931, Mosley attacked Bolshevism by claiming it would 'wade cheerfully to its objective of a Soviet State through the blood and starvation of a disgruntled society'.[96] He considered a Communist government meant '"slaughter and starvation for thousands".'[97] For Mosley, communism meant destruction. In contrast, the corporate ideal was

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[90] Diary entry of 19 April 1932 in *Diaries and Letters*, p. 115.
[91] Diary entries of 15 March, 5 and 19 April 1932, in *Diaries and Letters*, pp. 112 & 115.
[92] 'Fascism Means Team Work and Freedom to Live', *Daily Mail*, 1 February 1932, p. 10.
[93] Ibid. In this period, Nicolson regularly commented on Mosley's interest in Mussolini ideas: diary entries of the 15 March, 5 and 19 April 1932, in *Diaries and Letters*, pp. 112; 114 & 115.
[94] Cited in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 211.
[95] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 95.
[96] Mosley, 'A New National Policy', *Week-End Review*, 24 January 1931, pp. 103–104; Quote from a Sheffield speech as reported in the *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 19 October 1931.
[97] Mosley, 'A New National Policy', pp. 103–104; 'Sir Oswald's Lively Speech in Sheffield', *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 19 October 1931, p. 7.

'constructive' in its appeal to, and application of, national unity.[98] In addition, he developed a personal hatred towards Communists as he blamed them for attacking New Party meetings.[99]

Mosley was clearly impressed by the Nazis. He gained inspiration from the party's rise from obscurity before 1929 to boasting 108 MPs and 18 per cent of the vote share in 1930. In his autobiography, Mosley noted that the Nazis capitalised on their country's high unemployment. He would have seen their 'struggle' as parallel to his own and was motivated by their successes.[100] In September 1931, he lauded their electoral gains by declaring that 'the bleating bourgeois block is dropping out of politics'.[101] Mosley was certain that the same 'phenomenon' would occur in England.[102] *Action* reported weekly on events in Germany and followed Nazi activities with interest.[103] However, the Nazis did not come to power until 1933 (a year after the formation of the BUF). The New Party, therefore, did not have a system of government to emulate, unlike Mussolini's Fascism, which had, according to the party newspaper, reversed the internal decline in Italy, and made a significant contribution to modern social and economic theory.[104]

By the time of the New Party's General Election catastrophe, Mussolini had been in power for nearly ten years. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini provided a stable and working template for the Englishman to research and, if desired, imitate. In the first few years of Mussolini's rule, Mosley had been unimpressed with the Italian leader. He had not only spoken out against Italy's invasion of Corfu but demanded military retaliation. Possibly related to Mosley's hostile stance, his yacht was blown up in the waters of Venice by 'some festive young Blackshirts', narrowly avoiding casualties. He later remarked that 'the conduct of the Italian leader and his supporters appeared an outrage'.[105] However by 1932, as his son Nicholas stated, 'Mussolini was emerging not only as someone who was giving the word "fascism" a recognisable meaning but as the leader of a nationalist

[98] Mosley, 'Old Parties or New?', *Political Quarterly* 3 (1932), pp. 27–32.
[99] Diary entry of the 12 September 1931, *Diaries and Letters*, pp. 90–91; 'Strachey & Alan Young Blow the Gaff'.
[100] *My Life*, p. 232.
[101] Nicolson, 'Election Will Annoy You', *Action*, 8 October 1931, pp. 10–11.
[102] Ibid.
[103] C. F. Melville, 'The International Apple Cart May Be Upset', *Action*, 22 October 1931, p. 2; 'Watch Germany', *Action*, 12 November 1931, p. 3, 'Hitler v Brüning', *Action*, 26 November 1931, p. 2.
[104] 'Mussolini', *Action*, 29 October 1931, p. 11.
[105] *My Life*, pp. 118–119.

revival about some aspects of which it was difficult for even the most sceptical politicians not to be admiring.'[106] The dire economic circumstances elsewhere in Europe made Mussolini and his apparent successes even more appealing. Through his Italian tour, Mosley had met and was impressed by Mussolini, and was clearly captivated by the new direction that Italy had taken under Fascist rule.

**Concept of a Corporate State**

Mosley was particularly impressed with the Italian Corporatist model. Following the Italian trip, Mosley wrote glowingly in the *Daily Mail* of the improvements in efficiency and capability of the Italian fascist system. He argued that it was far more appropriate and beneficial than the 'right to blather' so valued by traditional British politics.[107] This new model was the embodiment of what twentieth-century government should be: 'No time is wasted in the polite banalities which have so irked the younger generation in Britain when dealing with our elder statesmen.'[108] His 'immediate objective' for Britain was not to secure the election of parliamentary representatives, but

> to convince the nation – and more particularly the young men of the nation – of the need to unite in a determined effort to establish the Corporate State in Britain, a State in which every interest and every class will be subordinated to the interest of the nation as a whole.[109]

Mussolini's Corporate State provided the blueprint for the BUF's vision of an English state. Mosley even admitted that 'the original corporate thinking belongs to Mussolini'.[110] His party copied its basic structure. As in Italy, the corporate national economy would be collectively managed by state officials, employers and workers, and would be operated by formal mechanisms at the national level.[111] This non-elected body was to be focused not on the singular interests of the individual – as is the alleged

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[106] *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 207.
[107] 'Fascism Means Team Work and Freedom to Live'.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Mosley, 'Future Organisation', 1 June 1932: cited in *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 208 fn. 59.
[110] *My Life*, p. 278.
[111] Oswald Mosley, *Greater Britain* (London, 1932) was the foundational document that launched the BUF. For its vision of a corporate state, see Chapter 2 'The Corporate State'.

purpose of a democratic voting process – but, in theory, incorporated all interests into the organic state.[112] In *Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), Mussolini wrote

> when brought within the orbit of the state, Fascism recognizes the real needs which gave rise to socialism and trade unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporative systems in which divergent interests are coordinated and harmonized in the unity of the State.[113]

In theory, this model has both the advantages of socialism (the state overseeing) and capitalism (profit and private enterprise).[114] If Mosley got his way, the British state would be a reflection of Mussolini's maxim: 'Everything in the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State.'[115] Mosley explained this concept as a nation organised as the human body:

> Every part fulfils its function as a member of the whole, performing its separate task, and yet, by performing it, contributing to the welfare of the whole. The whole body is generally directed by the central driving brain of government without which no body and system of society can operate.[116]

However, to suggest that the BUF's corporatism is merely 'an extravagant eulogy of the Fascist State' is clearly an overstatement.[117] The only permanent solution to tackle unemployment, Mussolini proposed, was to use the government to maximise industry's potential, not through wholesale industrial nationalisation, but by state planning to maximise production. He also encouraged private industry but only for the good of the nation; where problematic, the state would intervene.[118] Although these were both stalwart proposals embedded in Italian Corporatism and were later adopted by the BUF, it would be incorrect to assert that the British movement simply copied them from the Italians. Immediately following war service, which 'released in him the springs of creative energy, whose results were seen in his successive plans to realise his Land fit

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[112] Peter Davis & Derek Lynch, *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (New York, 2002), p. 143.
[113] Benito Mussolini, *Doctrine of Fascism* (Firenze, 1932).
[114] For a contemporary study on the Italian Corporatist State, see Lours Frank, 'Fascism and the Corporate State', *The Political Quarterly* 6:3 (1935), pp. 355–368.
[115] Roger Griffin & Matthew Feldman (eds.), *Fascism: Critical Concept in Political Science* Volume 1 (London, 2004), p. 121.
[116] *Greater Britain*, p. 17.
[117] Described by *The Manchester Guardian*'s 'Labour Correspondent': 'Fascism Up to Date: Sir O. Mosley's New Creed', 30 September 1932, p. 12.
[118] Oswald Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London, 1936), p. 17.

for Heroes',[119] Mosley called for the state to play a greater role in Britain. His 'marriage of Keynesian ideas'– adopted in the 1920s – consisted of stimulating domestic demand and a policy of economic autarky.[120] Michael Quill claimed that these early declarations played a significant role in the main structural components of Mosley's economic philosophy over his lifetime, earning Mosley the reputation among his parliamentary peers as 'the most perceptive of all government critics actively opposing the consensus of economic policymaking in the 1920s'.[121] While a Labour minister, Mosley called for state nationalisation of main industries, high tariffs to protect British industries from international finance and an ambitious and costly programme of public works to solve unemployment.[122] Mosley's long-term radical economic ideology is prominent throughout the BUF's economic literature.

Furthermore, as the movement frequently reminded its readers, the BUF's model was far more advanced than that of its continental contemporary.[123] Mussolini proposed a vague semi-pluralistic model; therefore, it is difficult to ascertain what the Italian leader actually believed. In fact, the doctrine, the Duce insisted, 'shall not and must not be a robe of Nessus clinging to us for all eternity', meaning that it is merely a guide and should not necessarily be adhered to in its entirety.[124] In contrast, throughout its existence, the BUF offered a clear, coherent and regularly updated economic and political programme. For example, in *The Coming Corporate State* (1937), the party's chief ideologue and Mosley's representative to Germany, Alexander Raven Thomson, built on the BUF's corporate vision.[125] He mapped out in detail (26 pages) the three aspects of the BUF's vision for a corporate state. First, economic policy, which is the 'science of organisational planning upon functional lines for the production and distribution of wealth', is explained. Second, the political area is covered: 'Central

[119] *Politicians and the Slump; the Labour Government of the 1929–1933*, p. 66.
[120] *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 128.
[121] Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918–1998* (New York, 1998), p. 19.
[122] Untitled Memorandum; *The Daily Mirror*, 8 December 1930, p. 11.
[123] For example, see 'Co-Operators and Fascists', *Blackshirt*, 7 November 1936, p. 1; *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, p. 19; Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* (London, 1938), pp. 68–69.
[124] *Doctrine of Fascism*. In Greek mythology, Nessus's robe was the poisoned shirt that killed Heracles. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, it is used as a metaphor to refer to a 'destructive or expurgatory force or influence'.
[125] Raven Thomson was a key member of the BUF. He was fiercely antisemitic and pro-Nazi. He visited Germany many times and was part of the BUF delegation that attended the 1933 Nuremberg Rally. He was also one of Mosley's closest allies.

government weld[s] the nation together by the exercise of authority.' Third, the cultural element is explored, which highlights 'the release of individual enterprise for more energy of invention and design'.[126] The BUF even gave attention to the most insignificant of issues. For example, under the Corporate Government, 'the necessary preventive measures would be passed [for the] practice of exporting horses for butchery'.[127]

The BUF model also diverged from the Italian's by focusing on higher wages for workers, which would become aligned with the new British home market-based economy, therefore protecting Britain from the fluctuations of the world economy.[128] A British fascist state would

> release the great power of science into the productive field, giving at the same time purchasing power to the people that they may enjoy the wealth man's genius has created. A managed currency will end the operations by which the masses are denied a share of Britain's wealth. Through higher wages and salaries and great public works an increase in the buying power of the people will occur to provide a market large enough for both Co-operative concerns and private trades without competition.[129]

The year preceding the creation of the BUF, Mosley declared that 'the worker and consumer, as well as the employer, shall be protected by modern machinery, which will maintain in this country a stable market and a high standard of life based on high wages'.[130] The theory was that government-led expertise would ensure that production was high; therefore, so were the wages. The resulting higher wages would be an increase in purchasing power of consumers which, in turn, would result in more production.[131] These ideas then mingled with the influence of Mussolini as he shifted towards Italian-style fascism.

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[126] Alexander Raven Thomson, *The Coming Corporative State* (London, 1935), p. 3.
[127] 'Answers to Correspondents', *Blackshirt*, 29 November 1935, p. 7.
[128] Autarky was not taken up by Mussolini until the mid-thirties when the invasion of Abyssinia left Italy largely isolated from other European powers (except Germany) through trade embargoes.
[129] 'Co-Operators and Fascists'.
[130] '"The New Party"', *The Times*, 2 March 1931.
[131] See *Greater Britain* and *The Coming Corporate State*.

**Cosying up to Mussolini from the Outset**

Italian Fascist influence was not just apparent in BUF ideology but also through the aesthetic style adopted by Mosley for the BUF. The most obvious was the inclusion of 'fascist' into its name, the British Union of Fascists. In addition, BUF uniform, the Italianesque black shirt, and its emblem – the fasces, a bundle of sticks featuring an axe, which was a symbol of strength through unity – were almost carbon copies of Fascist insignia. Even the now infamous Fascist salute was adopted by the BUF. All the aforementioned are clear examples of the BUF's adoration for Italian Fascism.

Attracting capital for the new movement was not easy.[132] As James Barnes and Patience Barnes have argued, 'Growth and influence required money, and financial support for the BUF was lacking from the outset.'[133] From the birth of his new movement, Mosley's ambition was to court the only fascist power on the continent. Less than two weeks following the BUF's launch, Mosley sent his deputy, Robert Forgan, to Italy to solicit funds from Mussolini. The Italian dictator rebuffed the advance questioning Mosley's commitment to fascism: 'he has been spending most of this summer on the French Riviera. I spent quite a lot of time on the Riviera myself, but I was in exile struggling to make a living with my hands.' He stressed that it was not 'a place for serious reformers to linger in private villas for more than a few days'. The Duce accused Mosley of 'want[ing] too much the best of both worlds'.[134] In fact, according to Britain's ambassador in Paris, William Tyrrell, Mosley had been given a 'terrific dressing down' by Mussolini when Mosley later visited him in Rome.[135]

Undeterred, Mosley continued to laud Italian Fascism and its leader. The first edition of the BUF's first newspaper *Blackshirt* (February 1933) mentioned Mussolini in three of its four pages, including across the front page. The cover gave a heavily biased historical account of the Italian movement. Mosley explained how the country had

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[132] James Barnes & Patience Barnes, *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939* (Eastbourne, 2010), p. 134. Initially, the BUF acquired small segments of funding from individuals impressed with or connected to Mosley. Some funds remaining from Sir William Morris's, later Lord Nuffield, £50,000 donation to the New Party's 1931 election campaign may have also contributed: TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, p. 16, (134a).

[133] Ibid.

[134] Earl of Portsmouth, *A Knot of Roots* (London, 1965), p. 159; *Black Shirt*, p. 220.

[135] Gordon Martel (ed.), *The Times and Appeasement: The Journals of A. L. Kennedy, 1932–1939* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 64.

'drifted to collapse and chaos' before being 'rescued' by the Fascist revolution. He insisted that Mussolini had no choice but to be violent and that the continual use of the 'iron hand' was inevitable. Inside the newspaper, phrases used by the Duce are printed. On page 3, under the title 'Mussolini's Tribute to Mosley', for example, the BUF claimed that Mussolini had called the British fascist leader 'a man of courage and intelligence'. Subsequent issues included commending Italy's conversion to a self-supporting agricultural nation, a policy Mosley wished to emulate in Britain.[136] Blackshirts even printed inscriptions from a Mussolini monolith in Rome.[137] However, it was not Mosley's continual pressure that eventually aroused Mussolini's attention.

Italian Fascism was arguably facing its biggest challenge since the March on Rome. The rise of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism resulted in tension between the Italian and German variants of fascism, most notably between 1933 and 1935. This period saw Hitler's consolidation of power in Germany and concern over the Führer's moves in Austria, which the Italians considered a potential threat to their northern territories. The greatest problem for Mussolini, however, was, with the rise of Nazism, he had – for the first time since gaining power in 1922 – to compete for international recognition as the true model of fascism. Italy had to reaffirm its identity as first among fascisms.

Throughout the 1920s, Mussolini's Fascism was the dominant fascist ideology. In 1921, *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (the National Fascist Party - PNF) established the *Fasci all'Estero* (Fascism Abroad). Luca de Caprariis and Claudia Baldoli have investigated Italian communities in Britain in the interwar period (and before). Until Fascism came to power, inconsistent and sporadic 'patriotic societies' operated abroad but were not integral to Italian foreign policy.[138] Although Mussolini's priority in the twenties was domestic issues, the *Fasci all'Estero* became an integral part of Italy's foreign policy and by 1929 boasted 583 branches and 124,870 members spanning all corners of the globe.[139] Pre-Fascism, Italian emigrants were assisted according to need (for example,

[136] 'If Britain is Not to Starve', *Blackshirt*, 18 March 1933, p. 2
[137] 'Listen Razor Gangs', *Blackshirt*, 1 April 1933, p. 3.
[138] For example, the Dante Alighieri Society and Nationalists but branches were only set up in very few countries/regions.
[139] Luca de Caprariis, '"Fascism for Export"? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35:2 (2000), pp. 157 & 183. The Grand Council of Fascism officially recognised its existence in early 1923.

helping the illiterate and the poor, and providing religious guidance).[140] However, under the *Fasci all'Estero* every Italian diaspora community was to be transformed into a unit of Fascist activity. Its mission was to create a new imperial patriotism.[141] Local agents, whether they oversaw economic and trade coordination or with welfare institutions, made clear the party's desire to seize practically all control over emigration.[142] In 1925, the head of the *Fasci* to Britain and Ireland (1922–1925), Camillo Pellizzi, insisted that the activity of *Fasci all'Estero* was directed towards the 'fascistisation' of overseas Italians. This involved disciplining Italian emigres and encouraging them to join the 'great Fascist enterprise of the national Risorgimento' while quelling any 'misconceptions' of Fascism. However, Pellizzi was adamant that there was no attempt to convince foreign countries to adopt Fascism.[143] In order to achieve this, Fascist organisations were created outside of Italy, publications founded, and attempts to control the administration of Italian schools abroad were undertaken.[144]

As in other countries, *Fasci all'Estero* sought to create 'little Italies' in Britain. In fact, the earliest overseas branch was formed in London in 1921. Besides the capital, organisations were created in areas with a high population of Italians, such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester.[145] Newspapers were either acquired or created and then distributed throughout Italian areas. Content included comments on Italy, reports on 'little Italies' in Britain, reviews of Italian literature, Fascist 'achievements', Italian radio programmes guides, job adverts and appeals to buy Italian products, and frequent Italian eateries.[146] Due to 'conflicts' between the various bodies involved, *Fasci all'Estero*'s plan to control Italian schools in Britain did not materialise in the twenties. Before *Fasci all'Estero*, Italian schools were under the jurisdiction of two organisations – the Dante Alighieri Society and the Catholic Church – and they were unconvinced by the new organisation's demands. The project was plagued with problems until 1932

[140] Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascism and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2003), p. 9.
[141] Ibid., p. 167.
[142] Ibid., p. 171.
[143] Camillo Pellizzi, *Fascismo-Aristocrazia* (Milan, 1925), p. 148: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 9.
[144] By October 1926, the *Fasci all'Estero* were publishing 50 newspapers and magazines. Over 600,000 copies of propaganda material were printed that year, mainly pamphlets and photo albums, see '"Fascism for Export"', p. 172.
[145] By the end of the twenties, Britain had about 29,000 Italians living within its shores, with over half residing in the capital, see *Exporting Fascism*, p. 1.
[146] Ibid., p. 10.

when Pellizzi finally became president.[147] In Britain, and elsewhere, the *Fasci all'Estero*'s attempts to 'fascistise' the Italian émigré population appears to have been largely unsuccessful in the twenties.[148] Yet it did lay much of the groundwork for the more fruitful period of the thirties.

The 'spectacular ascendancy' of the Nazi Party in the early thirties not only raised the interests of the Italian regime but also 'reinvigorated plans for a transnational campaign in order to strengthen support for Italian Fascism.'[149] Mussolini now diverted considerable attention and resources to indoctrinating Italians abroad. 'Little Italies' were turned into 'little Fascist Italies' and all Italians were 'to work for the fascistisation of their communities and to be ready to act if the fatherland needed them'.[150] All non-Fascist organisations were amalgamated into the *Fasci all'Estero* and were subservient to Rome.[151] Education was a priority. Great efforts and extensive funding were spent on the organisation of Italian schools abroad. These educational outlets were considered 'the most important institutions for the defence of cultural traditions'.[152] In 1933, more than 300,000 pupils attended almost 2,000 Italian schools abroad.[153] In Britain, it was obligatory for Italian children to attend Italian schools. If not, parents were depicted as traitors and therefore 'foreigners twice over' in both Britain and Italy.[154]

Children were subject to a Fascist style of education. The schools taught the Italian language, Fascist culture, moral education as well as Italy's 'glorious' past and present. Children recited Fascist poems and songs, analysed texts such as 'I love and respect the Duce' and drew images of Roman lictors. Considerable emphasis was put on health, fitness and discipline. Elena Salvoni recalled her time in an Italian school in Britain:

> every morning we were out in the grounds doing exercise, all in unison, jumping up and down and waving our arms about. At the end of each session we had to

[147] Ibid., pp. 14–15.
[148] Largely down to personal jealousies and factions, see '"Fascism for Export"', p. 160.
[149] Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939', *East Central Europe* 37 (2010), p. 225.
[150] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 2.
[151] Ibid., pp. 2–3.
[152] Ibid., p. 13.
[153] Piero Parini, 'La cultura italiana e gli italiani all'estero', *II Legionario*, 29 April 1933, p. 3: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 13.
[154] 'La riapertura delle scuole italiane', *L'Italia Nostra,* 23 September 1932, p. 5: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 13.

> march past the doctor and his wife with our right arms raised […] we did as we were told and had no idea that this was the Fascist salute. [...] For weeks one particular year we were drilled for a parade before Mussolini's daughter.[155]

Teachers and directors had to be Fascist. Directors were given 'appropriate instructions for the coming year' by the Fascist high command. In 1934, a British inquiry uncovered how the employment of teachers in Italian schools abroad was organised under the direct supervision of the Italian Foreign Ministry. According to the Dominion Office, they had to be 'sound in the Fascisti faith to proceed to [teach] the Italian language and Italian culture. These teachers are in no sense employed in consular work'. The Foreign Ministry also paid their salaries. As Claudia Baldoli has claimed, this signified that Italian intentions were 'propagandistic rather than merely educational'.[156]

In addition, and unlike in the twenties, Fascist outreach was broadened to non-Italian citizens with the intention of spreading its doctrine. To achieve this, Italy's political and cultural importance in Europe had to be promoted. From the early thirties, Mussolini opened his Fascism to the world. On the tenth anniversary of the Fascist assumption of power, the Italian leader 'inaugurated the most enduring propaganda event of the fascist dictatorship'.[157] He claimed Fascism represented the new universal civilisation of the twentieth century, and 'in ten years Europe will be fascist or fascisized'.[158] The British Ambassador to Rome, Eric Drummond, noted Mussolini's desire to present his Fascism as an example for the rest of the continent.[159] The *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution) glorified the March on Rome and subsequent Fascist 'achievements'.[160] During its two-year run, Italians and foreigners alike were invited to participate in the celebration of Fascist culture, which attracted almost three million visitors.[161] In 1933, Mussolini formed the *Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalita*

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[155] Elena Salvoni, *Elena: A life in Soho* (London, 1990), pp. 32–33: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 13.
[156] TNA FO 371/18439, 'Contact between Italy and her emigrants' (Dixon of the Dominion Office to Batterbee at Downing Street), 14 September 1934.
[157] Marla Stone, 'Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History* 28:2 (1993), p. 215.
[158] 'In dieci anni l'Europa sarà fascista o fascistizzata', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 30 October 1932: cited in 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939', Abstract.
[159] TNA FO 371/16800, 'Celebration of anniversary of the March on Rome' (Drummond to Simon), 3 November 1933.
[160] For more on the exhibition, see 'Staging Fascism', pp. 215–243.
[161] 'Staging Fascism', p. 215.

*di Roma* (CAUR) with the purpose of uniting the many fascist movements in Europe.[162] CAUR developed secret links and distributed funds to the burgeoning fascist groups, including the BUF: 'If Italy failed to institutionalize these contacts, a Fascist International might be co-opted by the Nazis, which was intolerable to Mussolini.'[163]

Mussolini invited Mosley (and other European fascists) to his international Fascist exhibition, which intrigued the British press. With the Nazis now in power, Mussolini courted the British fascist leader. He instructed thousands of his Fascists to salute the Englishmen.[164] They exchanged gifts. The Italian leader presented Mosley with a custom-made banner for his British movement, which was 'dipped respectfully to each banner in the parade'.[165] While on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, Mosley, in return, presented Mussolini with a parchment BUF membership card in a leather case.[166] Through the visit, the Italian leader had clearly intended to build stronger relations with the BUF. Mosley also sought closer ties in the form of financial support. This was successfully negotiated in return for active support for their Fascist counterparts.

Despite 'elaborate steps' being taken to conceal BUF funding activity, the Mosley faithful later detailed their connections when interrogated by Special Branch.[167] The Head of the Finance Department and Secretary General of the BUF, Major George Tabor admitted to opening a confidential account with Westminster Bank Charing Cross for his boss in March 1933 (while Mosley was in Italy). According to Tabor, the account 'was fed to a very large extent, by deposits of notes in the currencies of various

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[162] For more on the CAUR, see 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939', pp. 227–232.
[163] *Black Shirt*, p. 234. Included in Mussolini's payouts were José Antonio Primo de Rivera's *Falange Española*, Belgian *Rexists* and the French *Franciste.* For work on the Fascist international, see Michael Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York, 1972) & Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919–1945* (London, 2003), pp. 167–172.
[164] Quotes from *Black Shirt*, p. 220; *The Times and Appeasement*, p. 64 (14 October 1932); *The Daily Mirror*, 22 April 1933, p. 7.
[165] 'The banner is black with the Union Jack in the top left corner and Fascist emblem in the centre. Across it is the inscription, "British Union of Fascists for King, Empire and International Justice." Over the banner is a gold Roman eagle.' *The Daily Mirror*, 22 April 1933, p. 7.
[166] *Black Shirt*, p. 232.
[167] CAB 66/35, memorandum by Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, 14 April 1943.

foreign countries'.[168] He claimed that he personally handled several bundles of French francs.[169] According to Allen, payments from Italy were often received in Paris by Mosley's Chief of Staff and 'principal collector' Ian Hope Dundas.[170] Dundas then deposited the funds into the Charing Cross account. Allen himself was occasionally present when Dundas collected the prearranged packages of money from the French capital.[171] The first of many instalments were personally handed to Mosley by Mussolini's men while on his Italian visit.[172] Intelligence gathered by the security services suggested that the BUF received £5,000 per month from the Italian government for at least 18 months.[173] This was no small feat in the 1930s.

It could be argued that MI5 and Special Branch goaded the informers to make false statements to satisfy the British establishment's desire to see Mosley and other fascists, who they believed traitors, behind bars. To have evidence that the BUF had been paid by an enemy of the British state would undoubtedly help their cause. However, the number informants who admitted to being involved in or observing the secret financial transactions between the Italian State and the BUF – not just one or two but at least half a dozen associates of Mosley's – casts considerable doubt over this theory. Yet, perhaps even more compelling evidence that the BUF did receive monetary backing from Mussolini can be seen in BUF publications and activities.

Securing this 'big spectacular success' had a marked impact on the BUF.[174] The movement went from making favourable comments about Italian Fascism (as aforementioned) to now wholeheartedly supported it. After securing financial support from the Italian leader, the BUF became obsessively pro-Italian. For example, the front

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[168] TNA KV 2/879, 'W.E.D. Allen', 5 November 1940, (35a).
[169] Ibid.
[170] TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, p. 23, (134a).
[171] TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, pp. 8–9 & 25, (134a); TNA KV 2/880, 'Interrogation of W.E.D. Allen', 27 February 1942 (129a).
[172] Ibid; This was confirmed by Italian Ambassador to the UK, Dino Grandi: cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 236.
[173] Ibid; TNA KV 2/881, 'Interview with Captain Lewis on the B.U.F. Finances', 12 October 1939, (154a). Another who confirmed that the BUF received funding from Italy was Peter Symes: TNA KV 2/881, 'Interview with Dent' 27 November 1939, (155a); TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, pp. 18–19, (134a).
[174] 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', pp. 8–9.

page of the April issue of *Blackshirt* is dedicated to Mussolini and his Italian Fascism. In an article titled 'Fascism and Peace. Mussolini – The Realist', Mosley lauded Mussolini as a 'peacemaker […] chief of realists […] constructive thinker' and a man of great skill. He claimed the Italian leader had a master plan to strengthen great powers 'while at the same time he preserves every possible usefulness which the League of Nations machinery may provide'.[175] On the next issue's front page – headlined 'Visit to Rome – The "Immense Majesty" of Fascist Peace' – the BUF hailed the close ties with Italian Fascism: 'Our deep and abiding friendship with the Fascist movement of Italy is based on the solid rock of friendship between men who hold in common a vast conception and a great ideal.'[176] The article argued that Corporatism was the 'only constructive system of government in the modern world, [which] lifted [Italy] from the dust and ha[s] placed her among the foremost of the nations'.[177] Mussolini was branded a 'genius' and an 'inspiration'.[178] Articles in these periodicals continued in this vein, with Mussolini mentioned no less than 50 times from June to December 1933, while appearing on the front page in almost 20 of them (60 per cent).

Although the BUF championed itself as an ultra-nationalist movement, international aspects to its character become evident when Mussolini lent his support. The call for 'world' or 'universal fascism' became a regular feature on the front pages of *Blackshirt*. For example, in an apparent reference to the book *Verso l'Internazionale Fascista* (1932) by the universal fascist Asvero Gravelli, the 17 April 1933 issue's front page headline reads 'Forward to World Fascism'.[179] The first issue of the following month's front page announced that 'we are united with them [Italy] by indissoluble bonds of friendship in universal Fascism, the greatest creed which Western civilisation has yet given to the World.'[180] A short time earlier, Mosley wrote a letter (presumably to the Italian embassy), admitting that he had visited Italy again to study Fascism: 'we even had the honour of being received by His Excellency the Head of the government […] whom we fascists salute as the origin and inspiration of world Fascism'. Reflecting upon his time in Italy for Mussolini's Exhibition, Mosley claimed that 'the last few

[175] 'Fascism and Peace. Mussolini – the Realist', *Blackshirt*, 17 April 1933, p. 1.
[176] 'Visit to Rome – The "Immense Majesty" of Fascist Peace', *Blackshirt*, 1 May 1933, p. 1.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 44.
[180] *Blackshirt*: 17 April & 1 May 1933, both page 1. Also, see the 1 June 1933 issue page 1. The terms were also used regularly in the inside pages of BUF newspapers.

weeks in Rome have carried a long stage forward the great conception of universal Fascism'.[181]

The BUF and the Italian government were in regular contact throughout 1933 and 1934. Mosley and Dundas, in particular, made frequent trips to Italy.[182] The Italian authorities in Britain also sought close ties with British fascists. Along with ministers, MPs, journalists and members of the royal family, the Italian ambassador to Britain, Dino Grandi, developed personal and political relationships with Britain's fascists. Baldoli described Grandi as on the one hand a 'respectable diplomat who dealt with the parliamentary and diplomatic establishment' and on the other a 'supporter of the British Union of Fascists and of fascism'.[183] As the self-proclaimed 'ambassador of the Revolution',[184] Grandi thought Mosley had the greatest chance of successfully undertaking a British-style 'March on Rome'. Although Grandi accused Mosley of being 'naive and frivolous', he was particularly impressed by his oratorical skills: 'he hits hard and has plenty of guts'.[185] Grandi encouraged Mussolini to continue financing the BUF.

While in London, Grandi was in regular contact with his leader in Rome. He repeatedly informed Mussolini that fascism was expanding its influence in Britain. He sent regular updates on Mosley's progress and BUF activities such as marches, speeches, and conflicts with Communists. Two days before the 1933 Trade Union Congress in Brighton, Grandi wrote to Mussolini:

> The old leaders are planning to transform this Congress into an anti-Fascist demonstration. Yet rather than against fascism of the fascists, they want to attack the 'fascism' of the labour anti-parliamentarian and anti-democratic youth organised by Cripps and Attlee, under whose flags most of socialist youth is

[181] 'Atti Mosley'. Letter by Mosley, addressee unknown (probably the Italian embassy), 26 April 1933, ASMAE, *AL*, b. 800, f. 2 (Rapporti politici, GB, BUF): cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 44.
[182] TNA KV 2/881, 'Dundas, Ian Hope', 11 October 1935 (18b). Dundas left England for Rome on 27 April 1936 to act as liaison between Italian fascists and BUF under the cover of a *Daily Mail* correspondent': Baldoli, 'Italian Fascism in Britain: *The Fasci Italiani all'Estero*, the Italian Communities, and Fascist Sympathisers during Grandi Era; 1932–1939', (PhD Thesis: LSE, 2002), p. 56 fn. 41.
[183] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 38.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 41.

> gathering [...] This country is the tortoise among the nations of the world. But like turtles, it will arrive, and I shall not be surprised by seeing tomorrow, perhaps after a violent domestic crisis [...] Mosley's blackshirts, Cripps' labour-fascists, and Lord Lyvington's [Lymington?] young imperialists fighting alongside one another.[186]

In a subsequent letter to Mussolini shortly after the conference, Grandi identified two strands of fascism in Britain: Mosley's BUF and a segment of trade unionism, organised by founding member and leader of the Socialist League, Stafford Cripps. In the same correspondence, he claimed that fascism was 'snatching vital youth from the ranks of Labour' and saw signs of a fusion of left and right in Britain: 'seventy per cent of Britain's Blackshirts are manual labourers'. Although trade union activists fed into the Italian propaganda machine, it was the BUF, 'the only British movement organised along the lines of the Italian Fascist party', where the Italian hierarchy focused their support and resources on.[187]

Contact between the *Fasci all'Estero* and the BUF was a frequent occurrence. Before 1933, the Duce's guidelines to the *Fasci all'Estero* prohibited interference in domestic politics. Dealings with British fascists were to be 'a relationship of friendly politeness […] without getting involved in intimate and continuous relationships, and without having official contacts with the leaders'.[188] Mosley's new pact with Mussolini resulted in a significant change in the relationship. According to the Secretary of the *Fasci all'Estero*, Carlo Camagna, Italian Fascists were now frequent guests at the BUF headquarters, while BUF members regularly visited the *Fasci all'Estero*.[189] Moreover, both groups became involved in each other's public events. For example, the BUF were present at the annual Italian March on Rome celebrations in London and, with their counterparts, sat through films on the history of the Fascist movement.[190] Italian newspapers in Britain followed the BUF's movements with interest. For example, *L'Italia Nostra*, the Italian news outlet based in London, covered Mosley's visits to

[186] Grandi to Mussolini, 3 September 1933, *DDI*, 7, XTV, pp. 149–152: cited in 'Italian Fascism in Britain', p. 49.
[187] Cited in 'Italian Fascism in Britain', pp. 49–50.
[188] Camagna to Parini, 6 November 1933; Parini to Grandi, 15 November 1933. ASMAE, AL, b. 805, f: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 42.
[189] Ibid.
[190] 'March on Rome Celebrations', *Blackshirt*, 2 November 1934, p. 10.

Italy.[191] Local Fascist branches in Italy desired close corporation with Mosley. For example, the Milan branch contacted the BUF leader with regards to producing Italian publications on British fascism and, through the Italian embassy in London, invited him to address a Fascist gathering in the Italian city.[192]

Jointly, The London *Fasci all'Estero* and the BUF organised social exchanges. For example, two hundred British teachers were invited to tour the Italian educational system. Greeted by Mussolini in Rome, the teachers, represented by Professor Vaughan Johnston, told the Italian premier how privileged they were to meet 'the leader of the new Italy in Rome, which had always been the common mother of all nations and is today re-establishing its place of prestige and responsibility in the world'.[193] In addition to UK holiday camps, BUF newspapers now regularly advertised excursions to fascist countries.[194] 'Student tours' were arranged in Italy. Students would visit Rome, Turin and Milan while staying in the private homes of Fascists. Furthermore, they would spend time in the Students' Camps in the Tyrol and the Alps.[195] In return, 27 Italian university students visited London and stayed in Mosley's countryside retreat, spending time with the BUF leader. Accompanied by BUF members, the group visited the Italian embassy in London where they met with Grandi.[196] Furthermore, the BUF arranged, with the Italian embassy, a football match to take place in Rome between the British party and their Italian counterparts.[197] A group of Mosley Blackshirts even walked six miles to the Bristol docks to welcome officers and crew of the Italian vessel, *Monte Bianco*.[198] Both Mosley and Grandi stated that 'such informal gatherings as these' not only reinforced the 'good understanding which already exists between Fascists of

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[191] 'La visita di Sir O. Mosley a Roma – Interessanti dichiarazioni sul fascismo inglese', *L 'Italia Nostra*, 21 April 1934: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 44.
[192] Ferri to Vitetti, 29 August 1933, ASMAE, AL, b. 800, f. 2 (Rapporti politici, GB, BUF): cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 44.
[193] 'Duecento insegnanti inglesi ricevuti dal Duce', *L 'Italia Nostra,* 6 April 1933, n. 270: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 45.
[194] *Blackshirt*: 1 April 1933, p. 4; 17 April 1933, p. 3; 1 May 1933, p. 3; 16 May 1933, p. 3.
[195] 'Students' Tours', *Blackshirt*, 1 June 1933, p. 3.
[196] See TNA HO 144/19069, 'British Union of Fascists and Italian Fascist Students in London'; Grandi to foreign ministry, 11 August 1933, ASMAE, *AL*, b. 800, f. 2 (Rapporti politici, GB, BUF): cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 45.
[197] BUF to Italian embassy, 3 November 1933, ASMAE, *AL*, b. 800, f. 2 (Rapporti politici, GB, BUF): cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 45.
[198] 'Blackshirts Meet Fascisti. Good Work at Bristol', *Blackshirt*,1 June 1934, p. 9.

different nations' but argued that it 'strengthened' them.[199] As Baldoli claimed, 'it was probably the social encounters between members that had real consequences for British and Italian fascists in terms of their adherence to the concept of universal fascism.'[200]

**'Mind Britain's Business'**

By 1935, it was clear that Mussolini was questioning the significance of the BUF and was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the British movement. Since April 1933, when Mussolini had agreed to send regular payments to the BUF, there was little sign that Mosley's men had made headway in Britain. In March 1935, the Italian leader withdrew the BUF's allowance. Around the same time, the UK ambassador to Rome, Sir Eric Drummond, informed Special Branch that 'Sir Oswald Mosley's stock had slumped very heavily with Signor Mussolini'.[201] Reports were being sent to the Home Office from Italy citing the disregard displayed for BUF members in the country. For example, a dentist from Florence visited the UK embassy to complain of the treatment a family member was receiving from Italian businesses. According to the dentist, his nephew had been 'expelled' from two jobs because of his membership with the local BUF branch.[202] As the Foreign Office stated, the British movement 'cuts no ice' with Mussolini anymore.[203]

However, the Duce resumed the payments a short time later. This was partly due to Mosley pleading with him to reinstate the funds but also because Mussolini began to seriously consider launching an ambitious invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia).[204] Abyssinia lay within the Horn of Africa. Italy already possessed Abyssinia's neighbours Libya, Somaliland and Eritrea but failed to conquer Abyssinia in their first attempt in 1896. The Fascists viewed the conquest of the poor and weak African country as a step towards its quest to recreate the glory of the Roman Empire. As part of their imperial programme, Italy intended to transform the Mediterranean Sea into the 'Italian Sea' while extending its influence across the Balkans and North Africa. In addition, the

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[199] Grandi to foreign ministry, 11 August 1933, ASMAE, *AL*, b. 800, f. 2 (Rapporti politici, GB, BUF): cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 46.
[200] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 44.
[201] TNA FO 371/19554 (1935), 'Sir E. Drummond', 13 June 1935, (62).
[202] Ibid.
[203] TNA FO 371/19554 (1935), 'No. 618 [letter from Sir John Simon of the Foreign Office]', 28 May 1935, (61); TNA FO 371/19554 (1935), untitled note from Rome Chancery, undated, (68).
[204] KV 2/881, 'Dundas, Ian Hope [27 April 1935]', pp. 5–6, 6 June 1935[?], (5a[?]).

colonising of a relatively sparsely inhabited territory was the ideal antidote for Italy's soaring birth rate (an extra half a million per year), particularly as resources were lacking at home.[205]

Mussolini wanted to use the BUF as a tool to increase proletarian feeling in Britain with the intention of persuading the British government (and therefore the League of Nations[206]), not to endorse economic or military action against his Abyssinian campaign. When the funding recommenced, Mussolini gave Mosley strict instructions to 'render the Italians all support in their power should this country attempt to interfere over the question of Abyssinia'.[207] Special Branch reported that Mosley informed his followers that 'capital was to be made out of the Ito-Abyssinian situation'.[208] BUF official, F.M. Box, who was confirmed as the BUF's funding source to the authorities, informed Special Branch that it was 'a pity that Rome was now deciding Mosley's policy […] [as] the man who pays the piper calls the tune'.[209]

Mosley saw this as an opportunity to begin a 'peace campaign' and therefore increase party support. In August 1935, backed by Italian money, Mosley launched a new campaign under the slogan 'Mind Britain's Business', in direct reference to Italy's imminent invasion of Abyssinia. Mosley was given orders by the Italians to 'carry out his pro-Italian campaign, which includes the chalking of Mind Britain's Business and the distribution of pamphlets, in addition to speeches on the Ito-Abyssinia question'.[210] The BUF launched its crusade with four major rallies in London, with Mosley subsequently speaking three to four times each week.[211] Across the country, members painted peace emblems on buildings and pavements, and ran a poster campaign to warn of an upcoming war – the slogan was even painted on the steps of 10 Downing Street.[212] Local newspapers reported on the 'crop' of police courts fines issued for defacing walls

[205] *Hurrah for the Blackshirts,* p. 46.
[206] Britain was a leading influence in the League.
[207] TNA KV 3/53, 'Fascist Activities in London', 27 April 1935', p. 2.
[208] TNA KV 3/53, 'Summarizing BUF/Italian activities between 1933 and 1935 for the Foreign Office', September 1935, p. 3.
[209] TNA HO 144/20145, 'Report to the Home Office', 23 October 1935 (12–13).
[210] TNA KV 2/881, 'A.D.S.(B), 18 October 1935' [Minutes Sheet].
[211] '"Mind Britain's Business". Public Opinion can Prevent Sanctions that will lead to War', *The Blackshirt,* 30 August 1935, p. 1.
[212] Ibid.

with ‘Mind Britain’s Business’.[213] Grandi reported to his boss that the BUF had assisted him when he needed to counteract anti-Italian demonstrations.[214] Furthermore, Mosley instructed BUF members in Italy to sign the following declaration of support, addressed to the Italian government, for the Italian invasion: ‘The undersigned British subjects residing in Italy […] impressed by the magnificent conduct of the Italian nation […] express their approval of the political solidarity of Fascist Italy and formulate their fervent wishes for the triumph of the Duce’s firm action in defence of Italy’s well-founded rights.’[215] The campaign may have increased party membership slightly while increasing BUF newspaper circulation but it did not, as Mosley believed it would, bring him any closer to power.[216] As Special Branch noted, although ‘Mosley ostensibly supported Mussolini during the Abyssinian war on the grounds of natural sympathy between the Fascist parties in the two countries, there can be no doubt that the financial assistance he received from Mussolini was a powerful motive for the energy displayed in this direction’.[217]

Although it is difficult to assess the impact of the BUF’s ‘Mind Britain’s Business’ campaign on Britain’s and the League of Nation’s response to Italian aggression, it appears negligible. Although military combat was rejected, both Britain and the League condemned Italy’s invasion and imposed sanctions on Italy.[218] In addition, the British public was overwhelmingly and openly hostile to Mussolini’s attack on a fellow member of the League.[219] Therefore, Mosley’s campaign was ultimately unsuccessful in coercing Britain to ‘mind its own business’. However, the sanctions were relatively

[213] For example, ‘The Writing on the Wall’, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 15 October 1935, p. 7; ‘Mind Britain’s Business’, *Norwood News*, 18 October 1935, p. 4; ‘Local Fascists Bound Over’, *Middlesex County Times*, 7 September 1935, p. 13; ‘Chalked on Wall’, *Sheffield Independent*, 19 September 1935, p. 5.
[214] Grandi to Mussolini, 7 October 1935; Grandi, *Diario di Londra*, entry for 20 November 1935: cited in *Exporting Fascism*, p. 71.
[215] TNA FO 371/19554 (1935), ‘Activities in Italy of British Union of Fascists’, 18 June 1935, p. 2, (2c).
[216] By the end of 1937, the BUF had 6,000 members, 200 active branches, 14,000 circulation for *Action* and 12,000 for *The Blackshirt*: TNA HO 144/21281, 3 February & 7 April 1938 (figures from Special Branch reports).
[217] TNA KV 2/877, ‘Relating to R. Gordon Canning’, 22 April 1937, pp. 1–2, (158x).
[218] In September 1935, Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare announced that Britain would adhere to the League’s principles and resist the Italian attack.
[219] A Peace Ballot survey showed that over eleven million people favoured League sanctions against the Italians: *Black Shirt*, p. 355.

ineffectual as Britain refused to stop the passage of oil through the Suez Canal, upon which Italy was so reliant.

Shortly after the Second World War began, it was discovered, much to the dismay of the British populous that the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, and his French counterpart, Pierre Laval, agreed to let Mussolini get away with his aggression in Abyssinia. Although the government discarded the Hoare-Laval Pact, the ineffectual sanctions policy continued. This lack of desire to tackle the Italians had little to do with BUF influence. The reasons were twofold. The British and French feared to push Italy towards an increasingly powerful Nazi Germany and, as the then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin later recalled, the Allies had no military force to withstand an Italian attack.[220]

Mussolini directly influenced BUF policy, the Italy-Abyssinia War being a case in point. Mosley's insisted that his 'friendship [with Mussolini] raises no question of subordination; it raises only a question of common service to a common cause'.[221] This is clearly false. As Gary Love stated, for Mosley and the BUF to approach the Italians for financial aid proves their willingness to be influenced politically by a foreign regime.[222] In the twenties, Mosley was an avid proponent of the League of Nations. He even backed the sanctions imposed by the League against Italy for occupying Corfu in 1923.[223] Yet, tellingly, he reversed his stance when it came to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia because, as Stephen Dorril has remarked, 'Mosley had to prove to Mussolini he was receiving value for money.'[224] However, he failed to do so. During the Abyssinian crisis, Grandi realised how ineffectual the BUF was when it came to influencing the British government and subsequent British foreign policy. Therefore, with the advice from his ambassador, the Duce initially cut payments to the BUF

[220] Library of Congress, *Events Leading Up to World War II* (Washington, 1944), p. 97; George Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations* (Stanford, 1976), p. 77; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 264. For an in-depth assessment of public opinion on the war, see Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935–6* (London, 1975).
[221] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 234.
[222] 'What's the Big Idea?', p. 453.
[223] Letter from Mosley to Cynthia (undated) & letter from Baba to Tim (undated) in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, pp. 11, 26–27, 47.
[224] *Black Shirt*, p. 355.

considerably before stopping them altogether in 1937, believing Mosley's movement to be an insignificant political force that was simply not worth investing in.[225]

**Branches Abroad**

A largely overlooked area of scholarly research is on BUF branches abroad. Baldoli has described this lack of inquiry as a 'completely blank page in the history of British fascism'.[226] The BUF did, in fact, form many overseas offshoots, most notably in Italy, Germany and across the Empire (the latter two are discussed later in this chapter). Baldloi has suggested that sources on the BUF branches in Italy can only be found in the Home Office files at Kew and from Italian newspapers.[227] However, BUF newspapers also regularly covered the activities of its Italian divisions. For example, the opening of new branches in Milan, Genoa, Bordighera, San Remo, Turin, Florence, Messina and Catania were reported in *Fascist Week* and *Blackshirt*.[228] Columns were devoted to the 'Promotions' and 'Appointment' of BUF staff, which included those operating overseas.[229]

Examination of these newspapers suggests that Milan was the BUF's flagship Italian division. Shortly after it opened in April 1933, the BUF reported on its 'rapid progress', so much so that within twelve months the branch relocated to larger premises at Piazza Missori, Milan.[230] Here, under the guidance of Branch Organiser, John A Celli, at least one member manned the branch all day ensuring that BUF propaganda was distributed, new applications were processed promptly and potential members could visit and ask questions.[231] The Milan branch was either at the top or thereabouts of BUF's '[Branch] Literature Sales' competition.[232] It held the record for *Blackshirt* sales of almost 100 per

[225] *Exporting Fascism*, pp. 37–41. According to the Home Office, funding from Italy was cut to £1,500 per month from mid-1936 and stopped altogether by late 1937: TNA KV 2/881, 'Source of Information: S.B. Report [Dundas]', 21 May 1937, (105b).
[226] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 46.
[227] Ibid.
[228] For example, 'Fascist News Film', *Fascist Week*, 11 May 1934, p. 6; 'News of the Week', *Fascist Week*, 30 March 1934, p. 7; 'Larger Premises for Milan Branch', *Blackshirt*, 30 March 1934, p. 2.
[229] For example, *Blackshirt*, 20 April 1934, p. 4.
[230] 'Larger Premises for Milan Branch'; 'News of the Week'.
[231] Ibid.
[232] *Blackshirt*: 'Literature Sales', 16 February 1934, p. 3; 'Literature Sales', 2 March 1934, p. 4; 'Literature Sales', 16 March 1934, p. 3.

cent of quota.[233] A photograph titled 'British Blackshirts in Milan' featured in *Blackshirt*, as did a telegram sent to Mosley from the branch boasting about a recent well-attended meeting they hosted to recruit Britons in Italy.[234] The article read: 'The large audience accepted "en masse", the invitation to join [the BUF], and amidst manifestations of enthusiasm a telegram of loyalty and devotion was sent to the Leader.'[235] The popularity of the Milan branch challenges the intelligence received by the Home Office that stated that the membership of the division did not exceed six.[236]

BUF headquarters in London funded the creation and maintenance of foreign branches for two reasons. Baldoli, the Home Office, and indeed the Blackshirts themselves, claim that the main duty of BUF members abroad was to 'support the struggle of their fellow countrymen in Britain for the rise of fascism in that country, by seeking to 'fascistise' British subjects living abroad'.[237] To attract new members in Italy, BUF members were required to wear uniforms and make 'direct contact' with other British residents in Italy; frequent radio broadcasts given by Celli were directed at Britons in Italy, and postcards were distributed to Britons at 'all stations at the various Italian frontiers' offering assistance to new arrivals. According to the BUF, 'in this way, a large British family has been established in Italy after the Fascist way.'[238]

However, while undoubtedly Mosley was keen to make contact with British residents in the hope of converting them to his British-based cause, the BUF also wished to build relations with Italian Fascists in their home country as a further sign of solidarity with Mussolini's men. Delegates from the various British divisions in Italy celebrated or commemorated significant events in Italian memory, often with Italian Blackshirts. For example, delegations from various BUF centres across Italy were present at the annual

[233] *Blackshirt*: 'Literature Sales', 16 February 1934, p. 3; 'Literature Sales', 2 March 1934, p. 4.
[234] 'British Blackshirts in Milan', *Blackshirt*, 1 June 1934, p. 10. 'Milan Telegram to Leader', *Blackshirt*, 16 February 1934, p. 4.
[235] 'Milan Telegram to Leader', *Blackshirt*, 16 February 1934, p. 4.
[236] TNA FO 371/18436 (1934), 'Activities of British Union of Fascists', 19 July 1934, (276). 'Activities of British Union of Fascists […] Mrs. Hollingsworth', 3 December 1934, (287).
[237] *Exporting Fascism*, p. 46; TNA FO 371/18436, 'No.6. [letter from the British Consulate General, Thurstan, in Genoa]', 20 March 1934, (255); TNA FO 371/18436, 'No.310. [letter from Drummond to Simon]', 12 April 1934, (259); BUF newspapers report on its 'intensive propaganda' mission to convert British subjects: 'News of the Week'.
[238] 'Larger Premises for Milan Branch'.

Fascist Levy where they laid wreaths at the memorial tablet erected in Via San Lorenzo (Genoa) in memory of the Fascist who was killed there in the early days of the revolution.[239] Before the party dispersed, 'telegraphic greetings' were sent to both Mosley and Mussolini.[240] On the anniversary of Italy's entry in the Great War, British fascists were received by their Italian counterparts at both the Palazzo Braschi in Rome and at the Casa del Fascio in Florence, where 'flattering speeches were exchanged'.[241] According to the BUF, a film, which was described in *Fascist Week* as 'the first all-Fascist film', was shown in the theatre at BUF headquarters and included 'some good shots' of the members of the Milan branch marching to the local cenotaph.[242] Similarly, Italians attended prominent events hosted by BUF Italian branches. For example, important Italians, including a representative of the National Fascist Party and the Rome Federal Secretary, were invited to a meeting organised by the Rome branch of the BUF to celebrate King George V's birthday.[243] Furthermore, a school had been set up in Italy in connection with the BUF's Milan branch. These free educational classes taught English to Italians to build a stronger bond between the BUF and Italian Fascism.[244]

Other, less notable and little known, branches were formed in mainland Europe. In March 1934, an advert appeared in *Blackshirt* requesting British residents in Paris join its new branch there, headed by Mr J. E. Cleverly.[245] Mr E.C. Yaldwin headed the Madrid branch.[246] Mr de Piro was the Political Director of the Malta branch.[247] The BUF also claimed to have branches in Brussels and Latvia.[248] However, these branches were nowhere near as popular as those in Italy and Germany. The likely reasons for this are twofold. First, BUF time and resources focused far more on the countries in which the two fascist regimes operated, as Mosley hoped to curry favour with both Italy and Germany. Second, it is likely that British citizens living in Italy or Germany would be

[239] TNA FO 371/18436, 'No.6. [letter from the British Consulate General, Thurstan, in Genoa], 20 March 1934, (255).
[240] Ibid.
[241] TNA FO 371/18436, 'From Sir E. Drummond (Rome)', 8 June 1934, (266); TNA FO 371/18436, 'No. 618. [letter from Drummond]', 28 May 1935, (61).
[242] 'Our Own Films', *Fascist Week*, 11 May 1934. p. 6; 'Fascist Film', *Blackshirt*, 11 May 1934, p. 1.
[243] TNA FO 371/18436, 'No. 520. [letter from Simon]', 8 June 1934, (269).
[244] 'Larger Premises for Milan Branch'; 'News of the Week'.
[245] 'Paris Branch', *Blackshirt*, 30 March 1934, p. 2.
[246] 'New Branches Abroad' *Blackshirt*, 8 June 1934, p. 9.
[247] 'Appointments', 16 February 1934, p. 4.
[248] 'New Branches Abroad'.

far more receptive to fascism as they are residing in a fascist state than those emigres who did not live under fascism. They were more likely to adhere to fascist values or, at least, feel obliged to sign up to fascism to fit in.

**Imperial Policy**

Unlike the BF and the IFL, the BUF's imperial policy was centred on achieving 'Empire autarky' through trade between Britain and its overseas territories. In *Blackshirt Policy* (1933), Mosley declared that 'The building of a Britain as nearly as possible self-contained, and an Empire entirely self-contained, is the declared objective of the British Union of Fascists.'[249] Mosley claimed that collectively Britain and its overseas territories had the potential to build the markets needed to isolate it completely from foreign imports. For example, under a fascist government, Britain would undergo an agricultural revolution; therefore, 'losing' its reliance on food imports from Europe.[250] The importance of doing so, Mosley argued, was to withdraw from the 'international struggle' for markets and the 'economic dislocation and war such struggles mean'.[251] For the BUF, all the goods, foodstuffs and raw materials which were required for a high standard of living could be produced within the Empire.[252]

However, for this to be successful, Mosley argued that a fascist government must replace the 'old gang' in Britain, who through their laissez-faire politics motived by vested interests had left Britain's most prized asset to decline, and used its power and influence to create a protectionist block.[253] Meanwhile, in July 1933, Mosley announced that he and the Australian New Guard leader Eric Campbell, who Mosley met when Campbell addressed a meeting at the BUF headquarters three months earlier, had established The New Empire Union, which claimed to dictate fascist activities throughout the Empire.[254] In *Blackshirt,* the BUF declared that 'we now have a united fascist drive throughout the Empire, against the great financial interests which have impeded Empire development, and towards the self-contained Empire which is our common objective.[255]

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[249] Oswald Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London, 1933), p. 32.
[250] Ibid., pp. 30–36.
[251] 'Blackshirt Policy', *Blackshirt,* 23 November 1934, p. 8.
[252] Ibid.
[253] 'An "Insulted" Britain', *Blackshirt,* 8 July 1933, p. 1.
[254] 'The Fascist Empire', *Blackshirt,* 26 August 1933, p. 4.
[255] Ibid.

The BUF was confident that this new union would create 'Empire Fascism', made up of fascist movements across the Empire working together towards achieving the goal of Empire unity.[256] However, the project was an abject failure, only the Ulster fascists joined as they professed to be '100 per cent' loyal to the Crown.[257] The reasons for this lack of interest were twofold. First, not all fascist groups in the Empire shared the same vision as Mosley and Campbell (and the Ulster fascists) for turning the Empire into a protectionist block. This appears to be the case with South African fascists. By far the most important interwar fascist movement in South Africa was the South African Gentile National Socialist Movement, otherwise known as Greyshirts. Its leader, Louis Weichardt, made clear his opposition to the aim of The New Empire Movement: 'the vast majority of South Africans now think of the [South African] Union as an entirely independent state, sovereign in all matters both internal and external, whose connection to the British Crown and Empire is purely voluntary'.[258] Weichardt claimed that even among English-speaking sections 'imperialist feeling is often lukewarm'.[259] Second, fascism had not been established in certain countries in the Empire at the time of The New Empire Union. In Canada, for example, no fascist party was established until 1934 – when Adrien Arcand formed Parti National Social Chrétien (Christian National Social Party). By this time, The New Empire Union was all but finished.

This venture came to an abrupt end only months following its inception.[260] Stocker has argued that the partnership between the BUF and the New Guard was doomed from the outset. He has claimed that although the New Guard was akin with the BUF in many ways – militaristic, anti-communist, stylistically similar and supportive of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany – it also differed from Mosley's model in so much as favouring, to a degree, individual liberty and, most importantly, was a proponent of free-market economics (before adopting corporatism later on). For these reasons, Stocker has

[256] 'The New Empire Union', *Blackshirt*, 8 July 1933, p. 1.
[257] 'Fascism Comes to Ireland', *Blackshirt*, 7 October 1933, p. 6. Quote from 'Ulster Fascists. Aims of the Movement Outlined', *Belfast Newsletter*, 7 April 1934, p. 4.
[258] L.T. Weichardt, 'National Socialism in South Africa', *The Fascist Quarterly*, October 1936, p. 567.
[259] Ibid., p. 556.
[260] The New Empire Union last appeared in BUF publications in early 1934: 'Ten Points of Fascism', *Blackshirt*, 23 February 1934, p. 2. This was reprinted in *Fascist Week*, 9 March 1934, p. 6.

claimed, the unity was built on 'shaky foundations' and 'inevitably short-lived'.[261] Another reason that may explain the failed relationship is that the New Guard was not an actual party, but more like a paramilitary militia made up of veterans, so it would have been difficult to do a party political deal with. The fact that The New Empire Union was such a disaster and came nowhere near achieving a 'Federation of the Fascist movements of the Empire', identifies how distinct the various fascist movements could be from each other, even when united under the Crown.

BUF imperial policy was rooted in Mosley's time as an MP. While a Labour MP, Mosley published his memorandum (1930) in which he outlined how he would tackle the problem of rising unemployment. In it, Mosley argued for British trade based on imperial preference, emphasising the vast resources and markets of the colonies that could be opened up to Britain.[262] In 'A National Policy' (1931), Mosley championed the notion of Imperial protection. Here, he argued that if Britain and its colonies could unite and negotiate exclusive trade agreements with each other, Britain and its overseas territories could obtain economic security and wellbeing without dealing in foreign markets.[263]

However, influence from Italian Fascism is also evident in the BUF's concept of Empire. In a bid to impress Mussolini, Mosley sought to connect Britain's Roman heritage to the Italian model. In *Greater Britain*, he stated that 'fasces are the emblem which founded the power, authority and unity of Imperial Rome. From the Rome of the past was derived the tradition of civilisation and progress during the past two thousand years, of which the British Empire is now the chief custodian'.[264] This was not included in Mosley's pre-BUF vision of the Empire; therefore, it undoubtedly derived from his attachment to Italian Fascism.

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[261] Paul Stocker, '"The Surrender of an Empire": British Imperialism in Radical Right and Fascist Ideology, 1921–1936', (PhD Thesis: University of Teesside, 2016), pp. 75–76.
[262] Oswald Mosley, *The Mosley Memorandum* (London, 1930), p. 13.
[263] Oswald Mosley, *A National Policy: An account of the emergency programme advanced by Sir Oswald Mosley M.P.* (London, 1931), p. 26.
[264] *Greater Britain*, Introduction.

**Courting the Nazis**

Mosley saw the Nazi power grab of early 1933 as an opportunity to curry favour with the new European fascist power, but also to extract funds. As well as courting the Italians, Mosley also attempted to build relations with the Nazis, which is evident in the party's literature, Foreign Office files and the British press.[265] *Blackshirt* quickly paid homage to Hitler and his movement. Shortly after Hitler gained the Chancellorship of Germany in early 1933, the paper dedicated a profile to 'Hitler – The New Man of Germany' written by Mosley. The BUF leader attacked the 'dreary columns of spiteful abuse which the English Press has spat at Hitler and the Nazi movement'. He then applauded 'the spirit and the force which has lifted Germany from the mud and has set her on the road to becoming a great nation again. It is a spirit of struggle, of sacrifice, of great belief […] of fanaticism […] [The Nazis have] save[d] the soul of a great nation.' Mosley described how the German movement 'struggled on through unparalleled reverses and disasters', and how their 'will to action' resulted in eventual glory not only for Nazism but for all Germanic nations. He compared the BUF to the Nazis by claiming the latter initially endured 'slow progress, compared to the great strides' Mosley's movement made in the first months of its existence.[266]

The result of securing much-needed funds from Mussolini shortly after the article went to print meant the paper's admiration for Fascist Italy overshadowed its comments on the Nazis. Intent on not alienating the Nazis, the movement's newspaper continued to compliment them. For example, in May 1933, *Blackshirt* proudly announced that Germany under Hitler 'heats the iron that will beat out of a corrupt and broken Capitalism'.[267] In the following months, the *Blackshirt* wrote about the excellent conditions of the prisoners in German prisoner camps, regularly challenged negative accusations against the new Germany in the British press reiterated Nazism's claim that Hitler was a man of peace.[268] For example, they claimed that the Führer had offered to 'march with all nations to the constitution of a new European civilisation […] [to] show that the men of Fascism are the enemies of chaos, and not the enemies of other

[265] Hitler became German Chancellor four months after the formation of the BUF and throughout 1934 cultivated Germany into a dictatorship.
[266] 'Hitler – The New Man of Germany', *Blackshirt*, 1 March 1933, p. 2.
[267] 'The Washington Washerwomen', *Blackshirt*, 1 May 1933, p. 2.
[268] Ibid; 'Who are the War-Mongers Now!', *Blackshirt*, 1 June 1933, p. 1; 'The Human Side of Hitlerism', *Blackshirt*, 15 July 1933, p. 1; 'Hitler "Too Socialistic." More Whine from The Democrats', *Blackshirt*, 23 September 1933, p. 1.

nations.'[269] In an attempt to prove how 'magnificent' the new Germany was, the *Blackshirt* advertised tours to Germany for those interested in 'see[ing] something of the Hitler movement at first hand'.[270]

Mosley sought collaboration with the Nazis. In the autumn, Hitler sent the Nazi official Gunther Schmidt-Lorenzen to England to study British fascism first-hand. When Mosley met the German officer, he stressed his 'great sympathy with the great Hitler movement and wished nothing more than to be able to remain in close contact with the events in Germany'. He informed Schmidt-Lorenzen of his intention to send 'capable men' to Germany on behalf of the BUF.[271] Following the conversation, Mosley sent an official BUF delegation to Germany with the instruction to establish links with the Nazis.[272] The group attended the 1933 Nuremberg Rally, the first since the Nazis' accession to power, where they had based a liaison officer. According to the Home Office 'At Nuremberg the British fascists will attend a review of the Nazi troops, and will later go to Berlin.'[273] The representatives included the BUF's chief emissary with the Nazis, Alexander Raven Thomson, who stayed at a Brownshirt camp. Saxony's Minister of Justice reported to his colleague at the Chancellery that Raven Thomson was 'so enthusiastic about his experience that he told me quite openly that Germany's rise was now unstoppable and that it was high time that people in England sought an alliance with this re-awakened nation'.[274]

BUF Branches were opened in Cologne and Berlin. As with Italian branches, the purpose was to attract British citizens living under Nazi rule to the party, but also to connect with Nazi officials. The head of the Berlin BUF, and a man of dubious reputation and 'minor importance', Mr B.A. Owens, reported to the foreign office that BUF branches in Germany were in 'no way affiliated to the Nazi movement'. However,

[269] 'Who are the War-Mongers Now!'.
[270] See, for example, 'Tours to Fascist countries', *The Blackshirt,* 1 April 1933, p. 4.
[271] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 254.
[272] According to the Home Office, 15 representatives included Raven-Thomson, William Joyce, Unity Mitford and Captain Vincent visited Germany: cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 261.
[273] TNA HO 144/19069, '31 August 1933'.
[274] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 261.

the Nazis were made 'fully aware' of the organisation and Hermann Göring, President of the Reichstag, was sent monthly lists of branch members and their addresses.[275]

Local members attended official Nazi commemorative ceremonies. Members from the Cologne branch, for example, visited a local ceremony commemorating the failed Nazi Putsch eleven years earlier. Leader of the delegation, and president of the Cologne branch, Captain Levi, gave a speech summarising the event:

> As leader of the British Fascists in Cologne it is my privilege to greet you […] This is the first time that our movement has officially met the authorities of the Third Reich. On this sacred day we have marched up to honour Germany's warriors who bravely fought and died for their country. We also wish to remember the members of the N.S.D.A.P. who lost their lives for the movement. It is our hope that these sacrifices and our ideals may lead to the triumph of fascism in the whole world. My comrades, I ask you to give a hearty cheer for the Führer of the German Reich, Adolf Hitler and for Sir Oswald Mosley.[276]

Two days later, on Armistice Day, Levi and his members attended the Cologne War Memorial in Germany where they laid a wreath. The British Consul, who was present, was both concerned with and embarrassed by the British fascists. Although the consul reported that Levi had been 'perfectly respectful and did not attempt to make a speech', he was concerned that they would cause problems in future: 'I regard with some misgiving the activities of this branch. [...] Being men of little education, I fear that sooner or later they may do or say something to cause friction with the local authorities.'[277]

The impact of BUF overseas branches is difficult to measure. No branch probably exceeded more than 100 members at any one time. Yet, the branches in Italy and Germany clearly integrated themselves well, while making connections with regime delegates. This most probably left some positive impression on Mussolini and Hitler, not least showing them that the BUF was a serious fascist movement with loyal supporters both inside and outside of Briton. The impact of these branches made little

[275] TNA FO 371/17731 (1934), 'British Fascist Movement in Germany [from British Consulate in Berlin]', 30 January 1934, (112).
[276] TNA FO 371/17731 (1934), 'English Fascists Commemorate the 9th of November', 10 November 1934, (119).
[277] Ibid.

impression at home. The newspapers hardly covered them, apart from BUF publications which occasionally reported on branches abroad.[278]

They did, however, attract the attention of the Home Office who monitored their progress. The most curious and perhaps unexplainable element to the BUF abroad is that both Owens and Levi were Jewish, according to the Home Office.[279] If this were true, it must beg the question why British subjects of the Jewish faith would choose to live in a country in which Jews were unashamedly hated by the regime – described by Hitler as the enemy of Germany – and were not only verbally but physically attacked by Nazis. The Home Office described their participation as 'not without its humorous aspect'.[280]

However, unlike the Italians, the Germans were reluctant to form a relationship with the BUF. Barnes and Barnes have argued that Hitler did not want to give the impression of interfering in British affairs. He wanted peace and friendship with the British state.[281] At a Nazi meeting in London – infiltrated by Special Branch in late 1933 – Otto Bene, the head of *Ortsgruppen* in Britain, on instruction from Hitler, told members that it was 'strictly forbidden for any Nazi to discuss or participate in English politics and particularly they were not to fraternise with members of fascist organisations here'.[282] A year later, Bene circulated a letter to members, which included a note to 'draw your attention again to the order that you are not allowed to participate in British politics and particularly you are not to associate with Fascists. We are guests in this country and must behave accordingly.'[283] When it was discovered that Lothar Streicher, son of Julius Streicher, a prominent Nazi propagandist and member of Hitler's inner circle, was staying with a BUF member while holidaying in London, he was reprimanded by the party for defying the 'no contact' order.[284]

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[278] Notable exceptions were a column in *The Observer* (28 January 1934, p. 10) titled 'Berlin's British Fascists' that covered the branch's opening, and a note in *The Manchester Guardian* (8 February 1934, p. 12) on the same subject.
[279] TNA FO 371/17731 (1934), 'The British Fascist Movement in Germany', 3 January 1934, (111 & 112); TNA FO 371/17731 (1934), 'No. 26 [letter from the British Consulate General, Sir Eric Bell]', 10 November 1934, (118).
[280] Ibid.
[281] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 21.
[282] Cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 19.
[283] Cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 20.
[284] *Nazis in Pre-War London*, p. 29.

However, as identified in Chapter One and Chapter Two, the Nazis had relations with both the British Fascisti and, more notably, the Imperial Fascist League. Three more likely theories explain the reasons for the Nazis' reluctance to build ties with the BUF from 1932 to 1935. The first is that they were unimpressed by Mosley. Shortly before forming the BUF, a key Mosley ally, Christopher Hobhouse, visited Germany and met with the Nazi leadership. They spoke negatively of Mosley, accusing him of not being 'a working man' and insisting he would 'disadvantage' any party.[285] This indicates that the Nazis, as well as the Fascists, thought Mosley more of a playboy than a serious revolutionary. Second, British fascist organisations were at odds with each other and the Nazis did not want to be seen to be taking the BUF's side over, their favoured group in Britain, the IFL. Raven Thomson sent a signed photograph of Mosley to a Hitler representative with a request for one of the German leader in return. The request was refused, citing the British fascist movements in 'conflict with one another'; the Nazis did not 'consider it proper to enter the conflict'.[286] Third, and closely linked with the previous reasons, was the BUF's perceived ambivalence toward antisemitism.

In a bid to be a 'respectable' party in the eyes of the British electorate, Mosley initially rejected that antisemitism played any role in the BUF.[287] However, an array of evidence indicates that Mosley was ideologically antisemitic even before the BUF's inception. In April 1932, he chaired a discussion on the subject titled 'The Blindness of British Politics under the Jew [sic] Money-Power'. He invited two notorious antisemites on to the panel: the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) leader Arnold Leese, and the Britons founder Henry Hamilton Beamish.[288] Evidence of Jew-hatred can also be seen in Mosley's short-lived New Party venture. Party members were reported driving through south London, shouting 'Down with the Jews', and distributing antisemitic stickers.[289] According to his son, who witnessed the event, Mosley's chief bodyguard and a former world boxing champion, the Jew Kid 'Ted' Lewis, asked Mosley if he was antisemitic. When Mosley answered in the affirmative and began to 'reveal his full plans', a

[285] Diary entry of 2 January 1932, *Diaries and Letters*, p. 105.
[286] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 262.
[287] For example, the first issue of *Blackshirt* on 1 February 1933 stated that 'No difference was made between Jew and Gentile', p. 4.
[288] Dan Tilles, '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution": The British Union of Fascists' Antisemitism and Jewish Responses to it', (PhD Thesis: Royal Holloway, University of London, 2011), p. 78.
[289] 'New Party's Disclaimer', *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 August 1932, p. 7; Michael Harrison, *Peter Cheyney: Prince of Hokum* (California, 1954), p. 209.

horrified Lewis hit him, leaving Mosley sitting on the floor.[290] The British Jewish Board of Deputies was so concerned by the growing racism toward Jews from Mosley and the New Party that they wrote to the leader to air their anxieties.[291]

In the draft of *Greater Britain*, Mosley alluded to the unhealthy influence of Jews in Britain. It was only on the advice of his friend Nicolson that Mosley decided to remove his 'Nazi note', which included a reference to 'Jewish banking houses'. Nicolson informed Mosley that he was 'prepared to believe that they [Jews] have been the villains of the piece [...] [but] English readers are always impressed by propagandists who take off their boots before they start kicking below the belt'. Mosley, however, did include a 'tone[d] down […] statement by a short qualifying phrase', as suggested by Nicolson, in the final copy of the BUF's founding manifesto.[292] In a section on finance, Mosley noted that 'we have within the nation a power, largely controlled by alien elements, which arrogates to itself a power above the State, and has used that influence to drive flaccid governments of all political parties along the high road to national disaster.'[293] This alien power, of course, was the Jews.

In his extensive work on BUF antisemitism, Dan Tilles observed how 'Jewish issues did not feature prominently in the party's public agenda over the nine months or so after October 1932'.[294] Yet antisemitism did occasionally rear its head in these early months of the movement. In the same month as its inception, while addressing a hostile meeting at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, Mosley verbally attacked three protesters branding them 'warriors of the class war – all from Jerusalem'.[295] This jibe was met with scorn by his sister-in-law, 'Baba', who questioned why the 'silly little schoolboy' Mosley had descended into 'the Jewish inanity […] [as the] little man in the balcony was quite inoffensive'.[296] A correspondent of *The Times* also noted this 'hostility to Jews' during Mosley's speech.[297] Following the meeting, Blackshirts were disbursed by police from the Cenotaph, where they congregated, for chanting 'to hell with Jews'.[298]

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[290] Morton Lewis, *Ted Kid Lewis: His Life and Times* (London, 1990), pp. 227–228.
[291] Cited in *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 5.
[292] Quoted in Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, pp. 379–380.
[293] *Greater Britain*, p. 106.
[294] '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution"', p. 38.
[295] 'Fight at Fascist Meeting', *The Times*, 25 October 1932, p. 16.
[296] *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 232.
[297] 'Fight at Fascist Meeting'.
[298] Ibid.

Moreover, antisemitism was rife in BUF branches in Leeds and Hull, where walls were decorated with pro-Nazi posters. Similarly, in Manchester, Jews were threatened with violence and their shops graffitied with the words 'Perish the Jews'.[299]

Around the time he acquired funds from Mussolini, Mosley banned antisemitism in the BUF. While visiting the Italian leader, he was instructed not to copy 'Nazi-aberrations' as 'anti-Semitism is a symptom, not of Fascism but of Germany'.[300] This indicated that Mussolini would consider stopping his transnational support to the BUF if Mosley refused to conform. Almost immediately after his dressing down by the Duce, Mosley dedicated the front page of the next issue (1 April) of *Blackshirt* to explaining the relationship between 'Fascism and the Jews'. In a lengthy article, and immediately following the line, 'The Jewish issue was unknown to Italian Fascism', the BUF announced their updated policy on Jews: 'Jew-baiting in every shape and form was forbidden by order in the British Union of Fascists before the Union had been in existence two months. The Jewish question is no issue of Fascism, and the great case of Fascism should not be obscured by side-line or irrelevance.'[301] Despite his claim, no evidence can be found that Mosley banned antisemitism in the movement. The statement he is likely to be referring to was in February's issue of *Blackshirt* (two months earlier) which read: the BUF 'did not attack Jews as Jews. No difference was made between Jew and Gentile, and only if either was anti-social would any action be taken against them'. Yet there was no mention of an outright ban.[302] As Dorril remarked, 'the statement [on the ban] was entirely to do with Mosley's visit to Rome'.[303]

In a bid not to alienate the Nazis, however, the newspaper was careful to justify or dismiss the Nazi's treatment of Jews in Germany. In the same article, under the section 'Outrages Against Nazis', a key passage described how the Nazi struggled to power:

> violence, struggle and political ferocity have inevitably increased. In that struggle, Jews have probably been killed or injured, like members of every other community. It must also be remembered that in Germany, Jews are conspicuously associated at one extreme with the Communist and Socialist

[299] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 224.
[300] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 232.
[301] 'Fascism and the Jews', *Blackshirt*, 1 April 1933, p. 1
[302] 'I Accuse', *Blackshirt*, 1 February, p. 4.
[303] *Black Shirt*, p. 231.

> movements, and at the other extreme with International Finance. Jews, in fact, have been associated economically and politically, apart from every consideration of race, with the two main enemies of the Fascist movement.[304]

In the following issue (17 April), the BUF printed an article it claims to have received from a 'Jewish Correspondent in Prague [… which] emphasises in a marked degree the unaccuracy [sic] and dishonesty of the Press's anti-Hitler campaign'. The *Blackshirt* claimed the contributor spent four days in Breslau, 'a stronghold of the Hitler men', which revealed no sign of a 'Jewish pogrom'. The unnamed individual supposedly spoke with many 'patriotic German Jews', all sympathetic to the Nazis. In one conversation, 'Several young Jews admitted [to him] that were they not Jews they would probably be enthusiastic Nazis and that if only hysteria were avoided the patriotic Jews would receive favoured treatment as distinct from that meted out to unpatriotic ones'. Apparently, an 84-year-old Jew told him, 'I am afraid that we must admit that the Nazi movement was inevitable as the only hoping of saving the country. Jews who keep their heads will not be hurt. I believe that Hitler and his lieutenants are genuine idealists, though a few youthful members really got out of hand.' 'The final impression' this traveller received was that 'these Jews who are as good Germans as the British Jews are good Britons have little cause for alarm – unless from agents, provocateurs and misguided "friends". "After all," as a young German put it to me, "you cannot expect an entirely smooth revolution after 14 years' corrupt government."' The column concluded with an appeal, perhaps with a nod towards Mussolini, to let 'the British Fascists help to save decent Jews from the sentimentalists'.[305]

At this time, the promise of payments from Mussolini were not as forthcoming as Mosley had hoped. In the autumn of 1933, BUF officials noted that 'funds [from Rome] were not coming in as expected'.[306] On 11 October, Mosley complained to Nicolson about his reliance on 'canteens and subscriptions' to fund his movement.[307] It was around this time that Mosley became aware of the Nazis' misgivings over his perceived leniency towards Jews. Schmidt-Lorenzen met with the British fascist leader while in Britain and raised these concerns. Mosley insisted that he was not paid by Jews, but that

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[304] 'Fascism and the Jews'.
[305] 'Save Us From Our Friends', *Blackshirt,* 17 April 1933, p. 3.
[306] *Black Shirt,* p. 269; TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, p. 24 (134a).
[307] Diary entry of 11 October 1933, *Diaries and Letters*, p. 155.

> his attitude and tactics with regard to the Jewish question was one more suited to the English character and which appealed more to the English sense of fair play. It is better to say "Here is a man who is in touch with the international communists and who are damaging English industry – both are Jews". Judge for yourself what happens to them.[308]

Furious by the accusations thrown to him by the Nazis, Mosley wanted revenge on the group he believed was spreading these 'mistruths': the IFL. The vehemently antisemitic IFL was suspicious of the BUF's ambiguity over the 'Jewish question'. From the birth of Mosley's movement, the IFL's newspaper, *The Fascist*, consistently taunted Mosley and the BUF about their relationship with Jews. For example, accusations of Jewish interests controlling Mosley was the front page headline of the January 1933 issue. Under the heading 'Big Money "Fascism"', the IFL claimed that 'the word "Jew" must not be mentioned by members of the "British Union of Fascists," under heavy penalties!'[309] April's issue of *The Fascist* continued in a similar vein: 'the Big Money pro-Jewish Fascism of the Mosleyites spends itself like a shrieking gale over the head of a pilot clad in oil-skins'.[310] The same month saw the two movements directly exchange insults. *The Fascist* denounced the BUF as not properly fascist: 'Fascism is a thing of the spirit, a state of mind, which refuses to turn from realities, such as Jewish domination over white men's civilisation and achievements. It is not simply a matter of collecting together a number of impecunious unemployed to do the shouting at a certain figure.' Mosley, the paper declared, has 'married a wife of Jewish blood, grand-daughter of the Jew Leiter who cornered the people's wheat to make money out of the transaction.'[311] Through *Blackshirt,* the BUF responded by attacking 'the vicious vet' and his band of 'cranks', for, 'in addition to the usual silly stuff which ignorance and jealousy throw at the Leader and members of the British Union of Fascists, this dreary nonentity now also attacks Lady Cynthia Mosley with a pack of lies'.[312] The response concluded that the 'organisation has stepped out of the realm of pure humour to which they usually belong'.[313] Leese continued these pro-Jewish accusations against Mosley and his movement over the subsequent months, which included insults such as labelling the Blackshirts 'Kosher Fascists' and their party the 'British Jewnion of Fascists'.[314]

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[308] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 254.
[309] 'Big Money "Fascism"', *The Fascist*, January 1933, p. 1.
[310] 'Fascism in Holland', *The Fascist*, April 1933, p. 2.
[311] 'Sir Oswald Mosley and his Big Money "Fascism"', *The Fascist*, April 1933, p. 3.
[312] 'The Vicious Vet', *Blackshirt*, 17 April 1933, p. 3.
[313] An accusation that Mosley's wife was of Jewish ancestry.
[314] 'The British Jewnion of Fascists', *The Fascist*, November 1933, p. 3.

On 24 November 1933, shortly after Mosley's conversation with Schmidt-Lorenzen BUF members, on instruction from their leader, violently attacked an IFL meeting in Trinity Hall, Great Portland Street. Initially, the intruders demanded an apology from Leese for his repeated accusations that Mosley and his movement were conspiring with Jews. They then assaulted those present, including Leese, leaving him with head injuries and ripped clothing. Witnesses claimed that chairs were used as weapons to 'strike' opponents. Newspapers reported that 'the interrupters tore down from the walls a Union Jack on which was superimposed a black swastika; a standard bearer was attacked and his flag torn to pieces; windows were broken; and one man [probably Leese] had part of his clothing torn off'. The fight, which lasted around a quarter of an hour, was eventually broken up by the police with two arrests made. When reflecting upon the melee, Leese explained the 'real object' of the 'Jewish and typically "Mosleyite" attack' was the 'suppression of the truth about Jewish control of Britain'.[315]

In these years, the BUF was desperate for funds. Driven by financial concerns over the uncertainty around Italian Fascist payments and, Mosley believed, the growing unlikelihood of securing financial assistance from the Germans due to his perceived attitude towards the Jews, the movement 'slid into anti-Semitism' with an overtly pro-Hitler stance in a bid to impress the Nazis.[316] In what Tilles described as a 'watershed in the BUF's commitment to antisemitism', the first issue of the November 1933 *Blackshirt* ran with the headline 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?'[317] For the first time, the movement openly argued that Jews were the 'hidden hand' behind various financial entities:

> [M]odern Conservatism in Britain is entirely subservient to the international finance of the City of London, which is of course largely Jewish […] Socialism, too, is dominated by so called intellectuals, many of whom are Jewish, while the rest are invariably under Jewish influence […] Their money power has established such a grip upon the Press and other organs for the creation of public opinion that they are in a position to hold up to ransom the established Parties of the State. Even if these Parties were not dominated by Jews or by Jewish influence, they would have to dance to the Jewish tune if they are to reach the

[315] 'Free Fight With Chairs', *The Times*, 25 November 1933, p. 14; 'Disturbance at Fascist Meeting', *The Times*, 27 November, 1933, p. 11; 'Fascists Fight Each Other', *Daily Worker*, 27 November 1933, p. 3; 'Stop Press', *The Fascist*, December 1933, p. 4.
[316] *Black Shirt*, p. 259.
[317] '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution"', p. 40.

> Democracy on whose favours they depend […] [U]se of Jewish money power for political purposes has just been brought to our notice in the cinema world. The British-owned company, Fox Movietone News, makes a news reel which is shown also under contract by the Jewish-controlled Gaumont British, which is under the control of those Polish Jews.[318]

Yet, as the title suggests, among the many accusations, perhaps the most notable was the way Jews were 'pursuing an anti-British policy' by attempting to 'drag this country towards war with Germany […] we state deliberately that Jews are striving to involve Britain in war'. As a show of allegiance with the Nazis, the BUF asserted that 'For long past, great interests and great newspapers in Great Britain have striven hard to work up war fever against Germany [...] Germany, for reasons of her own, has suppressed the great Jewish interests which previously dominated that nation by their control of all the old Parties of the State.'[319] Hitler, contrastingly, was perceived as a man of peace with no interest in foreign policy.[320] Tilles assertion that the War article of November 1933 denoted a 'shift in policy' was, perhaps, premature.[321]

Over the ensuing months, while trying to appease both Hitler and Mussolini over the Jewish question, the movement seemed to be in something of a quandary about its official position on antisemitism. Two weeks after the War article, the BUF appeared to backtrack somewhat on the premise that Jews were warmongers, attempting to play down the hostility directed to them only a few days previously. For example, in a contradictory statement, an article in *Blackshirt* stated 'We did not say "the Jews are striving to involve Britain in War," but that "Jews" were doing so'. The article then emphasised that 'We are not now and never have been, anti-Semitic.'[322]

Also in the *Blackshirt* a month later, under the title 'Italy's Jewish Senator', the BUF announced, in seeming admiration, that a 'prominent Jewish industrialist in Turin' had been elected to the Italian Senate.[323] Yet at the same time, *Blackshirt* continued to attack Jews. For example, it claimed that 'Roumania […] have changed an antiquated feudal system for the far more onerous tyranny of the Jewish money-lenders, who, during the

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[318] 'The "Jewish World" Challenge', *Blackshirt,* 18 November 1933, p. 1.
[319] 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?', *Blackshirt,* 4 November 1933, pp. 1 & 4.
[320] 'Nazi Germany Explained', *Fascist Week,* 1 December 1933, p. 7; 'Fascism and Disarmament', *Fascist Week,* 15 December 1933, p. 2.
[321] '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution"', p. 40.
[322] 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?'
[323] 'Italy's Jewish Senator', *Fascist Week,* 15 December 1933, p. 8.

slump, have succeeded in getting whole provinces into their hands'. In consequence, *Blackshirt* predicted the coming fascist revolution in the country. The newspaper was also sympathetic to the idea of rich Jews purchasing an island abroad as a permanent home for all Jews irrespective of nationality.[324] Perhaps the most telling response to the BUF's precarious position was shown in early December's *Blackshirt*: 'some people say we are anti-Semitic, others say we are not anti-Semitic. We prefer to believe neither party.'[325]

To suggest, as David Lewis has, that 'the consistent elements of anti-Semitism were all there' by the end of 1933 or, as Dorril asserted, that the decision to adopt antisemitism had been taken by the party by late 1933, are somewhat preemptive.[326] In early 1934, the BUF changed its position on Jews again as a direct consequence of a cash injection from Mussolini. On 9 January, while on one of his regular trips to Italy, Mosley had the 'most violent argument' with Mussolini on the subject of antisemitism.[327] The Italian leader was furious over how Mosley had embroiled his movement in the attacking of Jews. Mosley agreed to curb the antisemitism on Mussolini's instruction, which may well to have been a key condition in the financial negotiation between the two fascist leaders. Consequently, in a letter to his boss, Grandi noted how upon his return to Britain, he had 'never seen him [Mosley] so sure of himself and so confident.[328] He told me that the talk with you had enriched and illuminated him and he left the Palazzo Venezia more determined than ever to do battle'.[329] On 24 January, a package was sent from Rome with £20,000 of foreign currency inside. A week later, it was passed to Mosley, who confirmed its content. BUF officials remember seeing hordes of foreign notes. A jubilant Mosley told his staff, who by now were desperate for money, that 'We'll put you right up now'.[330] In a report to Mussolini, Grandi noted Mosley's gratitude for the 'material assistance', which was a key aspect of transnational corporations.[331]

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[324] 'Our Letter Box', *Blackshirt*, 2 December 1933, p. 4.
[325] 'Editorial', *Blackshirt*, 2 December 1933, p. 2.
[326] David Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur; Mosley Fascism and British Society, 1931–81*, pp. 92–110; *Black Shirt*, pp. 301–304.
[327] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 270.
[328] Letter from Grandi to Mussolini: *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 296.
[329] Ibid.
[330] *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 296.
[331] Letter from Grandi to Mussolini.

As a result of the leader's Italian visit, the next few months saw BUF publications soften their stance toward Jews. In March, the movement's new publication *Fascist Week* reverted to the initial party line where 'Jews, loyal to the interests of Britain, have nothing to fear when Fascism comes to power in Britain, and Fascists consider the whole Jewish question as being relatively unimportant as compared with the great national issues with which they are concerned'.[332] The movement now even appeared to favour Britain as a safe haven for Jews fleeing the continent. A regular contributor to BUF publications, John F. Porte, argued that 'Political events abroad have led to a considerable number of Jewish refugees seeking asylum in this country. That a sanctuary should be offered to the refugees no one will question […] we have every sympathy'. Porte did, however, have concerns over potential competition for jobs in roles such as teachers and, in his trade, musicians.[333] Furthermore, a gesture was also given to Mussolini by dedicating a column to 'The Jews in Italy'. Another BUF correspondent, Muriel Currey, declared that 'there was no suppression of the Jews in Italy. On the contrary, the Chief Rabbi was a Fascist and was a strong supporter of Mussolini.' Currey also spoke glowingly on issues such as the treatment of women and the Italian press.[334] Mussolini even wrote a front page 'exclusive' for *Fascist Week*.[335]

However, from early May 1934, the BUF took a complete U-turn regarding its policy on antisemitism, one that it would adhere to for the next six years until the internment of its leadership. On 4 May 1934, *Fascist Week* announced the banning of Jews from the BUF: 'Our reasons for excluding the Jews from membership of the British Union of Fascists are: 1. Jews and the Jewish Press in this country have bitterly opposed Fascism, 2. The great majority of Jews have shown themselves to be international in outlook and have placed the interests of their own race before the interests of the country in which they reside.'[336] In the days following this ban – in response to a Conservative meeting where attendees criticised the BUF and its leader on a speaking tour of the Lake District – Mosley repeatedly attacked the Tories for 'worshipp[ing] at the shrine of an Italian Jew'.[337] This jibe was in relation to the Conservative Party's admiration for their ex-leader, Benjamin Disraeli. *Fascist Week* proudly reported the story under the banner

[332] 'Unintentional Misconceptions', *Fascist Week*, 30 March 1934, p. 5.
[333] 'Unemployed Musicians', *Fascist Week*, 13 April 1934, p. 7.
[334] 'The Jews in Italy', *Fascist Week*, 27 April 1934, p. 5.
[335] 'Twilight of the Democrats' [Mussolini exclusive], *Fascist Week*, 6 April 1934, p. 1.
[336] 'Attitude to the Jews', *Fascist Week*, 4 May 1934, p. 4.
[337] 'The Leader's Visit to the Lake District', *Fascist Week*, 18 May 1934, p. 2.

'Conservative Worship of an Italian Jew', where they poked fun at the 'fanciful Jew' and his party.[338] Many newspapers picked up the story and quoted a Mosley speech in which he alluded to the Conservative leaders who 'dance like portly dervishes before the altar of their Eastern divinity, chanting his obsolete incantations'.[339]

The following months saw the BUF's antisemitic sentiment continue. Conspiratorial accusations against Jews were now in full swing. Besides the Conservative Party being Jew-controlled and Jews allegedly being responsible for violence against Blackshirts, the 'hidden hand of the Jew' was held to task for exerting its influence in many other spheres. For example, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was now deemed 'subservient' to Jews since they were planning to boycott German goods, a decision made in light of recent domestic events in the country: 'The social democrat, the international financier; the Trade Union leader and the unsavoury Oriental, are now united by Jews, in the production of the most spectacular slanders against the German Government.'[340] The BUF labelled the policy a 'Jewish boycott of Germany'.[341] The Depression-era collapse of the cotton trade in Lancashire was even blamed on this 'Jewish boycott'.[342] The BUF claimed that their members who were employed by Jewish businesses were being dismissed because they were fascists.[343] This accusation resulted in newsagents refusing to distribute future BUF literature on account of a potential libel suit.[344]

This new wave of antisemitism continued in Mosley's Albert Hall speech of 16 October 1934. As reported in the *Blackshirt*, he

> explained in detail how Blackshirts had been compelled by Jewry to defend themselves and to defend the nation; how Jewry has used every weapon of violence and of intimidation, to attack Blackshirts violently and overtly; how they had "blackmailed!" many who desire to support our Movement, and how for eighteen months they had injured British trade and had carried on a campaign of hatred and venom against a foreign Power with whom Britain was

[338] Ibid.
[339] 'Disraeli and Mosley', *The Yorkshire Post*, 21 May 1934, p. 6; 'Mosley Attacks Disraeli', *Daily Herald*, 14 May 1934, p. 11; 'Mosley on Disraeli', *Taunton Courier*, 16 May 1934, p. 1.
[340] 'Socialists Join with Jewish Finance', *Blackshirt*, 20 July 1934, p. 2; 'Hypocrisy – A National Menace', *Blackshirt*, 20 July 1934, p. 8.
[341] 'Raiding Chamberlain's Roost', *Blackshirt*, 3 August 1934, p. 5.
[342] 'Jewish Boycott Brings Suffering to Lancashire', *Blackshirt*, 17 August 1934, p. 1.
[343] 'Dismissed for Being a Blackshirt', *Blackshirt*, 27 July 1934, p. 1.
[344] '"Blackshirt" Banned By Newsagents', 3 August 1934, p. 1.

> at peace […] A new phase has entered the history of Fascism in Britain […] Fascism has accepted the challenge of Jewry.[345]

Despite the leader's annoyance that mainstream newspapers ignored him and his movement, several outlets reported on the meeting and its aftermath.[346] Included in the *Daily Express*'s analysis were further examples from the speech of Mosley's insistence on a so-called Jewish conspiracy: 'Jewish employers have dismissed men and women for no other reason than that they are Blackshirts […] There is a whole organised blackmail of the Press through their advertisers, who are extraordinarily strong and largely Jewish.' The newspaper reported on Mosley's threat that 'we shall deal with organised Jewry in this country because they have challenged the interests of the nation'.[347] In a similar vein, *The Times* printed Mosley's accusation of 'big business men ha[ving] come to him and said that they dare not come out for Fascism, or dare not remain in it, because if they did Jews would ruin their business'. According to the newspaper, Mosley spoke of 'the great organised blackmail […] [including] of any business man whose interests touched their [Jews] own […] we say to the alien race that rises against us to rob us of our heritage, we take up that challenge and deal with it. They shall have it.'[348] Richard Griffiths noted that 'by the end of the year, a full-blooded policy had been developed in which "the force of international Jewish finance", which had "dominated Britain ever since the war", was blamed for all the ills of the present. This policy was to continue right up to the war.'[349]

A consensus exists among historians that other prominent BUF figures besides the leader played a significant role in the BUF's attitude to, and official adoption of, antisemitism. Almost sixty years ago, in one of the earliest scholarly studies on the BUF, Colin Cross explained how 'pressure […] [existed] at every level in the BUF' for Mosley to adopt antisemitism, a stance he 'found [...] difficult to resist'.[350] In his thorough study on British interwar antisemitism, Colin Holmes noted the influence of

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[345] 'Blackshirts Take Up the Challenge Thrown Down by Jewry', *Blackshirt*, 2 November 1934, p. 1.
[346] Ibid.
[347] 'Sir O. Mosley Attacks British Jews', *Daily Express*, 29 October 1934, p. 2.
[348] 'Jews and Fascists', *The Times*, 5 November 1934, p. 14.
[349] *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 106.
[350] Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London 1961), p. 123.

'some individuals […] [who] encouraged the expression of their hostility'.[351] More recently, Thomas Linehan, Martin Pugh, Tilles, and Dorril (amongst others) have all highlighted the role other members contributed to the party's antisemitic position, most tellingly via Mosley's 'influential lieutenants' William Joyce and A.K Chesterton.[352]

Salvatore Garau's transnational study has investigated the influential 'factions' operating within the movement which, he found, dictated the party's stance on antisemitism. According to Garau, throughout the movement's lifetime, various opposing cliques operated. The two main internal groups were the 'conservatives/authoritarians who were more inclined towards Fascist Italy, and totalitarians/revolutionaries who were more inclined towards Nazi Germany'. These competing factions 'reproduced at a micro level the competition between Italian Fascism and German national socialism that was playing out at the macro level.' Preference was between a more moderate and 'respectable' form of fascism, like Mussolini's, or for the extreme, radical and 'truly revolutionary' ideas presented by Nazism. The former wished to make the BUF into an organised political party, as the Italian Fascists had transformed the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* into the PNF a year before the March on Rome. This strand played down the paramilitary aspects of the BUF and wanted to increase its electoral profile in the hope of achieving success through the ballot box. The radical strand (including Joyce and Chesterton), who took Germany as its exclusive example, looked to cultivate virulent antisemitism. They dismissed the BUF's existing elites, took on a more anti-capitalist rhetoric, and sought to turn the movement into a fully revolutionary party. In short, the 'Mussolini-like' element wanted respectability and adherence to the established order, while the Nazi faction did not believe in compromises, wishing instead to undertake paramilitary violence against its enemies in order to build mass appeal. These contrasting views, according to Garau, 'became the two poles around which […] the BUF developed'. He argued that the 'Mussolini-like' element was initially in control of the party until the

[351] Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876–1939* (New York, 1979), pp. 189–190.

[352] *British Fascism*, p. 176; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, pp. 156–176; '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution"', p. 39. For more on the members mentioned and their antisemitic ideals, see *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, pp. 183–190; *Black Shirt*, pp. 317–8 & 330–332.

adoption of antisemitism, which signified the Nazi group's takeover. This, in turn, forced a shift from a Roman to a Teutonic model of fascism.[353]

However, Garau, and others, appear to have seen considerably more authority in the character of those working under Mosley than is likely to be the case. If leading members in government, including prime ministers and cabinet ministers, were unable to hold sway over Mosley and – despite their most vigorous and sincere attempts – not to mention his best friends, closest allies and even his wife, it seems extremely unlikely that a bunch of cranks with little, if any, status would have been able to exert influence over the notoriously stubborn dictator, most certainly when it came to the policy decisions of his own party. The then Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and former colleague of Mosley's, Clement Attlee, described Mosley's manner as reminiscent of 'a feudal landlord abusing tenants who were in arrears with their rent'.[354] Likewise, the ex-Liberal leader Jo Grimond declared, the fascist leader an 'upper-class bully'.[355]

It has also been argued that BUF antisemitism had been 'merely suppressed during the Rothermere period'.[356] Lord Rothermere was an influential press baron who owned several newspapers, most notably the *Daily Mail*. In January 1934, Rothermere, although holding Hitler in high regard, believed Mussolini's brand of fascism was better suited to Britain given the latter's conservative and traditional values. When Rothermere agreed to support Mosley, this resulted in an upsurge in conservative and middle-class support for the BUF. Rothermere withdrew his only backing six months later over concerns that the BUF's use of antisemitism would lead to the withdrawal of Jewish advertisers in his newspapers.[357] What scholars like as Dorril and Tilles have failed to explain, however, is that if it was true, as they have suggested, that Rothermere's support led to the curbing of antisemitism in the BUF, why did Mosley openly ban Jews

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[353] Salvatore Garau, 'The Internationalisation of Italian Fascism in the face of German National Socialism, and its Impact on the British Union of Fascists', *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 15:1 (2014), pp. 54–63.
[354] Cited in *Oswald Mosley and the New Party*, p. 5.
[355] Quote from 'Simon Pia's Diary', *The Scotsman*, 26 April 2002, [www.scotsman.com/news/simon-pia-s-diary-1-504592], accessed 2 July 2019.
[356] *Black Shirt*, p. 304; '"Jewish Decay against British Revolution"', p. 41.
[357] *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, p. 168; 'The Internationalisation of Italian Fascism in the face of German National Socialism, and its Impact on the British Union of Fascists', p. 56.

from the movement in early May 1934, while still 'under the influence' of the press tycoon, and some two months before Rothermere turned his back on the fascists?

More plausibly, the reason for the BUF's turn towards open antisemitism was to attract funding from the Nazis, who had already criticised Mosley for his lack of antipathy towards Jews. As aforementioned, the financial agreement with the Duce began in March the previous year and was only guaranteed for 18 months. Therefore, Mosley would have been aware that the subsidies were likely to end in August 1934, a mere three months from the time of the banning of Jews from the BUF. Although Mussolini did continue with payments in the run-up to his African invasion, Mosley was not to know this at the time. In addition, as also aforementioned, despite Mussolini agreeing to send money to Mosley, the latter regularly complained of missed or delayed payments. In this way, Italian funding and transnational support was precarious and not to be relied upon. At the time, the Home Office estimated annual BUF expenditure was between £40,000 and £80,000 with Italy reported to contribute at least £36,000 to the BUF annually. MI5 noted that without funds from Italy, the British movement would cease to exist. Mosley was even reported to have informed Mussolini to that effect. It was 'for all practical purposes dependant on foreign funds'.[358]

Together with the BUF's increase in open antisemitism in a bid to attract the Nazis' attention, the movement also pursued an overtly pro-Nazi line. In May 1934, the rabid antisemite and Hitler worshipper, William Joyce, dominated the front pages of *Blackshirt*. On the same day as the BUF outlawed Jews, Mosley began a recruitment drive for speakers and Joyce, himself an impressive orator, was tasked with writing articles on 'If you want to be a Speaker.' Almost certainly copied from the Nazis, the instructions of the two-part piece insisted that 'those who wish to represent us on the platform' would need to immerse themselves in the appropriate literature, most notably the works of Hitler:

> Since Fascism cannot be dissociated from the great personalities who have made it, the student should read Drennan's book on the [BUF] Leader, Mussolini's autobiography, and Hitler's "My Struggle," more famous as "Mein Kampf." The latter work is of remarkable interest to speakers, who will find that Adolf Hitler has a shrewd appreciation of their problems. Whilst in training, the student will

[358] *Black Shirt*, pp. 329–330.

> naturally read as much of the daily and weekly press as he can absorb; and only a portion of what is absorbed can be retained.[359]

The following month, Mosley purposely used his 'monster meeting' at the Olympia Stadium to instigate a large melee which, he hoped, would attract the attention of press and politicians alike.[360] This, in turn, would alert the Germans and prove his commitment to the fascist cause, which the Nazis had previously doubted. Mosley was clearly aware that the meeting held on 7 June 1934 would result in 'mass violence'.[361] Speaking on BBC radio days after the brawl, an unrepentant Mosley admitted that 'we knew all about […] [the] Red violence […] and so did the authorities. For weeks before the meeting, incitements to attack it were published, and maps were printed to show how to get to the meetings.'[362] He was also obviously aware of the 15,000 tickets purchased for the event, making it, at the time, the largest indoor event Britain had ever seen.[363] Tellingly, Special Branch made no record of any preparations by Mosley to deal with the upcoming violence, which suggests he 'took no special precautions'.[364] In fact, the BUF member, Alex Miles later explained how 'the hall had been surveyed in order to discover how many men were required to control each exit and entrance.'[365] These 2,000 Blackshirts from around the country were called to duty that evening to 'swell the ranks of the Defence Force'.[366] When they arrived at the venue, alcohol was freely available, 'almost as freely as blood flowed during the course of the meeting'.[367] Violence at Olympia that evening was inevitable.

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[359] 'If You Want To Be A Speaker', *Blackshirt*, 4 May 1934, p. 1; 'More Hints For Speakers', *Blackshirt*, 18 May 1934, p. 1. Those in Germany who took to the platform for the Nazis were required to be versed in the works of Hitler, see Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Voice: Organisation and Development of the Nazi Party, The Volkischer Beobachter, 1920–1933* (New York, 2005).

[360] Cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939*, p. 128. For a scholarly article on Olympia, see Jon Lawrence, 'Fascist Violence and the Politics of Public Order in inter-war Britain: the Olympia Debate Revisited', *Historical Research* 76:192 (2003), pp. 238–267.

[361] *Black Shirt*, p. 229.

[362] 'The Leader's Broadcast', *Blackshirt*, 15 June 1934, p. 5

[363] *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939*, p. 128. Whether sold or given away, tickets were purchased through BUF publications. See, for example, 'The Great Rally at Olympia', *Fascist Week*, 18 May 1934, p. 1; 'Olympia', *Fascist Week*, 18 May 1934, p. 4; 'The Blackshirts. Twelve Page Issue for Olympia', *Fascist Week*, 25 May 1934, p. 1; 'Olympia Rally will beat Albert Hall Record', *Blackshirt*, 25 May 1934, p. 3.

[364] *Black Shirt*, p. 295

[365] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 295.

[366] *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 125.

[367] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 295.

At Olympia, moreover, the Blackshirts were overzealous from the outset. As soon as a heckler attempted to speak, 'there is no pause to hear what the interrupter is saying: there is no request to leave quietly: there is only mass assault.'[368] Pugh commented on the 'scores of eyewitness accounts of the violence meted out by fascist thugs on anyone who intervened to ask a question.'[369] Storm Jameson, one of several writers and journalists present observed 'a solitary man or woman stood up, made or began to make a remark inaudible to all but his close neighbours, and was instantly set on by a dozen or more Blackshirts and kicked and pummelled unrestrainedly, before being ejected.'[370] After being forcibly thrown out of the hall, Jameson claimed, 200 drunken Blackshirts set upon their prey like a pack of 'wolves'.[371] The BUF's official photographer, Kay Fredericks, was unsurprised by the amount of 'quite serious injuries [that] originated in this double beating-up process. It was not a matter of six to one this time, but about twenty to thirty'.[372] The editor of the *News Chronical* described 'a man lying on the floor, obviously powerless and done for, being mercilessly kicked and horribly handled by a group of Blackshirts'. He remarked upon how the scenes he witnessed that night were more brutal than 'anything I have ever seen in my life short of war. It made me feel physically sick.'[373]

Barnes and Barnes claimed that the assaults were conducted 'in typical Stormtrooper fashion' and 'dismayed some of Mosley's conservative supporters'.[374] Special Branch noted how the 'removals and interruptions' lasted for an hour, yet the police – who 'were so disgusted that they drew their truncheons, driving the Blackshirts back into the main hall and calling them "bloody bastards"' – were forced to leave the premises after a BUF official complained of their presence. Mosley had a strict 'no police' policy for

[368] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 296.
[369] *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 11.
[370] 'Fascists at Olympia' (1934), 12, Labour Party Archives, 329.8: cited in *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 125. Jameson went on to a speculative novel about what a fascist takeover in Britain would look like: *In the Second Year* (New York, 1936) [reprinted in 2004].
[371] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 297.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid.
[374] *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939*, p. 128.

the meeting.[375] The leader could have simply continued his speech, which contained 'virulent anti-Semitism', as the loudspeakers would have drowned out any heckling. Instead, he stopped talking and spotlights were shone upon the fighting so all in attendance could see.[376] According to Jameson, 'even fascist supporters were at a loss to know why [Mosley] held up his speech at each interruption for periods varying from three to six minutes when he could perfectly well have drowned them with a voice made unbearably loud by the amplifiers. Slowly we all understood that it was done to allow his Blackshirts to make a thorough mess of the interruptor [sic].'[377] Indeed, Mosely was 'cock-a-hoop' with all the trouble.[378]

His scheme worked. Attention was widespread. Reports of the melee flooded the press for days after.[379] Three Conservative MPs, who observed the palaver, felt moved enough to write to *The Times* that same evening. These 'involuntary witnesses' reported on the use of 'wholly unnecessary violence inflicted by uniformed Blackshirts on interrupters. Men and women were knocked down, and after they had been knocked down, were still assaulted and kicked on the floor. It will be a matter of surprise to us if there were no fatal injuries'.[380] Politicians criticised the BUF. According to the *News Chronicle*, the 150 MPs present at Olympia were unanimous in condemning the behaviour of the Blackshirts there, and put pressure on the government 'to get a grip on the situation'.[381]

However, the condemnation of violence was not the only viewpoint expressed. Several commentators saw the Blackshirts as merely defending themselves and their meeting from their antagonists. For example, in the *National Review* Captain Luttman-Johnson – Secretary of the pro-fascist January Club – spoke of 'the fine bearing of the young

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[375] Cited in *Black Shirt*, pp. 297–298. The Public Meetings Bill of 1908 made it an offence to create disorder at a meeting so as to prevent the transaction of the business, see 'Public Meeting Bill' 19 December 1908, *Hansard*.
[376] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 296; *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 127.
[377] 'Fascists at Olympia' (1934), 12, Labour Party Archives, 329.8: Cited in *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!*, p. 126.
[378] *Black Shirt*, p. 297.
[379] *The Daily Mirror*, 8, 12 & 13 June, 1934, p. 3; *Daily Express*, 8, 9 & 12 June, p. 2; *The Yorkshire Post*, 8 & 12 June, 1934, p. 11; *The Times*, 8, 9, 11 & 12 June 1934, p. 15.
[380] 'Blackshirt Tactics – to the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 8 June 1934, p. 14.
[381] *News Chronicle*, 8 & 9 June 1934.

Blackshirt men and women under extreme provocation'.[382] Several Tory MPs complained that 'without freedom of speech there can be no democracy'.[383] Some even dismissed the melee as 'the good old fashioned way by the use of a fist', or as an average Saturday night at the Cow-caddens in Glasgow. Others asked the question: 'Why are we making all this fuss about this wretched meeting at Olympia?'[384] The MP for Argyll, Mr Frederick Macquisten, perhaps made the most poignant comment when he attacked the MP who brought the debate to the House of Commons: 'I should think that he [Mosley] will throw up his hat with glee to-morrow when he sees the magnificent advertisement he has been given by the hon. Member for Bodmin, and still more when he sees the House, and all parties in the House, in such a state of panic.' Macquisten accurately concluded that Mosley must have been 'profoundly grateful' to the House for this debate.[385]

Regardless of who was to blame, it appeared Mosley was achieving what he set out to do: to make the Nazis rethink their view of him and his movement. German newspapers marvelled at the 'energetic defence of Blackshirts in a bloody battle' against Communists. The German Foreign Ministry said that Olympia was symptomatic of events which were occurring throughout England: the 'growth of support for British fascism, lively activity in meetings and recruitment together with the growth of an aggressive and defensive rejection of fascism by its opponents'.[386] Discreet discussions took place between the BUF's head of foreign relations, George A. Pfister, and the Nazis over a potential meeting between Mosley and the German Führer. In a statement passed to the Nazis, Mosley said 'It is beyond question that the present and future outlook brings my operation even closer to Arnold's [his codename for Hitler] so that close cooperation is absolutely necessary. We both have the same aims.' In a clear turn from Mussolini to Hitler, Mosley declared that the BUF was in excellent agreement with Italian Fascism, but 'Arnold's business is of greater importance'. He also committed to hard-line antisemitism: 'As far as our opponents of non-Aryan race are

[382] *National Review*, July 1934.
[383] *English Review*, July 1934, pp. 9–10; *Saturday Review*, 16 June 1934; *National Review*, July 1934.
[384] 'Class III. Home Office.' 14 June 1934 (by 'Earl Winterton' at 1984; 'Mr Macquisten' at 2036), *Hansard*.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 300.

concerned, we will have to take the most drastic measures as soon as we are in power, or we will have no rest.'[387]

From this point until the movement's proscription, Mosley continued to laud the Nazis. He regularly claimed that Hitler was Europe's saviour from Communism.[388] In early July, when the vast majority of the British public gasped in horror at the infamous Rohm purge, infamously coined the 'Night of the Long Knives', the BUF came out solidly in defence of the Führer.[389] In *Blackshirt*, under the title 'Hitler's Stand Against Financiers And Intriguers', the BUF claimed that international finance had prepared a revolution in Germany for the overthrow of Hitler. Moreover, the murdered 'conspirators' had either succumbed to 'financial inducements' or were susceptible to influence:

> Out of gratitude for their help in the early days, Hitler had treated these officers with every consideration; and there is plenty of evidence to show that they repaid his loyalty by leading extravagant lives, most unworthy of their position. They now added, to these the greatest Fascist crime of disloyalty to their leader, through whom alone their cause had triumphed.[390]

*Blackshirt* also began quoting from Hitler's autobiography. A column titled 'A Topical Quotation from "Mein Kampf"' was a lengthy extract from the infamous book, which included the following section on the Jews:

> international world-Jew is slowly, but surely strangling us, our so-called "patriots" are raging against the man and a System that have had the courage to tear themselves free, in one bit of the world at least [in reference to Italy], from the Jew-Freemason embrace, and to oppose the international world poison with the forces of nationalism.[391]

By now some politicians, certain sections of the press and members of the public linked the BUF directly with Nazism. Antifascists would demonstrate at BUF meetings

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[387] *Black Shirt*, p. 301.
[388] For example, see 'Sir Oswald Mosley and Hitler', *Western Daily Press*, 6 July 1934, p. 8.
[389] The magazine *John Bull* went as far as to say 'Hitler killed fascism in this country tonight': cited in *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 330. Purge of Nazi leaders by Adolf Hitler, including the killing of his friend Ernst Röhm. Hitler feared that the army (SA) had become too powerful and ordered his elite *SS* guards to execute the organization's leaders.
[390] 'The end of German Reaction', *Blackshirt*, 6 July 1934, p. 7.
[391] 'A Topical Quotation from Mein Kampf', *Blackshirt*, 3 August 1934, p. 4.

holding caricatures of Mosley and Hitler while shouting 'Unite to Fight the Fascist Terror.'[392] General Secretary of the Community Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, argued that Mosley was using the same methods in Britain as Hitler had used to gain power in Germany.[393] *The Observer* described 'the Nazi technique' and the 'Nazi temper' of the BUF.[394] The regional papers ran headlines, such as 'Sir Oswald Mosley and Hitler' and 'Mosley Praises Hitler'.[395] Reported widely in the press was ex-Conservative MP and critic of Mosley, Lord Melchett, who, after hearing Mosley's recent outbursts, labelled the British fascist leader a 'second-hand Hitler'.[396] In its coverage of the Albert Hall meeting, *The Church Time*s stated how Mosley had

> declared war on the Jews, in terms that might have been quotations from Nazi speeches and publications […] [His speech] appears to be one more attempt to arouse sympathy here for the Hitler Government by charging the Jews with striving "to arouse in this country the feelings and passions of war with a nation with whom this country made peace in 1918." If they have striven to do this, they have signally failed.[397]

However, Mosley was unable to convince the leading Nazi in Britain, Bene, that the BUF was of any relevance. Furthermore, Bene was still of the opinion that the BUF was at the behest of Jewish interests. Bene repeatedly rebuffed Pfister's attempts to arrange a meeting between Mosley and Hitler:

> During the past ten days [Pfister] visited the German Nazi Party offices in London on several occasions to negotiate for a meeting through Herr Bene of Sir Oswald Mosley and Herr Hitler in Germany. Bene has definitely refused to arrange the matter and moreover has informed Dr. E. W. Bohle, leader of the foreign department of the Nazi Party in Hamburg, of his decision; and further, that Mosley is a person of little importance. He also expressed the view that no good would accrue to the Party and its aims as the result of such a meeting.

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[392] 'Rival Meetings in Hyde Park', *The Times,* 10 September 1934, p 9.
[393] Ibid.
[394] 'Freedom and Order', *The Observer*, 17 June 1934, p. 16;
[395] *Western Daily Press,* 6 July 1934, p. 8; *Aberdeen Press and Journal,* 6 July 1934, p. 7.
[396] 'Secondhard Hitler', *Daily Express* 5 November 1934, p. 13. 'Sir Oswald Mosley Criticised', *The Yorkshire Post*, 5 November 1934, p. 7; 'A Second-Hand Hitler', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1934, p. 12; 'Jews and Fascists', *The Times,* 5 November 1934, p. 14; 'A Second-Hand Hitler', *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail,* 5 November 1934, p. 6; 'Mosley A 'Second-Hand Hitler', *Dundee Courier,* 5 November 1934, p. 7; 'Lord Melchett & Fascists', *Daily Herald,* 5 November 1934, p. 3.
[397] 'Summary', *The Church Times,* 2 November 1934, p. 467.

> Pfister intimated that he would attempt to bring about the meeting through other channels, but it is unlikely, in view of Bene's attitude, that he will succeed.[398]

These 'other channels', as mentioned in the Home Office report, included using the visit of Lothar Streicher to London over the summer. This was undertaken to persuade the young Nazi to return to Germany and convince his influential father, Julius Streicher, to negotiate a meeting between the two fascist leaders. Again, Pfister's plan failed. Mosley even met with Bene in secret in an unsuccessful attempt to win him over. Mosley told the influential Nazi

> we have never received a penny from Jews. I give you my word of honour […] During the first few months I intentionally said not even one word against the Jews. If I had done so we would never have been able to withstand the power of the Jews. We would have been simply crushed. We were not strong enough then. Today we are so strong that we are feared […] [W]e should attack no Jew on the grounds of his religion or race. We attack them because of their damaging influence on the people, because of their internationalism, because of their many activities of all kinds against the good of the people. The outcome is the same. [The] anti-German world boycott by the Jews is led from London. And I imagine that you are well aware in Germany what it will mean if we break Jewish power here […] Open war […] I will contribute my part in order to hasten this explosion and I have so organised my plan of campaign that they will find us ready, whatever they do.[399]

Mosley was finally granted an audience with the Führer in April 1935. Dorril has argued that Hitler had resisted meeting the British fascist leader, as he was concerned that the encounter would become public and therefore damage relations with the British government. He claimed that the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of June 1935, 'eased British fears of a German sea threat and a naval arms race [… and therefore] Hitler believed the treaty freed him from British interference in his own plans.'[400] However, the treaty was not signed by both nations until mid-June 1935, two months after the meeting, and was not registered in the *League of Nations Treaty Series* until July.

A more likely explanation for the meeting was through a somewhat surprising and intriguing relationship between the Führer and two young aristocratic British sisters: Unity and Diana Mitford. Unity, the fifth of seven children, met Mosley around the time he formed the BUF. Her older sister, Diana, who was now Mosley's mistress,

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[398] Cited in *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930–1939*, p. 129.
[399] Cited in *Black Shirt*, pp. 302–303.
[400] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 341.

introduced them to one another at a party.[401] As soon as Unity saw him, she called him 'the Leader' and, almost instantly, donned the new black shirt.[402] Both sisters were part of the BUF contingent who visited the first Nuremberg Rally in the autumn of 1933, where an excited Diana described how 'an almost electric shock passed through the multitude' when Hitler appeared.[403] The Nuremberg Rally had a profound effect on Unity and Diana. Although already an admirer of Hitler, the Rally 'turned conviction into worship' for Unity.[404] As the younger sister later said, 'the first moment I saw him, I knew there was no-one I would rather meet'.[405]

In February 1935 through stalking and 'making eyes at him' daily at his favourite restaurant in Munich, the Osteria Bavaria, she finally met her idol, Hitler.[406] The Führer invited her to his table and spoke with the young Englishwomen at length, becoming 'intrigued by her'.[407] She described that day in letters to her family: 'It was the most wonderful and beautiful of my life [...] I am so happy that I wouldn't mind a bit dying. I suppose I am the luckiest girl in the world. For me he is the greatest man of all time'.[408] Unity quickly became part of Hitler's inner circle. She accompanied Hitler to party rallies and state events, and her family were even invited to dine with the Führer. Unity was very much '*persona grata*' with Hitler until she killed herself on the day that war was declared.[409]

The following month Diana, urged by Mosley to form a friendship with Hitler via Unity, drove to Munich where she was introduced by her sister to 'sweet Uncle

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[401] *My Life*, p. 308.
[402] Interview with Unity Mitford's biographer David Pryce-Jones in 'Hitler's British Girl (1/4)', *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-lWnUBtMbU&t=7s], clip 14.05–1410, accessed 2 July 2019.
[403] *Life of Contrasts*, p. 103; *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, p. 260.
[404] Interview with Mitford biographer Anne de Courcy in 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfFkG-5_PTI&t=528s], clip 3.05–3.15, accessed 2 July 2019.
[405] In an interview with the *Evening Standard*: cited in David Pryce-Jones, *Unity Mitford, An Enquiry Into Her Life and the Frivolity of Evil* (New York, 1977), p. 88.
[406] In the summer of 1934, Unity moved to Munich, close to the headquarters of the Nazi Party, and 'set her mind on getting Hitler'. She discovered he ate at the Osteria Bavaria at roughly the same time each day
[407] Interview with Nicholas Mosley, in 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 5.00–5.15.
[408] *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family*, pp. 260–261; Mary Lovell, *The Mitford Girls* (London, 2001), see Chapter 'Unity and the Führer (1934–5)'. Also, see 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 5.40–5.55.
[409] Interview with Anne De Courcy in 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 6.00–6.15.

Adolf'.[410] The sisters, for several reasons, fascinated Hitler. First, he was attracted by their Nordic beauty. He described the two sisters as 'angels', and admired their physical features 'so much so that both sisters got away with wearing the make-up of which he so disapproved'.[411] After meeting Diana, he described the sisters as 'perfect examples of Aryan women'.[412] Second, Hitler was surrounded by 'yes men' who were afraid to question their leader. In contrast, the sisters were not seemingly scared of him, and would freely voice their own opinions. At least from these foreign guests, Hitler respected and appreciated that.[413]

Last, and perhaps most importantly, there was also Hitler's obsession with superstition and his own role in German history and mythology. One commenter branded him 'a patron of occult mysticism'.[414] The connections, particularly with Unity, appeared remarkable to mystically inclined Nazis. Unity was conceived in a tiny mining town in Canada called Swastika and her middle name was Valkyrie, after the war maidens in Wagner's opera.[415] Hitler was obsessed with Wagner, drawing ideas from his writings and opera.[416] Furthermore, the sisters' grandfather (the first Lord Redesdale) was a friend of Wagner's.[417] Redesdale had also written introductions for and translated books by the racial theorist, Houston Stewart Chamberlain: an author who had profoundly influenced Hitler when writing *Mein Kampf*.[418] When he discovered the links it would have been, for him, 'a sort of sign' that the sisters were 'sent to him, it was destined'.[419] Crucially, it was the two sisters who convinced Hitler to meet with their Leader, Mosley.

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[410] *Black Shirt*, pp. 335–336.
[411] Anne De Courcy, *Diana Mosley* (London, 2003), p. 150.
[412] 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 7.20–7.25.
[413] Interview with Nicholas Mosley in 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 7.00–7.15.
[414] William Main's book review of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York, 1992), [www.ewtn.com/library/NEWAGE/NAZIOCCU.TXT], accessed 2 July 2019.
[415] 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 8.30–8.40.
[416] Joachim Kohler, *Wagner's Hitler: The Prophet and his Disciple* (Cambridge, 2001). In it, Kohler argues that Hitler based his entire philosophy and the whole Nazi apparatus on ideas explicitly drawn from Wagner′s writings and operas.
[417] Lord Redesdale, *Memories* Volume 2 (New York, date unknown), pp. 769–793 (Chapter XLII), [https://archive.org/details/cu31924071237816], accessed 2 July 2019.
[418] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* Volume 1 (London, 1998), p. 151.
[419] Interview with Mitford biographer Jan Dalley in 'Hitler's British Girl (2/4)', clip 8.50–9.00.

As Dorril has stated, no transcript of this pivotal meeting has survived.[420] Therefore, we have to rely on Mosley's depiction of the conversation. According to Mosley, his host became elated when he insisted that 'war between Britain and Germany would be a terrible disaster'. Mosley guaranteed Hitler that if he was head of the British government, maintaining the British Empire would be his priority and German affairs (domestic or foreign) would be no business of Great Britain: 'The men with whom we quarrel in life are those who want the same thing as we do, with consequent clash of interest; Hitler and I pursued different paths.'[421] Following the conversation, Unity asked Hitler his opinion of Mosley. He replied, '*Ein ganzer Keril*! [Quite a man]', while Goebbels claimed he made 'a good impression'.[422] Inevitably, the request for funds followed shortly after the meet.[423]

In a bid to obtain money, Mosley continued to display his party's commitment to antisemitism.[424] Furthermore, as a mark of allegiance to Hitler, he made cosmetic changes to the BUF which clearly identified it with the Nazi model. In early 1936, he changed the BUF's dress to a Nazi-style uniform, replacing the Italianesque black shirt with a black jacket, peaked cap and jackboots. Later that year, he extended the movement's name to the 'British Union of Fascists and National Socialists' ('British Union' for short) and changed its emblem from the Roman fasces to the Naziesque flash-and-circle.[425] In addition, at the behest of Hitler, Mosley agreed to marry Diana in Germany (October 1936). According to Allen, who was present at the wedding, Hitler had 'certain bourgeois scruples in sexual matters' and did not like the idea of the two living together while not married.[426] Hitler was not only present at the wedding but arranged the event.[427] Mosley insisted that the wedding be kept a secret because he feared Diana would be a target for violence if it became known she was his wife.[428] He insisted they were not to marry in their own country or at a British embassy abroad, for

[420] *Black Shirt*, p. 341.
[421] *My Life*, p. 305.
[422] Cited in *Black Shirt*, p. 342.
[423] *Black Shirt*, p. 345.
[424] For example, the East End campaign, see *East London for Mosley*.
[425] *Black Shirt*, p. 371.
[426] TNA KV 2/880, 'Interrogation of W.E.D. Allen', 27 February 1942 (129a).
[427] Ibid.
[428] *My Life*, p. 303; 'Yes or No Would Help', *Daily Express*, 29 November 1938, p. 6 & 'Sir O. Mosley is Father of a 10-lb. Baby Son', 1 December 1938, p. 13.

'We might as well tell the town crier.'[429] However, if this was a cause of great concern for Mosley, and if he was truly fearful for Diana's safety, it begs the question why he would marry her at a time when he was subject to such hostility.

A more plausible explanation for the marriage taking place in Germany was to build a closer relationship with Hitler in the hope of obtaining much-needed funds – at a time when Mussolini's subsidy had shrunk considerably. It is likely that Mosley thought the wedding would strengthen the bond of friendship between the two fascist leaders in several ways. One, inviting Hitler to their 'big day' was in itself a symbol of friendship. Two, Mosley had not been granted another audience with Hitler since his first 18 months earlier, and his wedding was an ideal opportunity to rectify that. Three, Diana's (and Unity's) relationship with the German leader had strengthened since Mosley's initial meeting with him.[430] By marrying Diana, it may have curried favour with Hitler because of the Führer's fondness for his new wife.

Although rumours of Nazi funding for the BUF were commonplace in the secret services, they could find no evidence to support the theories.[431] However, in 2006, Dorril uncovered evidence of German payments. His analysis focuses largely on the diary of Hitler's propaganda chief, Dr Josef Goebbels, and the Luxembourg Nazi Party. The diary shows entries during mid-1937 confirming that the Nazis did fund the BUF: 'Mosley needs money […] Wants it from us. Has already had £2,000 [...] £100,000 necessary. £60,000 promised. Must submit to Führer.' Shortly hereafter, Diana, on behalf of her husband, pleaded with Goebbels 'for an infusion of £100,000'. Further requests were made over the summer but came with a warning: 'Mosley must work harder and be less mercenary […] [Diana] wants money again for Mosley […] She was fed with hopes. Should help themselves sometimes.'[432] This reinforces the Nazis' suspicion that Mosley's primary motivation to build and maintain a relationship with them was financial. Through examining the Luxembourg Nazi Party, Dorril revealed that £4,000 worth of francs was given to the BUF from the Germans through 'Agent 18'.[433] Diana's direct appeals to high-ranking Nazis appear to have secured funding for the BUF. It is likely the reason for the Nazis' largesse on the grounds that, like the

[429] *My Life*, p. 304.
[430] *My Life*, pp. 308–309.
[431] *Black Shirt*, pp. 316–342.
[432] *Black Shirt*, pp. 376–377 & 381.
[433] *Black Shirt*, pp. 381 & 409.

Italians, they incorrectly believed that Mosley may have been able to stifle British hostility to their expansionist foreign policy.

Although it appears Hitler did action Diana's repeated requests for funding, the Nazis were significantly less generous in their financial contributions to Mosley than the Italians had been.[434] Therefore, Mosley was forced to seek other moneymaking ventures to keep his personal affairs and his movement afloat. He took full advantage of his relationship with the Nazis. In 1938, Mosley successfully petitioned the Nazi regime on behalf of the wealthy Jewish banking tycoon Victor Rothschild for the safe passage of his cousin, Louis de Rothschild, who was imprisoned by the Nazis in Austria after the Anschluss. During his interrogation in 1942 by the head of MI5's section for monitoring fascist groups in Britain, Francis Aiken-Sneath, Allen, who by this time was readily cooperating with the British authorities, described the event as 'the ransoming of Louis de Rothschild'.[435] According to Allen, who acted as an intermediary for the negotiations, Oliver Hoare (the banker brother of Samuel) had been approached by the Rothschilds in Paris and asked if he could obtain Mosley's assistance. Rothschild offered Mosley £40,000 [£2.6 million approx.] if he could secure the release of his cousin through using his connections in Germany, but Mosley demanded £120,000 [£8 million approx.] for his efforts. After retaining the services of a Belgian Rexist financier named Wryns who was to collect 25 per cent for receiving the money, Mosley sent Diana to Berlin to see Himmler who granted Louis's freedom. Mosley received £80,000 [5.3 million approx.] for his help in securing the release, some of which, according to Allen, was used to pay off a private mortgage.[436]

By this time, the British press had reported on a number of incidents verifying Mosley's ties to the Nazis. For example, in May 1935, it was revealed that Mosley had been exchanging friendly telegrams with, the rabid antisemitic Nazi, Julius Streicher; and by the end of 1938, it was common knowledge of the Mosley's wedding in Munich, which was witnessed by Hitler.[437] Furthermore, through its own publications, the BUF did not

[434] TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, p. 19, (134a).
[435] TNA KV 2/880, 'Interrogation of W.E.D. Allen', 27 February 1942 (129a).
[436] Ibid; TNA KV 2/880, 'Shorthand note taken at the interview of W.E.D. Allen', 8 April 1942, p. 19, (134a).
[437] 'Sir O. Mosley and "Jewish Corruption": Telegram to Notorious Nazi Jew-Hater', *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 May 1935, p. 13. 'Streicher Wires to Mosley', *Daily*

hide its support for the Nazis (see below). Therefore, the BUF was viewed in Britain as having close relations with the Nazi regime.

Another notable example of Mosley using his relationship with Nazis for his gain was the selling of radio advertising space from offshore broadcasting locations transmitting to the UK. Again, against the wishes of Ribbentrop and Goebbels, who had 'not been particularly well disposed to the scheme',[438] Diana convinced 'Uncle Adolf' to sanction the use of German land for the radio plan. In an interview with the security services, a broadcasting expert assisting Mosley, Peter Eckersley, explained that 'The Germany concession had been obtained by Diana Mosley who […] had sat in Berlin for over a year, nagging at Nazi officials to give it to her. At last she went to Hitler personally, and after some difficulty, got the concession direct from him.' According to Eckersley, Mosley was going to use the money obtained from the profits for the BUF funds.[439] However, the Allied declaration of war in September 1939 meant 'the whole lot had gone to smash'.[440]

Unsurprisingly, given Mussolini's rebuff and Hitler's willingness to finance the struggling movement – while entertaining the radio broadcast plan on German soil – the remaining years of the BUF's existence saw it continue its avidly pro-Nazi style and stance.[441] These came under the guise of campaigns such as 'Mind Britain's Business' and 'Britain First', which called for peace with Germany. Almost weekly, the movement's newspapers attacked the British press over their hostile reporting of Hitler and the Nazis. In 1937, *Action* ran a weekly column called 'National Socialism & the British People' in which it argued that 'Much ink has been spilt by the scribes of the gutter press in their efforts to persuade the people that National Socialism will deny them the rights of free speech. When in point of fact National Socialism will bring to

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*Herald*, 11 May 1935, p. 2; 'Sir O. Mosley's Marriage', *The Hull Daily Mail*, 30 November 1938, p. 10; 'Sir Oswald Mosley. Hitler was Witness', *The Scotsman*, 29 November 1938, p. 13; 'Sir O. Mosley on his Marriage', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 November 1938, p. 11; 'Sir O. Mosley: Berlin "Marriage" Rumour', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 28 November 1938, p. 1.

[438] TNA KV 2/880, 'Interrogation of W.E.D. Allen', 27 February 1942 (129a).

[439] 'Report of Interview with Captain P.P. Eckersley', 12 December 1934, (96x), p. 1.

[440] Ibid., p. 5.

[441] In early 1937, the BUF was nearly bankrupt. Mosley mortgaged his estate for £80,000 and put £100,000 of his private finances into the movement: *Black Shirt*, p. 409.

this country for the first time real opportunities for free speech.'[442] The following year, *Action* regularly reported on and supported Hitler's condemnation of the British press.[443] In 1939, the BUF ran another regular anti-British press series in *Action* titled 'This Freedom! "Our Great and Glorious Press"'.[444] Following the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, there featured in the same newspaper an almost weekly column titled 'The Press and The War' in which examples of British newspapers being critical of the Führer were printed and '"popular" press reporters' were branded 'third-rate fiction writers'.[445]

In addition, the BUF defended every major foreign policy move that the Nazis undertook in the run-up to the Second World War, Mosley describing Hitler as 'a singularly shrewd, lucid intellectual'.[446] For example, Hitler's *Anschluss* (Union) with Austria, was vigorously defended in *Action*. The BUF attacked the 'dishonesty of the Press racketeers: The impression of an Austria cowed into submission by brutal Hitler is […] far from the truth […] [and the press have] serve[d] up dangerous falsehoods in the guise of truth.' To support its argument, the BUF included an extract from 'one of the few sane articles yet published on the Austro-German situation'. According to the *Daily Express*

> An Austrian plebiscite a few years ago would have given Hitler an overwhelming majority in favour of joining Austria to Germany […] Some of that fervour has cooled, but the Austrians in the mass are by no means unfavourable to the idea now […] Anybody who goes to save Austria from Hitler will find half the Austrians fighting on Hitler's side.[447]

Despite insisting six months before the occupation that Germany would not invade Czechoslovakia – because 'I reject utterly the whole conception of Hitler breaking his word' – Mosley claimed that 'internal disruption' encouraged by the British was responsible for the Nazi invasion. This was nothing to do with Germany, but a 'bid for

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[442] *Action*: 9, 16 and 23 October 1937, all located on page 14.
[443] For example, 'Hitler Lashes the Liars', *Action*, 26 February 1938, p. 11; 'Hitler's Attacks On The Press', *Action*, 5 November 1938, p. 3.
[444] For example, *Action*, 15 July 1939, p. 9; *Action*, 5 August 1939, p. 2.
[445] For example, *Action*, all page 2: 23 & 30 September 1939; 19 & 26 October 1939; 8, 15, 22 & 29 February 1940.
[446] 'Sir Oswald Mosley Defends Hitler', *The Birmingham Post*, 17 July 1939, p. 11.
[447] 'Press Lies Must Be Stopped', *Action*, 26 February 1938, p. 11.

independence by the discontented Slovaks' who pleaded to Berlin for assistance.[448] By defending a 'small but insolent people [who] love to lord it over their German minorities [the British government] have encouraged the Czechs to provoke a world catastrophe'.[449] The BUF even bemoaned the Czechoslovak refugees fleeing from German occupation for 'seeking Britons' jobs'.[450]

The day after the Nazis invaded Poland, the BUF attacked Poland and blamed the victorious governments of the First World War for the subsequent assault:

> The Poles were a perpetual nuisance to Czarist Russia, and there was a permanent state of rebellion among the many races which constituted the Hapsburg and Turkish Empires. In addition, it must be remembered that before the war a large part of the present Poland belonged to Germany […] The truth is that in destroying the Austro-Hungarian Empire – the only bulwark against German expansion – and dividing the Balkan States, the politicians made it inevitable that Germany should, at some time or other, dominate Eastern Europe. They also made it certain that we could do nothing practical to stop it. They have, in fact, only themselves to blame […] And that being the case, why should millions of British lives be sacrificed in an attempt to upset a situation which they themselves have created? [451]

In the days preceding the outbreak of war, fascists congregated outside, the soon-to-be prime minister, Winston Churchill's Epping constituency office to chant 'Mind Britain's Business'. To this, Churchill responded: 'We are minding our own business. We don't want organisations which seem chiefly to be minding Germany's business.'[452]

Attacks on Jews, who were 'the aliens of peace' with Germany, remained a significant feature of the movement's rhetoric in its final years. Between 1937 and 1940, Jews were attacked on the front page of BUF periodicals at an average of almost one in every two issues.[453] For example, in January 1937, the BUF proclaimed that 'Not the whole of Jewry with all its Press, all its films and all its hacks can make the British people hate

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[448] 'Warmongers Exposed', *Action*, 25 March 1939, p. 1.
[449] 'Stop Czech Nonsense', *Action*, 18 June 1938, p. 1.
[450] 'Czech Applies for Briton's Job', *Action*, 2 September 1939, p. 16.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Cited in David Thomas, *Churchill: The Member for Woodford* (London, 1995), p. 95.
[453] In an analysis of *Blackshirt*, *Action* and *Fascist Week* between 1 January 1937 to 4 April 1940, Jews featured in 111 front pages out of 247.

the Germany which has found her soul in Adolf Hitler.'[454] The following year, Mosley proudly announced in *Action* that his party has 'at each stage opposed the quarrel with Germany […] [undertaken] in the interests of Jewish finance'.[455] In the June 1939 issue of *Blackshirt*, Mosley wrote: 'We hear their [Jews'] broken English from political platforms pretending to lead the workers and urging them on to fight Germany or any other country which has attacked the Jewish race […] Britons Never, Never Shall Be Slaves, Least Of All To An Alien Master.'[456] In April 1940, eight months after Britain declared war on Germany, the BUF declared that 'it is not the fate of small nations which keeps us at war with Germany, but the blood feud against that country of the Jewish Finance which is the master of Financial Democracy.'[457] The following month, the British government interned Mosley and many BUF members, fearing they were operating as a Nazi 'fifth column'.[458]

This chapter has identified clear transnational activity in both Mosley's pre-fascist years and in his movement, the BUF. Mosley's early thinking was heavily affected by his industrial fact-finding mission across the United States in which he visited, among other types, a vast array of manufacturing and engineering works. Together with a tour of the US Federal Reserve Board, he took these experiences and formed his own ideas, which culminated in future attitudes and policies. Several years later, after becoming disillusioned with the British political system and those within it, he took an active interest in European political systems that unequivocally rejected democracy, including, somewhat surprisingly, Russia, where he was interested in the Communists rationalisation programme. However, the ultranationalist Italian Fascism was the inspiration behind the BUF, and it played a significant role in Mosley's vision of a British Corporate State, which would replace what he saw as the tired, old and weak democratic parliamentary system. Therefore, the BUF, with its palingenetic and ultra-nationalistic fascism, fits Griffin's model of a fascist minimum.

Mosley's quest for funding led the BUF to take an overtly pro-Fascist attitude. This sentiment continued after payments were secured, but, in exchange for the subsidies,

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[454] 'Mosley Shall Win', *Blackshirt*, 2 January 1937, p. 1.
[455] 'Humiliation Instead of War', *Action*, 26 February 1938, p. 1.
[456] 'Jew Menace', *Blackshirt*, June 1939, p. 1.
[457] 'The Taste of Boot-Black', *Action*, 4 April 1940, p. 1.
[458] Robert Loeffel, *The Fifth Column in World War II: Suspected Subversives in the Pacific War* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. lxxii.

Mussolini demanded the BUF work for the money, which resulted in the 'Mind Britain's Business' campaign. Therefore, financial assistance from the Italians had a direct impact on BUF policy. When funding decreased and eventually stopped altogether, Mosley and the BUF periodicals continued to refer to Mussolini and his nation in positive terms. By then, however, their attention had turned firmly in another direction.

The second half of this chapter has been devoted to the BUF's relations with Hitler and his Nazi Party. Alongside courting the Italians, Mosley also attempted to build relations with the Nazis. The BUF adopted an open policy of antisemitism and perpetrated violence to attract the attention of the Nazis in an attempt to acquire funds from Hitler. Furthermore, BUF branches were formed in German cities in an attempt to connect with Nazi officials. Yet, the intriguing relationship between the Mitford sisters and Hitler was what finally gained Mosley an audience with the Führer. From this, the BUF received a cash injection from the Nazis as well as permission to use German land to broadcast to the UK to sell radio advertising space. As a result of Hitler's support, the BUF wholehearted supported every one of the Nazis aggressive foreign invasions that led to the Second World War, while doing its utmost to prevent war between Britain and Germany.

Initially, each case study's transnationalism began with the influence of Italian Fascism before taking different paths – Mussolini for a time was the messiah of all three movements. The BUF was obsessively pro-Fascist for the first few years of its existence and then favoured the German model thereafter. Likewise, at first, the IFL favoured Mussolini but when the Nazis emerged onto the scene, it immediately became zealously pro-Hitler and wholehearted supported him for the remained of its lifetime. The BF always considered Italian Fascism its ideological brethren moved somewhat ideological closer to the Nazis in the 1930s. Furthermore, the BUF, IFL and the BF adopted the Italian Corporatism – the BUF and the IFL from the outset and the BF in the second half of its life.

It is almost certain that both the BUF and the IFL were, at least in part, funded by a foreign power (the BF may or may not have received a small donation from the Nazis, although the evidence for this is weak). However, it is evident that Mosley altered BUF polices and activities in exchange for funding from both Mussolini and then Hitler. In

contrast, the IFL's funding, which came exclusively from the Nazis, was a consequence of its fixed and longstanding White supremacist ideology and antisemitism. From as soon as the Nazis came to his attention, Leese supported them fully. In contrast, Mosley courted them both and favoured whichever fascist power could benefit him and his movement. This is played out most obviously in the role of antisemitism in the BUF.

Interestingly, despite it being the most well-known and popular of the three case studies and its leader the most intellectually gifted and charismatic of the three leaders, it probably had the least influence transnationally. Its attempt to form an alliance with far-right movements across the Empire was a damp squib and collapsed almost immediately after its inception. On the other hand, the IFL was a well-respected and important source for extreme Jew-haters across the globe, while BF branches abroad at some degree of impact on the countries outside of Britain in which it operated.

## Conclusion: 'You choose your side once and for all – of course it may be the wrong side. Only history can tell that.'[1]

This thesis has proved that transnationalism was an essential factor to interwar British fascism. It has uncovered, analysed, and explained the transnational influences and connections from abroad, most notably from Italian Fascism and German Nazism, on Britain's three major fascist parties during the interwar era – the British Fascisti (BF), the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and the British Union of Fascists (BUF) – and, in turn, the impact that these three movements had on their overseas counterparts. In so doing, this study has enhanced several areas of scholarship. First, it is the first in-depth investigation of the British far right from a transnational perspective. Second, it adds a further and much-needed dimension to the new and underdeveloped sphere of transnational fascism. In so doing, it has uncovered significant and unexplored aspects of the far right and, as a result, has offered a more complete picture of the larger context of which it is a part. Third, it brings a fresh approach to the abundance of work relating to interwar British fascism undertaken by historians. Forth, for the first time, this study brings together studies of British fascism and fascism in the White dominions in a way that shows the links and overlaps as, partly, imperial. Finally, it has crossed three spheres of scholarship: historical, cultural and political. Therefore, it has extended our understanding of the significance of the far right in Britain and beyond.

However, to enhance this investigation, further areas of research are required. Due to the limitation on space, this thesis has only been able to investigate three interwar British fascist groups. Therefore, broader research is needed. Other interwar British far-right movements, including the Right Club, the Anglo-German Fellowship, the Link and the rarely mentioned English Array, are worthy of examination. A key figure also worthy of further investigation is one of the leading British antisemites of the period, Henry Hamilton Beamish of the Britons. Beamish toured the transnational circuit. He spoke at a meeting of the Canadian Nationalist Party in Winnipeg, shared a platform with the 'Canadian Führer, Adrien Arcand, in the United States at the behest of the German American Bund and embarked on a major lecture tour of Nazi Germany where he claimed to have mingled with prominent Nazi officials.[2] Scholarship from a

[1] Graham Greene, *The Confidential Agent* (London, 1971), p. 68.
[2] Nick Toczek, *Haters, Baiters and Would-be Dictators: Anti-Semitism and the UK Far Right* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 43,44 & 52.

transnational perspective on the post-war far right is also underdeveloped. For example, very little has been written about the National Front (NF), the British National Party (BNP) and the violent neo-Nazi terrorist organisation Combat 18 through the transnational lens. In addition, the study would develop significantly if overseas movements, large and small, were also investigated through the prism of transnationalism.

Transnational British fascism, however, did not stop at the outbreak of war in September 1939. Unlike countries on the continent, support for fascism was virtually non-existent in wartime Britain. Perhaps the most salient example of this is the BUF's disastrous wartime by-election results: standing for the immediate peace with Nazi Germany, each candidate lost their deposit.[3] The most famous of these is the Middleton and Prestwich by-election of May 1940. A veteran of the First World War, Frederick Haslam, who was awarded the Military Medal when fighting on the Somme, stood as a BUF candidate against a political novice representing the Conservative Party, Ernest Gates.[4] Labour and the Liberal parties combined against the fascist candidature, standing down their candidates and allowing Gates to win the contest with a resounding 98.7 per cent of the votes: an all-time record for any contested UK parliamentary by-election. Prime Minister Churchill, who had only assumed the office days before the election, addressed a message of public unity against fascism to Gates and the voters in the lead up to polling day: 'I look to the electors of Middleton and Prestwich to return you to Parliament by an overwhelming majority, and so demonstrate their united and unflinching support of a Government resolved to wage war with all the might and resources of the nation until victory is won.'[5]

The vast majority of British people throughout the war duly adopted this message. Although there was clearly little appetite for fascism in wartime Britain, the government and the security services were intent on eliminating the threat. Many of the known or

[33] For example, BUF candidate, Tommy Moran, received just 1 per cent of the vote share at the Silvertown by-election of 22 February 1940, while Sydney Allen received 2.9 per cent of the vote share in a two-man race against the Conservative, John Craik-Henderson, at the Leeds North East by-election of 13 March 1940.

[4] 'Another By-Election Fight', *Action*. 2 May 1940. p. 1. The mainstream political parties maintained an electoral pact and agreed not to contest any by-elections in seats held by any other party in the Government.

[5] 'Mr. Churchill's Message to Electors', *The Times*, 18 May 1940, p. 3.

suspected Nazis were already expelled from the country by the outbreak of war.[6] However, the rapid military successes of Hitler's army in Scandinavia, a shock to the British government and public opinion alike, underpinned by the self-aggrandising opportunism of the Norwegian nazi leader, Vidkun Quisling, confirmed the suspicion of the British authorities that Nazi victories were the result of politically motivated sabotage by traitors. As Stephen Cullen has stated, 'It seemed that there must be deeper reasons than military tactics alone that explained these defeats for the democratic countries.'[7]

Foremost among these was the supposed role of the fifth column. This, together with the discovery by MI5 of thousands of secret documents at a flat occupied by Tyler Kent, a cypher clerk from the US Embassy in London who had links to the far right, 'reached a tipping point' for the British authorities.[8] On the 22 May 1940, two days after Kent's arrest, clause 1A was added to Defence Regulation 18B. Faced with 'the gravest moment in our history', this allowed for the incarceration without trial of British citizens suspected of being under foreign influence or control, or who might sympathise with any power with which Britain was at war.

For this reason, the clause intended to 'cripple' the BUF. Despite admitting no evidence to substantiate their theory, MI5 insisted that Mosley's movement consisted of '25–30 per cent [of members…who] would be willing, if ordered, to go to any lengths' to ensure a fascist victory.[9] In the weeks following the adoption of 1A, around 1,000 BUF members, including Mosley and his wife Diana, were arrested and interned, 'effectively decapitating the movement's leadership', while non-BUF far-right activists, most notably the former head of naval intelligence, Sir Barry Domvile, and Tory MP, Captain Maule Ramsay (Leese was captured by British authorities sometime later), were also

[6] 18B allowed for the emergency internment of aliens and political dissenters in Britain during the Second World War. For more on the defence regulation, see Aaron Goldman, 'Defence Regulation 18B: Emergency: Internment of Aliens and Political. Dissenters in Great Britain During World War II', *Journal of British Studies* 12:2 (1973).
[7] Stephen Cullen, 'Fascists Behind Barbed Wire: Political Internment Without Trial in Wartime Britain', *The Historian* 100 (2008), p. 15.
[8] Ibid. For more on the Tyler Kent affair, see Bryan Clough, *State Secrets: The Kent-Wolkoff Affair* (Hove, 2005); Warren Kimball & Bruce Bartlett, 'Roosevelt and Prewar Commitments to Churchill: The Tyler Kent Affair', *Diplomatic History* 5:4 (1981).
[9] TNA CAB 65/7/28, 'War Cabinet Conclusions 133 (40). Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, SW.1, on Wednesday, May 22, 1940, at 10.30 am', pp. 213 & 220–221.

imprisoned throughout much of the war.[10] In fact, as fascism was a non-entity in wartime Britain, the Nazis thought of attempting to use the Welsh Nationalists, led by the antisemitic Saunders Lewis, as supporters 'on the line of Quisling in Norway'.[11] This action taken by the British subverted the potential of a fifth column operating within the country.

Although fascist activity was now virtually suppressed in Britain, failing to 'raise a squeak in protest' when confronted with state power, more troubling for the authorities were the activities of certain home-grown fascists who, for a variety of reasons, ended up on the continent during the conflict.[12] The most notorious of these was former BUF member and the Jew-hating, Hitler-worshipping William Joyce, infamously known as 'Lord Haw Haw', who was executed by the British for treason shortly after the war.[13] As a result of his transnational activities during the conflict, most notably his radio addresses to Britain from Germany, Joyce is arguably Britain's most well-known fascist, surpassing even Mosley. Before he was sacked from the BUF by Mosley in 1937 as part of a cost-cutting cull, Joyce was a key player within the party. In the early stages of the movement, Joyce was, next to Mosley, 'the most powerful figure of the

[10] A list compiled by the Mosleyite group, 'Friends of Oswald Mosley', puts the figure at 1,055, 982 of them 'definitely BU' and 73 'probably BU': Jeffrey Wallder, *The Defence Regulation 18B. British Union Detainees List; Second Edition to the Second Issue*, (London, 2007), p. 2; 'Fascists Behind Barbed Wire: Political Internment Without Trial in Wartime Britain', p. 16. For a study on BUF internment, see Graham Macklin 'Hail Mosley and F' Em All': Martyrdom, Transcendence and the 'Myth' of Internment', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7:1 (2006).

[11] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 2008), p. 68.

[12] Quote from Graham Macklin, *Deeply Dyed in Black Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism* (London, 2007), p. 1. Although largely suppressed, underground fascist gatherings appear to have taken place in Britain. In a later interview, ex-internee, Arthur 'Wakey' Mason, longstanding BUF activist and Branch Officer of the movement's Limehouse branch, describes escaping from the Huyton camp and attending 'illicit, underground meetings of the fascist movement': However, these liaisons were monitored by the security services: Cited in 'Fascists Behind Barbed Wire: Political Internment Without Trial in Wartime Britain', p. 20.

[13] Although Joyce had been born in America, he lived in the United Kingdom from the age of three (spending the majority of his childhood in Galway, which had been part of the UK until 1922 – by that time Joyce had moved to England). For more on Joyce, see Mary Kenny, *Germany Calling: A Personal Biography of William Joyce - Lord Haw-Haw* (Dublin, 2004); Francis Selwyn, *Hitler's Englishman: The Crime of Lord Haw-Haw* (London, 1993); John Cole, *Lord Haw-Haw & William Joyce: the Full Story* (New York, 1965); Nigel Farndale, *Haw-Haw: The Tragedy of William and Margaret Joyce* (Basingstoke, 2005); Colin Holmes, *Searching for Lord Haw Haw: The Political Lives of William Joyce* (Abingdon, 2016). Jonah Barrington of the *London Daily Express* christened Haw-Haw and helped make his name a byword.

BUF'. His voice 'ranted and sneered at the nation's internal enemies, over the boarded baths at Paddington and Lambeth, the arenas of Streatham and Liverpool'.[14]

Less well-known former BUF members also worked for the enemy during the war. The most sinister of these transnational operatives was Thomas Cooper, arguably the most violent, anti-British, antisemitic and pro-Nazi of all his traitor comrades. Cooper fled to Germany shortly before Britain declared war on the Third Reich, later boasting that he was on the run for attacking Jewish businesses and killing a Jewish man in a street fight.[15] He was so unrepentantly fascist that he became a naturalised German citizen during the war. Cooper committed mass murder when volunteering for the *SS* in Poland and Russia. He systematically executed over 200 Poles and 80 Jews in one day 'by merely lining them up against a wall and shooting them down'.[16] Equally as frightening, while in charge of a squad of Ukrainian volunteers in Warsaw, Cooper described how he was involved in a 'purge through the ghetto':

> His attention was drawn to a house by reason of loud screams issuing from the back of it. On-going inside the house he found in the top flat a bunch of these Ukrainians holding at bay with pistols some twenty Jews. On asking them what the noise was about they told him in broken German that they had found a new way of killing Jews. This was done simply by opening the window wide and two men each grabbing an arm and a leg and flinging the Jew through the open window. The small children and babies followed their parents because they said they would only grow into big Jews.[17]

The BF had ceased to exist long before the Second World War began, and its leader, Rotha Lintorn-Orman, had died in 1935, but Mosley and Leese continued along their respective fascist paths well into the post-war years. Interestingly, Mosley spent May 1940 trying to convince his internment committee hearing that he was a nationalist yet in 1945 came out as an internationalist. By the time of his release from prison in November 1943, Mosley's thinking had evolved significantly from the interwar years. During internment and the subsequent involuntary 'detachment from the particular

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[14] *Hitler's Englishman*, p. 43.
[15] TNA KV 2/264, Statement of Francis Paul Maton, Corporal, 50th Middles East Commando. 1437735 [captured by and worked for the Nazis during the war]', 9 September 1944, p. 5; *The Times* covered Cooper's arrest, court case and sentencing; 'Clerk on High Treason Charge', 5 December 1945, p. 2; 'Clerk on Treason Charge', 8 December 1945, p. 2; 'Clerk for Trial on Treason Charge', 21 December 1945, p. 2.
[16] TNA KV 2/254,'Statement of John Henry Brown, aged 37', 23 October 1945, p. 5.
[17] TNA KV 2/264, 'Maton statement' p. 4; 'Death Sentence for High Treason'.

problems of Britain that consumed his political life', Mosley reflected on his failures and adapted his philosophy towards a new world that greeted him outside the jail gates.[18] For Mosley, his, and fascism's, struggle of the thirties had been fought on to narrow a front: 'In reality, we were all too National – too narrowly concentrated upon securing the interests of our own nations.' A new 'healing synthesis' was required, incorporating European culture and experiences. From inside the prison walls, Mosley's mission was to learn how 'to think and feel as a European'.[19]

Letters to his oldest son Nicholas, who was fighting on the Western Front, identify this desire for European identity. While incarcerated, Mosley fed off an 'intellectual diet' of Germany theorists and Greek philosophers.[20] Through mingling with German POWs, he learnt German.[21] Therefore, he was able to dissect the works of Germanic philosophers such as Nietzsche and Spengler both of whom 'exhibited a range and depth of speculation unknown to English "liberal" literature'.[22] However, the German theorist that appears to have had the most impact on Mosley pan-nationalism was the 'towering figure' of Goethe, whose literature was largely unavailable in English.[23] Goethe's semi-autobiographical masterpiece *Faust* (1832) conjures up a mythical figure that deals with the spirit of the Western Man; a man who overcame cruelty and tragedy and rose to heroic status through knowledge and action, a path Mosley perceived himself to be following. Yet, Faust dies before accomplishing his life's work leading Mosley to comment: 'Faust falls dead at this instant of supreme realisation [that he was no longer under the spell of evil – Mephistopheles] as he swore he would so succumb if he ever became content. But the heavenly hosts bear him away from darkness to the empyrean of light because he has so greatly striven.'[24] From this, Mosley concluded that it should be possible to formulate a faith, which 'draws the Spiritual in Life from the best of the thought, creed and civilisations that the world has so far produced, weaving it into a

[18] Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, Third Edition (London 1990). p. 466.
[19] Mosley, *The Alternative* (Ramsburg, 1946), p. 12. Also in *Alternative*, Mosley credits much of his revised ideology to his time spent in prison, which afforded him 'intensive reading, reflection and creation', p. 11.
[20] See letters exchanged with Nicholas in chapter 'Conversations in Holloway', Nicholas Mosley, *Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family* (London, 1998); and the chapter titled 'The Faustian Riddle', *Oswald Mosley*.
[21] Mosley, *My Life* (London, 2006 /original 1968), p. 339.
[22] Letter to Nicholas, October 1943, in *Oswald Mosley*, pp. 468–469.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Letter to Nicholas, undated, in *Oswald Mosley*, p. 474.

coherent whole of conduct and attitude to human existence, and attuning it to the main tendencies of modern science.'[25]

Mosley was fascinated by the place where the great European adventure had begun, ancient Greece. He absorbed the words of eighteenth-century German neo-Hellenists, Winckelmann, Wieland, Goethe and Schiller; the Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides; and the philosophers Plato and Aristotle.[26] In addition, he read works on ancient Greece by contemporary scholars – Maurice Bowra, Lowes Dickinson, Werner Jaeger and Humphry Trevelyan. However, he was disgusted by their supposed inaccuracies on the subject and complained to Nicholas that 'the depths of their intellectual dishonesty are unfathomable', advising his son to always go to the original: 'In the end even genius should be allowed to speak for itself.'[27]

From these original works, Mosley found a utopian vision for Europe: a return to the 'glory days' where Greek influence spread across the continent following the Greek victory in the Greco-Persian wars. These readings presented an idyllic society lavished with beauty, perfect developments and the highest achievement of plastic art. Greek poetry offered a contrasting view of civilisation: one in which men unashamedly showed emotion – from crying to rage.[28] With nature forming the core, from these elements, the Greeks produced their 'aristocratic philosophy of heroic pessimism'; its central theme was what Mosley branded the 'fierce acceptance of life as it is'.[29] Unlike the Judaic-Christian tradition where nature was something to be suppressed or overcome, the Greeks embraced nature viewing it as something to be fulfilled, its power raised to a higher degree of completion. These Supermen 'can do on an enormous scale what man can do only faintly and fitfully'.[30] As a result of much soul-searching fused with ideas and inspiration gained from the contents of his cell library, an unrepentant Mosley left prison, awaiting the opportunity to return to the political arena to publicise his new pan-European vision.

[25] Letter to Nicholas, 1 June 1943, in *Oswald Mosley*, pp. 475–476.
[26] Letter to Nicholas, October 1943.
[27] Ibid.
[28] *Oswald Mosley*, p. 469.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Cecil Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York, 1957), p. 50.

Through his early post-war writings, Mosley provided a blueprint for his new vision of Europe. The geopolitical climate of post-war Europe was almost unrecognisable compared to the years preceding the Second World War. Fascism had collapsed, replaced by a world dominated by American and Soviet power and influence, ruled by either capitalism or communism. One of Mosley's main fears was that the Eastern Bloc was building atomic weapons to be used against the West. He claimed that German scientists and technicians were being forced to enter Russian service to create atom bombs to be used to inflict mass terror on Western cities. 'In a few years, or less,' he claimed, 'a man behind the Ural mountains may loose an Atom projectile which will knock London and New York flat'.[31] Unless a united Europe, alongside its ally, America, was powerful enough to challenge its foe, Mosley believed that the Soviets, through their sheer ruthlessness, may bring the end to both Europe and America. He argued that besides 'any emotional sense', a 'European Union' is essential to meet the danger.[32] According to Mosley, a united Europe was an 'absolute necessity' if the European man were to survive: 'Europe is not merely our [Britain's] business but our life'.[33]

The 'emotional sense' of European union stems from a Europe 'which shares with us the sublime heritage of culture whose resplendent rays shone forth from Early Hellas'.[34] According to Mosley, the 'family' of Europe, which is bonded by the 'same stock and kind', should never have been separated.[35] The death and destruction caused by the misery of European and world wars have gravely damaged the continent, but he believed 'European kinship and solidarity [may] have avoided disaster'.[36] In turn, the 'ridiculous structure' of the 'Tower of Babel [League of Nations]' created after the Great War, with its obsession with committees consisting of an increasing array of diverse nationalities resulted in 'grotesque failure'.[37] Mosley argued that their procedure in the face of difficulty was ever to introduce more and more people who were less and less like each other in tradition, thought, feeling and instinct until 'inevitably the difficulties became ever more insuperable until the whole attempt broke down in "tragic

[31] 'Our Life at Stake', *News Letter,* Issue No 1 (15 November 1946), pp. 4–5.
[32] 'German Technicians', *News Letter,* Issue No 1 (15 November 1946), p. 5.
[33] 'Our Life at Stake'. Mosley also explains his European idea in *Alternative,* pp. 146–148.
[34] Mosley, *My Answer,* (Ramsburg, 1946), p. 31.
[35] *Alternative*, p. 13.
[36] Ibid., p. 12.
[37] Ibid., p. 13.

absurdity"'.[38] His solution was the rejection of this 'old Internationalism' and to transcend exclusive nationalisms which divided 'natural friends and relatives':

> Man moved from the village to the nation in the natural process of uniting with his nearer kinsmen as his mind and spirit grew. Now the time is come to move from the nation to the continent, or even beyond it, under the same natural impulse and process of next uniting with those nearest to us in blood, tradition, mind and spirit.[39]

This 'Idea of Kinship' extended to the Americas where, through the export of British Puritanism, 'kindred of our same kind' flourished.[40] Mosley describes how their spirituality was founded on almost three millennia of European history and culture: 'In the deep realities and further ideals of this Age all Nature impels them in their final test to feel and think as we do.'[41] This union, he envisioned, required a 'synthesis of the best thought of Europe, and of America, on which we can build an idea that is new.'[42]

For the successful creation of this new civilisation, a leader was essential. However, the man to undertake such a mammoth task had to be from outside the political elite. Mosley declared that 'No alternative can come from the architects of chaos [… as these] existing rulers of the earth are responsible for this darkness of humanity; they stand on the graves of their opponents to confront the Communist power of their own creation.'[43] Moreover, the head of the new creed had to be prominent in international circles to bring nations together. Unsurprisingly, Mosley saw himself as the only man fit for such a role. As well as being distinct from the ruling class, he argued that his pre-war political activities made him known and respected beyond the confines of one country; his voice, he claimed, 'has been heard before'.[44] From a profound sense of duty and destiny, Mosley declared, 'I must do this thing because no other can.'[45]

In 1948, Mosley announced his arrival on the post-war political scene by forming the Union Movement (UM); its main aim was to develop a European nationalism rather

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[38] Ibid.
[39] *Alternative*, p. 14.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., p. 11.
[43] Ibid., p. 9.
[44] Ibid.
[45] '"Interview" with Mosley', *News Letter*, Issue number 1 (15 November 1946), p. 6.

than narrower country-based nationalisms under the policy 'Europe a Nation'. A short time later, Mosley had his passport returned by the British authorities, who had confiscated it during the war. Even before Mosley was reunited with his passport, his post-war transnational activities were flourishing. Special Branch, who circulated monthly newsletters to the Home Office on the activities of British fascists, identified the importance of Germany in Mosley's plan to create an international network of organisations working together to curtail Soviet influence and aggression. For Mosley, 'Germany is the key to the struggle between East and West and that he is the only living man capable of swinging her away from Russian influence.'[46] Mosley was convinced he could rely on unconditional mass support from the Germans if he could find a way to reach its people.[47] The first step in his scheme to influence the German public was to distribute his writings en masse throughout the country. Knowing that it would be impossible to run the operation from Britain under the noses of hostile and suspicious government, Mosley distributed his writings to associate companies in Europe and to those South American countries that have large German communities.

With fascism, and those linked to it, now associated with brutality and barbarism, it is no surprise then that Mosley and his plan for 'Europe a Nation' failed to gain support among the British public, besides galvanising the few ardent followers who harboured a 'smothering devotion to Mosley'.[48] However, 'Europe a Nation' did gain traction with continental fascists, and Mosley, unlike in the interwar period, became one of its leading lights, convincing unrepentant fascists across the continent to support his plan for a fully-integrated Europe. Included in the group was the ex-*Waffen-SS* officer and leading figure in the post-war German neo-Nazi movement, Arthur Ehrhardt, who established the journal *Nation Europa* to support far-right pan-European nationalist ideas, to which Mosley was a frequent contributor.[49] Mosley continued to champion his European vision until long after he effectively retired from politics in the late 1960s.

Leese's ideas, on the other hand, did not alter. Until his death in 1956, he remained an unrepentant supporter of National Socialism, and by setting up his own 'Jewish Information Bureau' and publishing his own avidly antisemitic journal and Hitler

[46] 'Fascist Activities. November–December 1947' in TNA KV3/51.
[47] Ibid.
[48] *Deeply Dyed in Black Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism*, pp. 27–28.
[49] Ibid., p. 11.

worshipping, *Gothic Ripples*, soon after the end of the Second World War, it was clear that his main aim remained to rid the world of Jews. As early as July 1946, MI5 believed Leese to be 'heavily involved' in establishing escape routes to South America (through Britain) for wanted German war criminals, who had been hiding in Germany since the end of the war. In addition, MI5 believed Leese to be planning a scheme to aid unrepentant fascist POWs in Britain to escape to Spain and thence to Brazil and Argentina.[50] Their concerns were well-founded, as, after a brief period of freedom following his release from internment, Leese was back in prison in 1947 for attempting to help two Dutch Nazi POWs to escape to Argentina. The case, which attracted much press attention, saw Leese declare from the dock that his and a large number of his pre-war followers' views had not changed since the days of the IFL.[51] As an example of his devotion to fascism, he even admitted to training his cat to give salutes for its dinner. [52] Perhaps surprisingly given his lower profile and fewer followers, it was Leese, and not Mosley, whose legacy evolved after 1945. Leese's 'scientific' racism meant that his racial ideas and themes were at the forefront of developing modern fascist thinking in Britain.[53] For example, IFL racial theory influenced post-war far-right groups such as the National Front (NF), the British Movement (BM) and the British National Party (BNP).

The transnationalism of British fascism did not end with the demise of Mosley and Leese. Leese's protégé Colin Jordan, leader of Britain's National Socialist Movement, was also a transnational actor. In 1962, Jordan and the leader of the American Nazi Party, George Lincoln Rockwell, combined to develop an international network between movements for the establishment of Aryan world order. Still in operation, the World Union of National Socialists is an umbrella group for neo-Nazis organisations

[50] TNA KV 3/37, 'A Suspected Escape Route', (1a).
[51] 'British Ring Helping Nazis to Escape', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 February 1947; 'Aid to Escaped P.O.W.s Alleged', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 February 1947; 'Aided P.O.W. Summonses', *Evening News*, 12 February 1947; 'Police Hunt for Former Fascist', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1947; 'Alleged Conspiracy to Aid Prisoners of War', *The Times*, 25 February 1947, p. 2; 'POW Smuggling Plot', *Daily Mail*, 1 April 1947, p. 5; 'Photograph Clue to P.O.W. Escape Plan', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 1947; 'Mistake Unmasked POW Escape Plot, *Daily Mirror*, 1 April 1947; 'Nazi Jew-Baiters Lose Their British Agent', *The People*, 6 April 1947, p. 3; '"Many Fascists Still Here"', *Daily Herald*, 29 November 1947.
[52] 'Cat Gives Fascist Salute', *Daily Star*, 28 November 1947.
[53] John Morell, 'Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League: the Impact of Racial Fascism', in Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain*, (London, 1980), p. 57.

worldwide.[54] The 1960s also saw the rise of racist nationalists with links made between British far-right groups and the American National States Rights Party (NSRP).

Links with the NSRP continued into the 1970s, and new movements that propagated stronger European ties surfaced. The British Movement, headed by Jordan, and The League of St George forged links with like-minded groups in Europe. The League attended far-right festivals on the continent, such as the annual gathering of nationalists in Diksmuide, Flanders, where they took part in demonstrations with Flemish nationalist patriots. However, events were not always cordial. As part of the League's delegation, Ray Hill described the frequent 'bar-room brawls' with right-wing militants from other countries.[55] The issue 'as often as not' was Northern Ireland. Many nationalist groups in Europe actively supported the IRA in its quest for separatism, whereas the League was 'fervently loyalist'.[56] In addition, the internationalised Holocaust denial movement (also known as 'historical revisionism') had become prominent in far-right circles in the 1960s. Through his books, British writer David Irving deliberately misrepresented historical evidence to promote Holocaust denial. In the 1970s, former NF member David McCalden, along with American Willis Carto, established the Holocaust denial enterprise: the Institute for Historical Review.[57]

The 1980s saw the rise and internationalisation of the British invention 'White Power Music'. This politicised skinhead movement spread across the globe, most notably to North America and Europe. The NF developed very particular transnational links under its 'political soldier' faction. The NF suffered splits over ideology, and a certain section of activists, for example, Nick Griffin (later leader of the BNP), expressed admiration for black separatist groups such as the Nation of Islam. In addition, the group announced a 'new alliance' with Islamic leaders Muammar Gaddafi, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Louis Farrakhan while Islamic fundamentalists marched alongside the

[54] For more on the World Union of National Socialists, see Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London, 2017), pp. 141–146.
[55] Ray Hill with Andrew Bell, *The Other Face of Terror* (London, 1988), p. 194.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, 1994). For more on Irving, see Chapter Nine: The Gas Chamber Controversy. For more on the Institute for Historical Review, see Chapter Eight: The Institute for Historical Review.

NF at the pro-Palestinians event Quds Day.[58] As scientific racism was, up to that point, at the heart of NF ideas, this form of transnationalism caused domestic tensions.

The 1990s saw the emergence of the International Third Position. This anti-Communist, anti-capitalist movement was formed by the political soldier faction of the NF and became an umbrella organisation for various national revolutionary groups throughout Europe and beyond. The American National Alliance leader, William Pierce, came to prominence in British far-right circles at this time. He accepted an invitation by the then leader of the BNP, John Tyndall, to address the BNP's national conference. The newly formed fascist group, Combat 18, idolised Pierce, and the neo-Nazi 'London Nail Bomber' David Copeland was motivated to start a race war by reading Pierce's novel *The Turner Diaries*.[59]

More recently, Nick Griffin's election to the European Parliament in 2009 was a turning point in the fortunes of the British far right, benefiting it in several ways. The BNP now received funding from the European Union (EU) which could make them more 'professional', they had access to EU resources and were able to network easily with other far-right European organisations, for example, strong connections were formed with the Greek fascist party, Golden Dawn. In contrast, the Front National of France refused to be allied with the Alliance for European Nationalists, which the BNP were involved with, as Marine Le Pen wanted to distance the party from her father's past. This 'detoxify' strategy triggered the realignment internationally of extreme right-wing groups. However, these newfound riches came at a cost. Certain members in Britain thought Griffin was spending too much time on the continent instead of concentrating on his commitments back home. More recently, former EDL chief 'Tommy Robinson' forged links with the anti-Islam, pan-European group PEGIDA, after earlier attempts to set up a 'European Defence League', and often spoke at their meetings abroad.

[58] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York, 2003), p. 69; Gerry Gable, 'The Far Right in Contemporary Britain', in Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson & Michalina Vaughan (eds.), *Neo-fascism in Europe* (London, 1991), p. 260.
[59] George Michael, 'The Revolutionary Model of Dr William L. Pierce', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15:3 (2003); 'David Copeland - The London Nail Bomber', *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qreNo9kTcYw], accessed 8 July 2019.

The single greatest benefactor to increase transnational corporation between far-right groups and individuals is the emergence of the World Wide Web. The internet connects across national borders. Arguably, the most well-known fascist group since 2010 is the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right is a loosely organised fascist movement that operates almost exclusively online, and although its most prominent figures are from Europe and North America, it attracts support from across the globe.[60] This thesis has uncovered the fact that transnationalism was an integral component of the British far right in the interwar years. However, transnationalism also manifested itself in the post-war years. Therefore, transnationalism has been, and likely always will be, a crucial ingredient in the makeup of the British far right. Even in a world of hardening borders, British fascism remains capable, as this study proves it always has, of transcending national barriers.

Transnational study contributes considerable value to the study of fascism. Examining the field from a cross-border angle both illuminates significant and unexplored aspects of fascism, and offers a more complete picture of the larger context of which it is a part. An ever-growing number of historians now view fascism not from a simply nationalistic point of view but endorse the cross-border approach.[61] Events over the last century have undoubtedly identified overseas links, both ideological and physical. Therefore, it is imperative that fascism – in whatever permutation and whichever country – is investigated from a transnational perspective.

Recent debates have focussed on transnationalism but have not really looked at transnationalism from a far-right point of view. Indeed, the far right has tended to be seen as impervious to transnationalism, and as an expression of the 'national' and the revival of the 'nation state' in narrow political terms. Transnationalism, in contrast, breaks down and navigates across borders, and is much more associated with the left – refugees, exiles, migrants, humanitarian relief, etc. Indeed, groups of early and

[60] Rob May & Matthew Feldman, 'Understanding the Alt-Right. Ideologues, "Lulz" and Hiding in Plain Sight', in Maik Fielitz & Nick Thurston (eds.), *Post Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (Bielefeld, 2019).

[61] These include Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, Brian Jenkins, Matteo Albanese, Pablo Del Hierro, Federico Finchelstein, Paul Jackson, Anton Shekhovtsov, Martin Durham, Pablo del Hierro, Arnd Bauerkämper, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, Graham Macklin, Fabian Virchow, are James Loughlin and Paul Stocker.

pioneering transnational historians, like the Annales school, came from an unequivocally left position.[62]

This thesis, and the contribution of the case studies provided within it, shows that transnationalism sheds considerable light on the way in which the far right operates as well: Mosley really did take money from the Italian Fascists and the Nazis (as long rumoured by some researchers), it enabled the privileging of some fascist groups over others by foreign powers (the IFL did well out of this), and the creation of a joint culture bound together by the trade and the selling of souvenirs, books and memorabilia to raise money. Transnationalism is about a lot of things, so the selling of souvenirs, and the chain of supply and purchase that went alongside it is important, as is the use of international symbols of solidarity, and visits and the movement to, and reception of visitors and delegates from, abroad. All this is channelled through the international financial exchange systems that are often highlighted as a key component of transnationalism and the study of which began many of the debates about transnationalism in the first place.[63] Much of this still pertains as part of a broader movement culture of the Alt-Right and has not had the consideration it deserves for the interwar period, particularly the 1930s, where it began. The seldom explored links between US and European far-right groups in the interwar period highlighted in this thesis may shed considerable light on this phenomenon.

This is the first in-depth study to examine the imperial undertones of fascism. Links between British fascism and imperialism has often been assumed (Thurlow's general study of British fascism detects imperialism as important in the early stages of the development of the radical right following the contraction of empire pre-1914[64]) but a lot of these assumptions have simply been asserted, rather than tested. This thesis analyses these prevailing assumptions and identifies the fact that there is a very clear correlation with empire in far-right politics. Empire itself is a transnational experience, and this study contributes to the understanding of organisations that saw themselves as not just British, but Anglophone in nature, with pan-colonial implications and

[62] Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales school, 1929–1989* (London, 1990), chapter 2.
[63] Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London, 2009), chapters 1 & 2.
[64] Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918–1998* (New York, 1998), pp. 8–10.

relevance. This emerges very strongly indeed from the career of Arnold Leese, who appears to have arrived at his fascist point of view whilst travelling around the Empire, had a long colonial a back-story, and might be seen as the most 'transnational' personality in the body of this thesis.

In addition, Labour under George Lansbury (1932 to 1935) was a 'little Englander' party and the Conservatives were very keen to avoid overseas, particularly European, entanglements. Therefore, the real transnational exchanges were coming from the political extremes. We know quite a lot about Communism in this regard (the CPGB International Brigades in Spain, for example) but much less has been written about the far right and British fascism. This thesis fills the obvious lacuna. During a period usually seen as characterised by movements expressive of economic autarky, protectionism and a narrow nationalism, transnationalism provides a new way of considering the cultural and political context of the 1920s and 1930s.

All transnational investigation makes organisations and groups appear less marginal and fringe than when scrutinised in domestic isolation, British fascism is no exception to this. The relevance of this for British fascism is that it might make the British Fascisti and the IFL look hitherto neglected and this survey accentuates their importance, suggesting that they are not just three men and a dog, but organisations that deserves to be taken seriously, not least for their use of imperial propaganda. In addition, too much emphasis is traditionally focussed on the BUF and that looking at these other organisations is not actually a kind of antiquarianism, but rather shows an aspect of British fascism that does not emerge from close scrutiny of the larger organisations involved. Here transnationalism is actually providing a lens that enables us to see the details of British fascism and the sometimes-neglected groupings within it in a slightly different way and enables historians to re-calibrates our view of exactly how British fascist groups should be lined up in order of importance.

The findings from this study will enhance historical scholarship in a number of ways: First, by uncovering the transnational aspects of the three most important fascist movements in interwar Britain, it will add a much needed cross-border dimension to British fascism, as recent transnational studies on Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany have achieved about their respective countries. Significantly, this is the first extensive investigation focused on transnational British fascism. By approaching the subject from

a transnational dimension, it has provided a greater understanding of British fascism. Second, it has added to the growing, but still under researched, field of fascist studies in general and therefore uncovered significant and unexplored aspects of the field as a result, offering a more complete picture of the larger context of which it is a part. Third, by investigating new subjects, it has added to the relatively new historical sphere of Transnational History, while illuminating the limited research on extremism in the field. Not only has this study of transnational history enhanced fascist inquiry, hopefully it will open the way for new cross-border research projects on British fascism (and fascism in general) and begin to fill the gap in the obvious lacuna in literature.

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