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FASCISM AND FASCISTS IN BRITAIN IN THE 1930's

A case study of Fascism in the North of England
in a period of economic and political change.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is comprised of four parts. The first, consisting of two chapters, challenges some generally accepted views about the 1930's as a whole and emphasises the change in political consciousness that occurred in the minds of ordinary people. The ideology of the B.U.F. is analysed in the context of the decade.

The second part, consisting of five chapters, provides a detailed history of the B.U.F. in the North of England from the days of its precursor, the New Party, to the detention of the leading B.U.F. members in 1940. Much of the history of the movement is concerned with Manchester though attention is also paid to other areas in the North of England. The 1938 Manchester municipal elections also receive attention, because of the campaigns waged by the B.U.F. candidates. This is the first major regional study of the B.U.F.

The third part deals with the ordinary membership of the B.U.F. in the North of England. The two chapters in this section assess previous judgements regarding B.U.F. membership and make use of interviews and unpublished manuscripts to provide the most detailed analysis of the membership of a British Fascist party.

The final part of the thesis consists, firstly, of a detailed account of the reaction of the Jewish community, both nationally and in Manchester, to the anti-Semitism of the B.U.F., and, secondly, the attitude of the police, judiciary, local authorities and the government to the rise of the British Union of Fascists.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the many words written on British Fascism we have still been left with gaping holes in our knowledge of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930's. In particular, we have no detailed regional study of Fascism available in publication. Similarly we have lacked a detailed analysis of the ordinary membership of Mosley's movement.

The reasons for this situation are clear. The history of the movement has been written 'from the top down'. So, for example, the available analysis of the membership of the B.U.F. has dealt with the top 100 members of the movement, and the analysis of the ideology of the B.U.F. has concentrated on the output of literature from the National Headquarters of the movement and the ideas emanating from Mosley himself. No attempt has been made by previous historians of the B.U.F. to discover what ordinary B.U.F. members were thinking and doing.

This thesis challenges some generally accepted views about the B.U.F. by reversing the order of analysis. National leaders of the movement, including Mosley himself, only appear in the following pages when they are either crucial to an understanding of the ordinary membership, illuminate the general picture of the B.U.F., or when they appear in the North of England, the area studied in this thesis.

Not only are previous histories of the B.U.F. challenged. The general approach of this thesis allows us to provide an alternative view of the 1930's from that currently fashionable. The 'revisionist' view of the

decade is analysed and new evidence, relating to changes in political consciousness, is provided, which challenges the revisionists view of a politically stable decade.

The arguments in this thesis rest on two approaches which have been lacking in previous accounts of the history of the B.U.F. Firstly, the rise of Fascism in Britain in the 1930's is seen in relation to the long term development of capitalist society. In particular, to the development of a more conservative authoritarian state. This approach differs radically from that of other published histories of the B.U.F., which have rested on an unstated 'celebration of Western democracy'. Secondly, this study makes use of research techniques drawn from new ways of writing history, epitomised by the 'History Workshop' movement. This means, for example, in the case of this study, that political labels which have traditionally been attached to people; have to be questioned. The analysis of the membership of the B.U.F. in this thesis suggests that many people, while 'Fascist' in the sense that they were members of a Fascist movement, did not display the characteristics normally associated with the term 'Fascist' as it is popularly known. Similarly, it is wrong to assume that all anti-Fascist activists in the 1930's were 'Communist'. Simple labelling of this sort, often in a way in which 'Fascist' and 'Communist' degenerate into terms of general abuse, disguises the rich political mixture of the community at large and adds to the general de-politicising of a generation of people characteristic of the approach of the 'revisionist' historians.

Another approach to the history of the B.U.F. which is lacking in

previous accounts of the movement is a recognition of the strength and significance of oral testimony. In the course of this thesis members of the B.U.F. and others speak in their own words, not just to impart knowledge about the movement as a whole but to reveal also something of themselves and their motivations. This is not the place to discuss the merits or otherwise of oral history. Part of the answer to that can be found in the following pages. However one observation must be made here. In the case of the members of the B.U.F., no quantitative analysis can be made. The results are essentially impressionistic. The reason for this is that it is not in the nature of oral history to attempt to interview, say, a 20% sample of membership. In any case, it would be impossible with the membership of the B.U.F. Tracing the members who have been interviewed has, to say the least, been fraught with difficulties, and not a little danger, though some were very pleased to be interviewed. The results of those interviews shed new light on the B.U.F. in the 1930's.

Since the B.U.F. was involved in many confrontations with anti-Fascists, I have devoted part of this thesis to an analysis of the response of the community to the spectacle of uniformed Fascists on the streets of Britain. The response of the Jewish community is particularly interesting, but it was not only the Jewish community which had to determine its response to Fascism. The State, too, had to respond. The final part of this thesis deals in particular with the response of the police, the judiciary, local authorities and the government, to the B.U.F. Those responses provide a new insight into the part that Fascism plays in a parliamentary democracy.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of many people. I would like to express my thanks to the following members of the B.U.F. who agreed to be interviewed: Mr J. Charnley, Mrs A. Barlow, Mr. A. Collinge, Mr J. Hamm, Mr G.P. Sutherst, Mr W. Eaton, Mr A. Fawcett, Mr. B. Row, Mr T. Pickles, Mr R.R. Bellamy, Miss N. Driver. Mr Bellamy and Miss Driver very generously allowed me to inspect their unpublished manuscripts and Mr. Fawcett gave me permission to reproduce a letter to him from the Deutscher Fichte=Bund e.V. Mr Bellamy also wrote to me and in doing so provided further detailed information about the B.U.F. under his control in the North of England. Miss Driver's unpublished autobiography From the Shadows of Exile is a remarkable document and has been indispensable in the writing of this thesis. The transcripts of the taped interviews and a copy of Miss Driver's MS will be made available in the Library of the University of Bradford.

I would like to thank the librarians and staff of the following: Hull University Library; The Board of Deputies of British Jews; The Labour Party; The Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews; The Wiener Library; Churchill College, Cambridge University; Marx House; The British Library (at Bloomsbury and at the Newspaper Library, Collingdale); Manchester Central Reference Library; Rochdale Reference Library, The Public Records Office; Manchester University Library; Bradford University Library; Bradford Central Library; University of Birmingham Library.

The staff of all these institutions have been most helpful. Mr J. Hamm and Mr B. Row, both members of the Directorate of the Union Movement were very helpful to me and I would like to thank them for their patience.

Eddie and Ruth Frow, of the Working Class Movement Library, Manchester, were both generous with their time and comments, and I, like many other researchers, owe them a debt of gratitude. I would like to thank Mr Raphael Samuel, of Ruskin College, Oxford, Dr. Gareth Steadman-Jones, of Kings College, Cambridge, Dr. Paul Thompson, of Essex University and Dr M. Lelohe of Bradford University, for their useful comments. Finally I would like to thank my University supervisors. Paul Coles, Professor of History at the University of Bradford, for his help and encouragement and many useful comments, and Jack Reynolds, now Visiting Lecturer at the University of Bradford, for his unswerving support and friendship over many years and his many helpful comments and suggestions which have helped to shape this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

B.U.F.	British Union of Fascists.
C.P.G.B.	Communist Party of Great Britain.
F.U.B.W.	Fascist Union of British Workers.
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party.
L.P.	Labour Party.
M.C.R.L.	Manchester Central Reference Library.
N.C.C.L.	National Council For Civil Liberties.
N.U.W.M.	National Unemployed Workers Movement.
P.R.O.	Public Records Office.
T.& G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers Union.
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress.
W.C.M.L.	Working Class Movement Library, Manchester.

PART ONE

BRITISH FASCISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 1930's

CHAPTER ONETHE LANDSCAPE OF THE 1930's

The period of history bounded by the advent of the second Labour government and the beginning of the Second World War has perhaps attracted more attention from journalists, film and television producers and, indeed, the public at large, than any other decade in British history.

This response is understandable. The period is within living memory, and many people can talk and write about the 1930's with the authority of experience. It was a decade in which the recording of sound and vision came into its own. Newsreels and films of contemporary life captured the imagination of millions of cinema goers. The events and occasions which people still remember achieved a significance which reached new heights and which has not lessened with the passing of time.

The 1930's were the years of the 'slump'. The decade has become, in popular parlance, the definitive Depression. It has been described as the 'Devils' Decade' and the 'Low dishonest decade'. Unemployment, the Means Test, hunger marches, Fascism and appeasement were the symbolic features of such descriptions.

Even at the time however, many people were able to observe that it was a case of poverty in the midst of plenty. The first major history of the period, published in 1955, considered that:

Recovery, despaired of in 1931, was in the air by 1933, obvious by 1935. The National government got little thanks for it, partly because it did not deserve it...partly because recovery, like the depression, was uneven, so that the misery of the depressed areas drew attention away from the return of prosperity elsewhere. This was the basis for the myth, sedulously propogated later, of the 'hungry thirties'. The reality was rather different.¹

As more data and information became available, economic historians began to substantiate Mowat's view of the period and continued the revision of the traditionally gloomy view of the 1930's. A new orthodoxy has grown up which, until recently, rested on an analysis of Britains economic performance during the 1930's. The debate has centred on the long term growth of the economy. The first assault on the traditional view of economic stagnation and under-utilisation of resources appeared in 1961 and emphasised the growth of new industries.² The arguement was later extended to deal with the economic recovery of the decade compared with economic performance in the 1920's.³ With the increasing availability of economic data for the 1930's and the compilation of indices of growth, this 'revisionist' arguments has become a somewhat orthodox school of thought.⁴

More recently the revisionism has extended to an analysis of social and political questions. It is to this controversial field of study that particular attention is paid here, since it is of crucial importance in understanding the history of the British Union of

Fascists in the period.

The arguments of recent revisionists rest on data concerning four specific areas. Firstly there is a concentration on the various social investigations carried out during the 1930's, which dealt with the problems of poverty and health.

In the nineteenth century the works of Disraeli, Dickens, Mayhew, Booth, Gissing and Rowntree, set the seal on the merit of social investigations in the understanding of contemporary life. The twentieth century has seen a continuation of such works, with the emphasis moving away from the Metropolis to the more distant industrial conurbations. The post war period produced a flood of new surveys which reflected the growing concern with post-war unemployment and poverty.⁵

The social investigations continued right throughout the 1930's, with the various regions of Britain receiving particular attention. The North East was studied by M'Gonigle and Kirby in 1937,⁶ Manchester and Liverpool by Allen Hutt in 1933.⁷ Rowntree surveyed the standard of living in York and compared it with the results of his first survey conducted in 1899.⁸ Liverpool and Manchester also received the attention of social investigators to add to the work carried out by Hutt.⁹ John Boyd Orr,¹⁰ G.D.H. Cole and M. Cole¹¹ and Fenner Brockway¹² added their voices, as did many other commentators, to the growing evidence of social and economic deprivation.

The fact that social investigations, census returns, official inquiries and commissions had been in existence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled comparisons to be made, in the light of which the conclusions drawn by some historians about the quality of life in the 1930's seem convincing. In spite of the poverty, ill health and bad housing, all exacerbated by unemployment, social conditions had not deteriorated during the decade and there were signs of improvement. Many people were indeed "condemned to live in poverty, ill health and poor housing, whatever the passing movements of the trade cycle or the short term policies of the government."¹³ What was of greater importance was the rate of improvement. Many commentators felt that not enough was being done to help the poor, the unemployed and the ill, or to improve housing conditions. They were critical of what they considered to be government complacency in dealing with the numerous social problems.

A second area of interest to revisionist historians draws on the work of economic historians in the 1960's and 1970's and their emphasis on the emergence of boom towns with low unemployment. Thus a very different picture from that traditionally presented is arrived at. In the past more attention has been paid to towns such as Jarrow or Merthyr, with 67.8% and 61.9% unemployment respectively in 1934, than to Coventry (5.1% unemployed) or St. Albans (3.9% unemployed) in the same period. Similarly the decline of the staple industries has received the attention of historians and economists at the expense of the new growth areas of the economy. The recent

change in emphasis has focused attention on the growth of the economy as a whole in the 1930's rather than on the stagnation and decline of certain key sectors.¹⁴

The new industries, such as those producing vehicles or electrical goods, fostered the growth of prosperous suburbs which were the antithesis of Jarrow and Merthyr. For those in employment everywhere, however, a new found prosperity was experienced as the standard of living increased throughout the decade. The increase in real wages depended of course on the cost of living index, which fell by a third between 1920 and 1939. Most of this fall occurred in the early 1930's. For those in employment, average real wages rose by 15% in the 1920's alone.¹⁵ The increase in disposable income was reflected in the queues outside the new cinemas, car production for the home market and the ribbon development of new houses along the sides of the new arterial roads. The new homes contained the products of the booming electrical goods industries - vacuum cleaners, cookers, radios and electric irons, powered by the equally booming electricity supply industry.

A third area of concern to recent historians has been the response of the electorate to the government's handling of unemployment and the depression in the economy. Historians are now turning, with a psephologist's eye, to the elections of the 1930's. The overriding impression one gains from such analysis is the stability of British politics during the decade. The second Labour government suffered a landslide defeat in the general election of 1931. For many the

defeat was seen as a result of the betrayal of MacDonald and the subsequent desertion of the party by its working class supporters. The question now being asked is "if there had been no split in the party, no rushed election in 1931, what would Labour's electoral chances have been?"¹⁶ The answer is provided by an analysis of by-election results between 1929 and 1931 and of the general election returns.

Whether or not MacDonald had deserted the Labour Party, the general election of 1931 would have been lost. The 1929 election had been won by Labour by gaining control of a large number of marginal seats. Only a slight reversal would be needed for the party to lose them. In addition over 40% of the Labour seats were won on a minority vote in three-cornered contests. Labour had won more seats than the Conservative Party, on fewer votes.

The state of the other main party also affected Labour's electoral fortunes. The vast majority of Liberal seats in the 1929 election had been won on a minority vote, mostly where the Conservatives were the next major party. Any movement of votes away from the Liberals would benefit the Conservatives rather than Labour.¹⁷ The 1929 general election, then, had not been such a success for the Labour Party as many people had thought. The by-elections between 1929 and 1931 emphasised the point, with large swings against the government throughout the period. This weak electoral position, together with the defection of MacDonald and a united opposition to Labour, made a defeat for the government certain in 1931.

In spite of the defeat of 1931 the fact remains that, with the exception of 1929, Labour gained more votes in the general election of that year than ever before.¹⁸ This was a reflection of the large number of marginal seats the Labour Party held and the swing of the Liberal vote to the National government. The Labour Party regained much of the lost ground in the various by-elections between the general election of 1931 and 1935. Not only by-elections but municipal elections also, with the result that "Only a year after the debacle of 1931, Labour was again to be reckoned with in municipal politics. Any chance of a vacuum for extremist parties to exploit had gone."¹⁹

Labour's revival, however, had to be measured against two very important concomitants. Firstly, the revival was far from nation wide. Secondly, the Liberal Party continued its rapid decline, with the Liberal voters either supporting the Conservatives or abstaining. Thus the 'middle ground' of British politics, the crucial factor in the outcome of the 1935 general election, was lost by Labour.²⁰ Far from 'extremist' groups reaping the benefit of the political vacuum, the Communist Party, like the British Union of Fascists, failed to take advantage of the situation and remained on the fringe of British politics. The 'middle ground' of British politics was captured by the National government and the prosperous employed had nothing to gain by joining either a Communist or Fascist movement. "The primary reaction of the British electorate in the face of the depression was to vote for traditional parties and a majority voted in a decidedly conservative direction."²¹

The Communist Party, in terms of electoral challenge and also membership, is considered a failure. The growth and consolidation of a home grown Labour Party was more important than the 'alien philosophy' of communism. Neither the unemployed nor those in work supported left wing politics and the Communist Party remained a "revolutionary party in a non-revolutionary setting."²²

As for the impact of the left on the Labour Party:

Might not the Labour Party in the 1930's have been used as an instrument for aiding the unemployed at home, restraining fascism abroad, or making a significant step towards the achievement of Socialism? The answer...is that opportunities existed but were wasted - partly because of left wing pressure which, far from encouraging brave initiatives, inhibited the Party leadership and restricted its room for manoeuvre.²³

The same writer also derides the impact of the Unity Campaign:

That the United Front was entirely a fantasy was rapidly demonstrated by the Unity Campaign. The Popular Front might have had more substance: yet; based as it was on the extreme left, and aimed at masses, not at leaders, it was rightly perceived as having far more to do with a struggle for support within the Labour movement than with the realities of Whitehall and Westminster.²⁴

The National Unemployed Workers Movement is similarly considered a failure in its overall political impact, which in turn was a result of its lack of success in challenging the existing leadership of the Labour Party and the T.U.C. in the areas of highest unemployment.²⁵ Similarly the hunger marches are considered "relatively obscure events, involving a restricted group of political activists. The view that hunger marches were a typical response to unemployment was very far from the truth."²⁶

The progress of fascism in Britain is similarly charted. Here the argument rests mainly on the assumptions of other writers more closely concerned with the history of the British Union of Fascists.²⁷ However, it is suggested that the B.U.F. did not draw any significant support from the unemployed. The problem of unemployment is in fact singled out in an attempt to disprove the contention that the failure of the B.U.F. to attract support was due to the relatively less severe economic depression in this country compared to other parts of the world. It is noted, for example, that unemployment in the depressed areas was at least as severe as in Europe or America but that this did not lead to support of the B.U.F. by the unemployed or the middle classes in South Wales or Jarrow etc. The reason for this was that "the National Government provided a bulwark for these people against the Communists and in doing so condemned the B.U.F. to a relatively minor role."²⁸

It is said that the B.U.F. had to contend with the 'civility' of British politics, whether myth or reality, and the dominance of

middle opinion in Britain. "The majority of British people chose to regard themselves as living in a relatively well-ordered, gentle society."²⁹ Hence the B.U.F. was doomed to failure right from the start.

While both communists and fascists presented problems for the preservation of public order, the cohesiveness of British society, it is argued, enabled such problems to be overcome without undue repression.³⁰

Finally, one of the main areas which the revisionists focus their attention on is that of unemployment. They emphasise the 'striking degree of normality' of the unemployed and their characteristic fatalism. Only a minority failed to 'adjust' to unemployment and turned to radical politics rather than settling down to life on the dole. While previous writers had noted that the depression affected Britain less severely than other countries, Stephenson and Cook, the chief revisionists, claim that comparing absolute figures of the number of unemployed is misleading and that "Britain, Germany and the United States had roughly comparable rates of unemployment when judged as a percentage of the labour force. Each country had three years when more than a fifth of the working population was out of a job."³¹

Emphasis is placed on the different experiences of unemployment in this country compared with others. The onset of unemployment was less sudden than in the U.S.A. or Germany and thus, it is argued,

it was less the absolute level of unemployment which created political upheaval, than the rapidity of its onset. The depression and unemployment had become so familiar, it seems, that the unemployed thought that the remedy was beyond human control and there was nothing they could do about it.

* * * * *

Perhaps there is a great deal to be said for the work of recent historians of the inter-war years. Maybe there is little room for disagreement when dealing with statistics of infant mortality rates or contagious diseases, or with cost of living indices and the measurement of unemployment in different areas of the country. The health of the country seemed to be improving. Unemployment was patchy and the growth industries produced boom towns. Unemployment did not, in fact, have a major impact on the political life of the nation as seen from the standpoint of the National government. Psephological data is similarly convincing. Election returns and the relative strength of political parties, both 'major' and 'extreme' now seem to have been put beyond reasonable doubt.

However it must be said that there is little originality in the work of recent revisionists. A selective use^{of} and over reliance on secondary sources has fed the prejudices of those commentators and politicians who, from a right wing standpoint, use the arguments of the revisionists of the 1930's to reflect on the economic problems of the last third of the twentieth century. The significance

of this point was not lost on the publishers of Stevenson and Cook's book, since the blurb on the dustjacket tells us that "Not only are the conclusions drawn by the authors of historical importance, but they are increasingly relevant today in view of the revival of mass unemployment as a political and social issue of the 1970's."

A brief reply to the revisionists, which touches on the unreliability of their use of documentation has already been voiced,³² and indicates, for example, that more care should be taken with the interpretation of unemployment data. The greater fluctuation within cyclical changes in the demand for labour in the inter war years has been ignored by Stevenson and Cook.³³ This in turn affects the computation of real living standards. The difference between real wages and real standards of living is similarly commented upon, which leads on to the problem of quality of life. The authors of the reply quote E.P. Thompson on the matter, in a passage worth repeating at this point.

...the term 'standard' leads us from data amenable to statistical measurement (wages or articles of consumption) to those satisfactions which are sometimes described by statisticians as 'imponderables'. From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work discipline, education and play, intensity of labour, and so on. From standards-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and sometimes an evaluation) of qualities...

It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditions, relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time...³⁴

In ignoring the qualitative side of the argument, the revisionists have isolated improvements in living standards from the political context of the 1930's. One is here reminded of the nineteenth century standard of living debate amongst economic historians and which E.P. Thompson was alluding to. Protagonists from both sides of the debate have accumulated massive evidence concerning the price of wheat or potatoes, standards of housing and sanitation, life expectancy and child labour, to show that the standard of living had improved, or alternatively, had declined, during the early decades of the nineteenth century. When the basic problem, the experience of living, is abstracted from wider considerations relating to the political context, the argument becomes devalued. The masses of people around whom the debate revolves, i.e. the victims of the early years of the Industrial Revolution, become dehumanised and depoliticised out of all recognition.

Fortunately the history of the working class in the first half of the nineteenth century has begun to be rescued and the standard of living debate placed in its proper perspective. E.P. Thompson also has this to say of the living standards of early nineteenth century

working class people:

All in all, it is an unremarkable record. In fifty years of the Industrial Revolution the working class share of the national product has almost certainly fallen relative to the share of the property-owning and professional classes. The 'average' working man remained very close to the subsistence level at a time when he was surrounded by the evidence of the increase in national wealth, much of its transparency the product of his own labour, and passing, by equally transparent means, into the hands of his employers. In psychological terms, this felt very much like a decline in standards. His own share in the 'benefits of economic progress' consisted of more potatoes, a few articles of cotton clothing for his family, soap and candles, some tea and sugar, and a great many articles in the Economic History Review.³⁵

The same view may be taken of the attempt to revise the history of the people of Britain in the 1930's. While we are dealing here with a debate concerning nineteenth century conditions, we might note in passing that many employers in the new booming industries, such as automobiles and electrical goods etc. were quick to seize on the lack of trade union representation in their factories and imposed what can only be described as Dickensian conditions on their workers. This was certainly true of car workers in Oxford.³⁶

In dealing with elections, Stevenson and Cook gloss over the atmosphere prevailing at the time of the 1931 Labour defeat. In attempting to dispel the notion of a panic election their selective

use of evidence provides no indication that "the most powerful weapon against the Labour Party was fear."³⁷ Nowhere can we find any evidence to suggest that in fact the Bolshevik scare was almost as strong as in the previous Labour defeat in a general election in 1924.

Similarly the impact of the Communist Party in the 1930's is underestimated. The typical recruit, as evidenced by an examination below of radicalism in Manchester in the period, was not young and middle class, though the Party undoubtedly attracted such people. The influence of the Communist Party went far beyond what the low membership figures would suggest, and has to be seen as an important concomitant in the change in political consciousness in the 1930's.

In replying to the revisionists and providing the background to the history of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930's, one has to utilise a premise notable for its absence in the work of Stevenson and Cook. This is, as briefly noted above, that the political consciousness of a generation of people in the 1930's underwent considerable change. It was due to this change in consciousness that people paid more attention to, and became more aware of, the social and economic problems of the age. Much of that change was due to the way people saw themselves in relation to others. There was a greater awareness of the presence of poverty, ill health, bad housing and unemployment, which was, in part, brought about by the role of social investigators, the impact of the media and by the obvious fact that those problems did undoubtedly exist, and, in the

'depressed areas', were all present in an acute form at the same time.

In dealing with the failure of the Left in the 1930's one has, firstly, to consider the numerous defeats suffered by working class people and the Labour movement since the First World War. In this context the General Strike of 1926 is usually cited as the main defeat of working people. Yet the General Strike may be considered as the closing drama of post war unrest.

That unrest was, in part, a continuation of events and trends during the First World War. The rising trade union membership and Labour Party support was accompanied by more militant action in different parts of the country, with the formation of the Shop Stewards movement and the Clyde workers committee. The Russian Revolution of 1917 inspired vast numbers of people in the Labour movement and was even applauded by MacDonalld and Snowden.³⁸ In 1919 discontent simmered in the armed forces over the method of demobilisation. In Glasgow and Dublin general strikes were called over a demand for a forty hour week. In Lancashire 300,000 cotton operatives went on strike for a forty eight hour week and a 30% wage increase. The miners went to the brink of strike action before being placated by an interim report of the Sankey Commission (whose judgement the government subsequently rejected). There was unrest in the police force; railwaymen secured a notable victory over the standardisation of wage rates and found sympathy and help throughout the rest of the Labour movement.

The trade union movement strengthened its position through the amalgamation of small unions,³⁹ and, with the formation of the General Council of the T.U.C. in 1920 was able to take on a more overtly political role, which was further strengthened by the formation of the National Joint Council, representing the T.U.C. and the Labour Party, and later to be called the National Council of Labour, in 1921. The Labour Party itself was transformed into a legitimate political party with a Socialist programme and individual membership. A new Party Constitution was adopted in 1918.

With the onset of economic depression in 1920, the labour movement in Britain went on to the defensive, and entered into a period of defeats and humiliations, of which the General Strike was but the major feature.⁴⁰ Miners' wages and the strike ability of the miners were both reduced by the breakdown of the Triple Alliance, due, in part, to weak trade union leadership on the part of people such as J.H. Thomas (the railway union leader) and Frank Hodges (the miners' union secretary). The miners' defeat was the first of many for trade unionists. Engineers, ship yard workers, railway workers, cotton operatives, building workers and workers in the printing trades all suffered wage reductions in 1922. According to the Economist, by 1922 three quarters of the working man's war time wage increase had been lost.⁴¹

One feature of the worsening economic climate was the increase in unemployment, which gave rise to the founding of the National Unemployed Workers Movement in 1921. Rising unemployment, coupled

with the decline of the staple industries, led to a reduction of trade union membership in mining, cotton and shipbuilding. The trade unions suffered even more after the defeat of the General Strike and the introduction of the Trade Union and Trade Disputes Acts of 1927. The problem of the fall in union membership was compounded by the problems of company unionism in the South Wales and Nottingham coal fields. The weakness of the Labour movement in the 1930's, to which we now turn, stemmed from the problems encountered in the 1920's.

The series of defeats in the 1920's affected the quality of the leadership of the Labour movement, so that the people who accepted with equanimity the weakened position of organised labour rose to the top ranks of their unions and dictated union policy for the next decade. This was true not only of the trade unions, but also the Labour Party. It could be said, in fact, that the lack of support for the Labour Party, from the lost by-elections of the 1929 government right through the 1930's, was a reflection, not of overwhelming support for the National government, even though it won the general election of 1935, but of the cautious and timid leadership of the political wing of the Labour movement, and, in particular, the incompetence of the leaders of the Labour Party. They were very busy people of course, but their energy was spent, for the most part, in attacking the activities of those to the left in the Labour movement.

The weakness of the leadership of the Labour Party, about which

more will be said shortly, allowed the dominant trade union personalities, particularly Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin, to dominate the Labour movement. These trade unionists exerted their influence through the National Council of Labour, originally known as the National Joint Council when it was formed in 1921. The Council was reorganised in 1932 and had seven representatives from the T.U.C. to three from the parliamentary Labour Party and three from the Labour Party outside parliament. Thus the trade union movement could dictate to the Labour Party, which is precisely what happened. Both Citrine and Bevin were temperamentally hostile to Lansbury, the Labour Party leader, and desired to keep him in check as much as possible. For example, when Lansbury agreed to speak at a meeting of the Socialist League in the Albert Hall in 1933, Bevin wrote to him condemning him for agreeing to speak without the permission of the Council.⁴² John Saville has pointed out that according to Citrine the National Council of Labour always met on the day before the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party met and so it was almost impossible for the Executive Committee and the Shadow Cabinet to reach a decision which differed from that of the N.C.L.⁴³ A small group of right wing trade unionists dominated the official Labour movement throughout the 1930's. They dominated the block vote of the T.U.C., they dominated the block vote at the Labour Party conference and they dominated the National Council of Labour.

There were three guiding principles and practices to which the right wing of the Labour Party and the T.U.C. adhered. The first was a

rigid adherence to constitutionalism and parliamentarianism. If any section of the Labour movement took any initiative outside the strict guidelines of the Labour Party or the T.U.C. it was regarded with great suspicion, carefully scrutinised, and often stamped out. The hunger marchers were never officially supported by the trade union movement of the Labour Party, and even the Jarrow march of 1936, which was not organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement, was not approved by the 1936 Edinburgh Labour Party Conference or the T.U.C. The nationwide Aid for Spain movement, which sent food, clothing and medical supplies to beleaguered, war-torn Spain, was condemned by the General Council of the T.U.C. as "subversive and unworthy of recognition."⁴⁴ The Labour Spain Committee, a ginger group operating within the Labour Party, and whose political objectives increasingly took second place to humanitarian relief work, was always considered to be 'unofficial' by the Labour leadership and came into conflict with the Labour hierarchy. A meeting of the Labour Spain Committee at Conway Hall in March 1936, which called on the Labour Party to fulfil its pledges made at the Edinburgh Conference, resolved to send a delegation to see Atlee. The leader of the Labour Party refused to see the delegation on the grounds that the resolution had been directed against the N.E.C. The N.E.C. in turn declared that the L.S.C. was an unrecognised body.⁴⁵

Secondly there was an acceptance of industrial collaboration by the Labour movement, as though the interests of the employer and the employee could coincide to produce industrial harmony. The London

omnibus strike of 1937 was betrayed by Bevin, the Transport and General Workers Union leader, and any other sign of rank and file activity was kept under close surveillance. This sort of action was linked to the third guiding principle of the right wingers, which occupied a great deal of their time and called on their greatest energy, and that was the attack on anyone to the left of them. The history of the Socialist League and the Popular Front movement, and the restrictions placed on men like Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan bears witness to the most important of the three guiding principles.

Many issues arose in this country in the 1930's in which the Labour Party either took little or no part or fumbled the issue and displayed an amazing incompetence. It is perhaps as well to remind ourselves of one or two of these issues since they form part of the intricate jigsaw of the political mood of the period. Firstly, the Labour Party was left on the sidelines in the fight against Mosley and his Blackshirts. There were some local constituency Labour Party groups which acted on their own initiative and spoke out against Mosley and acted to defend local Jewish communities, but it was without any encouragement from the leadership of the Party. In 1934 a questionnaire was sent to all the constituency Labour Parties and trade councils, requesting information on local Blackshirt activity.⁴⁶ The answers to the questionnaire were sometimes astonishing since the B.U.F. was on the crest of a wave and 1934 was the year of peak membership. The results of the exercise were filed away and nothing was done. No recommendations for action to be taken were

made to the constituencies experiencing the worst excesses of the local fascists.

The Left Book Club was ignored by the Labour Party and trade union leadership, who considered it to be Communist inspired. Yet it was a largely independent development and it contributed to the awakening political consciousness of a generation of people. It was on the policy of appeasement however that the Labour Party appeared to be most muddled. While the Labour Party and the T.U.C. did take an anti-appeasement line, they confused the issue with that of re-armament. The fight against re-armament itself was restricted to debate inside parliament. Only Nye Bevan was able to sort out the muddle, but he remained a voice in the wilderness.⁴⁷

We have seen that the adherence to strict constitutionalism on the part of the Labour Party led to a fear of the organised unemployed, but the Labour Party did not start its own inquiry into the depressed areas until 1936 and the report was not issued until a year later. In any history of the 1930's and particularly the plight of the unemployed at that time the Labour Party plays a minor role. It was the N.U.W.M. that took the initiative in organising the unemployed and it was they who brought their plight to the attention of the authorities. Not that the N.U.W.M. was able to exert any lasting influence on the government without the support of the Labour Party, which of course was not forthcoming.

Perhaps the key issue which the Labour Party fumbled was its

attitude to the Spanish Civil War. The Labour Party always remained on the sidelines in the debate, except when it entered the fray to condemn people in its own ranks who became closely involved in the organisation of even just humanitarian aid for the victims of the war. It is on the issue of Spain that the Labour Party's misjudgement of the political mood of the country can be most clearly discerned. It is to that political mood of thousands of people both within and without the ranks of the organised Labour movement that we must now turn.

It is a paradox that in the years of greatest economic crisis from 1929 to 1933, the left of the Labour movement, the I.L.P. and the C.P. were at their lowest point in terms of numbers and influence and failed to take advantage of the situation created by the right wing of the Labour movement. The I.L.P. had lost most of its M.P.'s in 1931 and the decision to dis-affiliate from the Labour Party in 1932 merely pushed them further onto the sidelines. One point to be made about the I.L.P. in this period is its poor quality of leadership. Maxton was not the figure he later became.⁴⁸ McGovern was unreliable,⁴⁹ Fenner Brockway was perhaps the best but he could not call on any mass base outside the Labour Party and the I.L.P. could not organise the industrial workers,⁵⁰

As far as the Communist Party is concerned, we know of course that there were two phases in its development in these years. The first coincided with the worst years of the slump and saw the dominance of the Communist International Line on Social Fascism, with its

assertion that social democratic parties merely encouraged fascism. This led to an attack on social democratic groups and trade unions. By the end of 1930 the membership of the Communist Party was down to 3,000 of whom most were unemployed and hence had no influence, especially in the trade union movement. However perhaps the most significant work of the C.P. in this period was its organisation of the unemployed, Wal Hannington being perhaps the outstanding figure of this first phase. The second phase began in late 1932 with a curb on sectarianism, which was strengthened when Hitler came to power and Russia joined the League of Nations. The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International adopted the policy of a united front against fascism and the British Communist Party responded swiftly. Membership of the Communist Party began to increase from 1934 onwards and the 1934 hunger march proved to be more successful than earlier ones.

If one takes the level of support, in terms of membership, achieved by the Communist Party, and also, in this context, the support of the British Union of Fascists, there is little to suggest more than token support for 'extremist' groups. There was thus, the revisionists would argue, no radical shift in political consciousness during the decade. The mass of the British voting public gave their support to the National government.

The evidence presented by the impact of the war in Spain on the people in Britain, and the different responses to the presence of the British Union of Fascists, provides a different picture and

relates to the failure of the left in the earlier years of the decade. That failure, as we have seen, was due to a combination of sectarian splits, poor leadership and the dominating position of right wing trade unionists over virtually the whole of the Labour movement, through the agency of the National Council of Labour. It is hardly surprising that people did not respond more readily to the National Unemployed Workers Movement, for example, when it was organised by the Communist Party still coloured by its sectarian attacks on the rest of the Labour movement. At the same time the Labour Party provided little scope for positive action and refused to organise marches and petitions. This is not to argue however that people were incapable of responding to the problems of unemployment or fascism or that they gave their total support to the National government. The response to the various pacifist organisations was some indication of the potential support for a radical programme.⁵¹

By focusing briefly on one particular aspect of the 1930's - the Spanish Civil War - it is possible to advance our understanding of popular responses to foreign policy issues and the strength of anti-fascist sentiment at a time when the established political parties offered little direction or purpose to a supposedly apathetic public. While it is true that the majority of the electorate remained within the mainstream of British politics and the two extremes of communism and fascism (as defined by the ideas and actions of their respective organisations, the C.P.G.B. and the B.U.F.) lacked mass support, little attention has been paid by historians to the

participatory role of many thousands of people outside the parliamentary framework. Undue emphasis on the conservatism of the British population has tended to obscure the degree of commitment to specific issues in the inter-war period. One such issue, which transcended class and party boundaries, was the Spanish War. Far from being a mere vehicle for Communist propaganda and having only symbolic value, commitment to the Spanish cause went beyond a small coterie of militants - many of whom joined the International Brigades - and breached the barriers of class and political party. On the continent the anti-fascist Popular Front movement was institutionalised in a formal political coalition; in Britain, the absence of a formal political alliance is explained not by the lack of mass appeal, but by the suspicions and fears of leading left wing politicians.

The combination of a disastrous experience of Labour in office, major electoral defeats and a crippled Trade Union movement prevented the emergence of a Popular Front policy. The failure to provide effective leadership created a vacuum which enabled the Communist Party to make political capital out of its anti-fascism and take credit for the organisation of the Spanish Aid movement.

When war broke out in Spain in July 1936 the response was immediate though unorchestrated. Individuals travelled to Spain from all parts of Europe to aid the defence of the Republic. By the autumn of 1936 the trickle of men and arms had become a stream and those who volunteered from this country were aided by an efficient support system. A total of two thousand British volunteers fought in Spain.

They came from a variety of backgrounds from different parts of the country and it was the Communist Party that provided the means by which most of the volunteers arrived in Spain. The usual route was down to King Street in London (the headquarters of the C.P.) where a group of volunteers would gather before taking the ferry over to France on a weekend tourist ticket. They would be met in Paris and escorted through to the Pyrenees and over into Spain.

The British section of the International Brigade consisted largely of working class people from such places as the Gorbals in Glasgow, the mining valleys of South Wales, and the back streets of Manchester and Liverpool. They were people who were willing to die for their beliefs, for their response was not, in the main, foolhardy or a desperate search for glory, but sprang from a long political apprenticeship. Many of the people who joined the Brigade were acutely aware of the importance of their response. They had learned it in the long dole queue, the humiliation of the means test and in the spectacle of uniformed fascists marching the streets of this country, They learned of the importance of their response not merely by such external events, but also by a developing inner knowledge and understanding of what was happening around them.

Cheap Penguin paperbacks started life in 1935, followed by the Left Book Club in 1936. Reading circles were formed and the book of the month eagerly discussed. Not just reading but listening as well, since the tradition of street corner oratory still flourished. Often crowds would gather on a patch of waste ground or in the streets

(Stevenson Square in Manchester was a traditional meeting place) to hear the speaker on the soapbox explain the meaning of unemployment, denounce the betrayal of the leaders of the Labour Party or tell of the dangers of fascism. Debating societies in Manchester took up these themes and the audiences argued and learned. Miners in the South Wales valleys learned in a similar way too but had the added advantage of their own miners' lodge libraries.⁵²

This political apprenticeship of many thousands of people was not a dull, lifeless experience. Comradeship flourished and social and sporting activities were eagerly pursued. Even here the political content was explored. The Clarion Cycling Club was very popular and the British Workers Sports Federation was active in the organisation of sporting events, outings and hikes. If the grouse shooting landowners decided to prevent hikers walking over Kinder Scout, then the young hikers would agitate, organise and trespass. If the organisers of speedway events were exploitative then the British Workers Sports Federation would organise its own events.⁵³ Politics was everything and even leisure activities had their political dimensions. By the time war in Spain broke out, the political consciousness of a whole generation of people in this country had been altered in some way. An indication of this is the response to the Aid for Spain movement. This was the collection of aid groups that sprang up in 1936 on the outbreak of the war. It must be seen as a most significant feature of the social and political landscape of the 1930's and yet it has largely been ignored by historians. Aid groups were formed in almost every town and city in the country.

People knocked on doors with collecting tins in their hands, jumble sales were held, doctors donated bandages and drugs. Tins of milk piled high on the dockside and foodships sailed from ports up and down the country laden with tins of soup, bags of flour, vitamins, chocolate, dried fruit, bandages, dressings and drugs. Money was collected for ambulances to be built - which were then 'adopted' by the towns which had sent the money. More than £2m (almost £70m in 1978) was collected in Britain throughout the three years of the war. Aid for Spain was a national movement which broke class boundaries. The effort was a measure of the political advance of a nation, and one which had no small bearing on the victory of the Labour Party in the 1945 general election.

The Manchester area Aid for Spain campaign was one of the largest in the country. In Stalybridge, for example, a 'Nurse Urmston Fund' collected £700 (£23,000 in 1978) in two weeks to aid the work done by a local nurse working in Spain.⁵⁴ In Manchester itself two foodships sailed from the docks laden with supplies donated by individuals, co-operative groups, schools etc. which everyone knew would find their way to the Republicans in Spain.⁵⁵ Shop floor engineers in Manchester organised a branch of Voluntary Industrial Aid, founded by Geoffrey Pyke, and aided by an advisory committee consisting of Lord Farrington, Alfred Barnes M.P., officials of the Co-op Party and trade unionists. The engineers, at Gardners Diesel Engine Works in Patricroft, who were all motorbike enthusiasts, constructed in their spare time motorbikes with low sidecars designed to carry a stretcher or medical supplies, which were sent to Spain.⁵⁶

In Horwich, near Bolton, the Spanish Medical Aid organiser was Mr Kirkwood, who co-ordinated several different appeals and the efforts of many local organisations. In some of the local schools dozens of children knitted blanket squares while many others collected donations from teachers and fellow pupils for the Milk for Spain fund. At one time it seemed that the whole of Horwich was involved in fund raising. All the co-op shops had collecting tins or tubs at the door for people to place gifts of tinned food in. An Aid for Spain food shop was opened, staffed by volunteers from the Townswomens Guild, the League of Nations Union and the Labour Party and Conservative Party Women's sections.⁵⁷

A local doctor organised a branch of Medical Aid for Spain in Manchester in his own surgery. A committee of about thirty people was formed which included Communists and Conservatives as well as Labour Party people and church leaders.⁵⁸ Arthur Koestler and J.B.S. Haldane spoke at the first meeting organised by the committee, which was held in the Albert Hall in the city centre. The manager of the Theatre Royal in the city agreed to let the committee use his premises for late night film shows after the regular evening performances ended. Films such as 'Defence of Madrid' were shown until the early hours of the morning and the cinema staff gave their services free. On another occasion a theatre was used to provide a variety show at which all the stars, appearing at other theatres in the city, gave their performances free of charge. Several ambulances, each costing £700, were sent to Spain from Manchester, all paid for out of the proceeds of the Aid for Spain campaign.

Manchester was one of the major areas of recruitment to the International Brigade itself, with many people, mostly working class, joining the steady stream of people who were ready to give their lives in the struggle against fascism. Most of them had jobs and had served a long political apprenticeship in the Labour movement in the area.⁵⁹ On their return the survivors received a hero's welcome. When George Brown, the secretary of the Communist Party in Manchester, was killed in Spain, it was not only Communists who mourned his death. His passing added a new sense of urgency to the support of the Republic and yet more money poured into the Aid fund.⁶⁰

The support for Spain was inextricably linked to the local campaign against the B.U.F. The North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee Against Fascism and Anti-Semism,⁶¹ for example, which was formed to co-ordinate opposition to Mosley, also held a series of meetings on the war in Spain and it called on all residents of North Manchester, a predominantly Jewish area, to learn the lesson of Spain and prevent any growth of fascism in their own area.⁶² At a meeting in Cheetham Park, Manchester, in September 1936, again organised by the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee, the platform was shared by the National League of Young Liberals and the Communist Party.⁶³ The secretary of the Committee read out a report of his recent visit to Paris where he had represented the Committee at the International Conference Against Racism and anti-Semitism.⁶⁴

The people who supported the campaign against fascism in the city came from a variety of backgrounds. The trade union movement was

particularly well represented, as was the Labour Party, both of which came into conflict with their national organisations because of their involvement in meetings and campaigns at which the Communist Party was also present.⁶⁵ Trade unionists from the engineering industry were particularly prominent, and it was they who were also the backbone of the Unemployed Workers Movement in the area.⁶⁶

Many people in the Labour movement in the city were active in outdoor pursuits, and it has already been observed that often politics and the outdoor life were mixed. Hiking and rambling clubs flourished and, as early as 1932, the British Workers Sports Federation in Manchester was involved in the Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout.⁶⁷ It was also the Sports Federation, a Communist Party organisation, which campaigned against the ruthless exploitation of motorbike enthusiasts by speedway managers in the North.⁶⁸

In Cheetham Hill in the Jewish area of the city, the Young Communist League formed a Challenge Club, at which not only political meetings but also social events were held. Within weeks of the opening of the club, hundreds of people attended the Saturday night dances organised by the Y.C.L.⁶⁹ The Challenge Club, named after the Y.C.L. newspaper, was one of the many debating arenas to be found in the city. Another one, free from any political sectarianism, was the County Forum, which held regular debates in the city centre on Saturday and Sunday evenings. City councillors and other public figures would take part in the debates and the Bishop of Manchester

spoke at one meeting. Between 100-150 people regularly attended, of whom about one third were Jews who worked in the local clothing trade. They all took part in debates which often covered topics such as fascism or trade unionism, which were of interest to the left.⁷⁰ The Y.M.C.A. in Manchester was a similar forum for debates, with members often discussing left wing problems. The membership here was not particularly Jewish.⁷¹ One well known working men's debating society in the city was the Queen's Park Parliament, at which M.P's and local councillors would often take part in debates with an audience of people of differing political persuasions.

It was through such debating societies and through the political, social and cultural involvement of thousands of people in South East Lancashire, and Manchester in particular, not only within the ranks of the Communist Party, nor even solely within the wider organised labour movement in the area, that ideas and action came together. Collecting for Aid for Spain or demonstrating against Mosley was usually a result of an understanding of the causes of the ills of capitalist society and a knowledge of the dangers of fascism. It is this understanding and knowledge which underwent a considerable improvement, and it is in the context of this radical change in political consciousness in the middle years of the 1930's that the fortunes of the British Union of Fascists and the opposition that Mosley's movement aroused must be seen.

The B.U.F. was founded in October 1932 at a time when, as we have seen, the labour movement in this country was demoralised and still

suffering from a litany of defeats and humiliations. Throughout 1933 and 1934 the B.U.F. experienced a rapid expansion, certainly in terms of a new political movement, in the North of England, at a time when anti-fascists within the ranks of the Communist Party were still coming to terms with the change in the Party line on fascism. Others in the labour movement who, a few months previous, had been attacked as 'social fascists' by the Communists, were now courted and appealed to for support for a common anti-fascist platform. Anti-fascists in the Labour Party were leaderless on the issue, while the Independent Labour Party had a more important issue to contend with - its own credibility as a part of the organised labour movement.

Within the Jewish community, which as early as spring 1933 was experiencing a systematic anti-semitic campaign from the B.U.F., the leaders of Jewry provided no lead whatsoever save the advice that Jews should remain aloof from the taunts and physical attacks of the fascists.

It is within this wider context of the weakened opposition to fascism that the growth of the B.U.F. in the North of England up to 1935 must be seen. There were, as we shall see, attempts to oppose the B.U.F. in these years, but it was not until the beginning of 1936 that a new awareness and cohesion became apparent in the labour movement. Although the membership of the B.U.F. began to decline before the anti-fascists became properly organised, this was more the result of problems within the fascist movement itself than directly.

than directly the result of effective opposition.

As public awareness of the presence of fascists on the streets of Britain grew, an awareness encouraged by the developing cohesiveness of the anti-fascist campaign against Mosley, so people were being prepared for the massive response to the outbreak of war in Spain in the summer of 1936. It is no coincidence that the autumn of 1936 and the early months of 1937 saw the development of a nationwide Aid for Spain movement, a general response to anti-fascists groups campaigning against Mosley, and at the same time a heightening of the struggle within the Jewish community over its response to Mosley. It is also the period which sees the campaign for the passing of the Public Order Act reaching its zenith. All these issues will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, with special reference to the city of Manchester and its surrounding towns.

However we must deal briefly here with the fact that by the end of 1938 it was clear that the developing political consciousness in the country, which had achieved such significance in the previous two years, was being dissipated. Why had all the hopes and aspirations of so many people diminished in such a short time?

There was, clearly, a drastic change in the international situation. The thousands of people involved in the Aid for Spain movement were becoming demoralised, not only by their struggle with the leadership of the labour movement at home, but more importantly, by the evidence of the impending defeat of Republican Spain. That Franco

did not march triumphantly into Madrid until the Spring of 1939 merely prolonged the agony and despair of anti-fascists in Britain. The onward march of the Nazis into Vienna and Austria and, later, the Munich agreement, were also very bitter blows to the left.

One significant feature of the labour movement in the 1930's was the lack of any basic structural change in its organisation in the light of the changed conditions and in response to the heightened political awareness. For example, the failure of the trade union movement to extend its membership either in the new industries in the boom towns or, indeed, in the staple industries recovering from the worst years of the depression, was remarked on at the time,⁷² and has subsequently come to be seen as a major reason for the dissipation of political consciousness.⁷³ The number of workers affiliated to the T.U.C. rose to 6½m in 1919 and 1920. After the General Strike the affiliated membership remained under 4m from 1929 to 1935 and did not reach 5m until 1940. Bevin and Citrine still retained their hold on T.U.C. policy and the majority of the T.U.C. continued to hold a more strident anti-Communist view than anti-employer.⁷⁴

Similarly the political leadership of the labour movement remained uninspired and ineffectual. The Labour Party while, on occasion rising to the level of an effective opposition in Parliament, nevertheless remained generally aloof from the battles in the constituencies. Atlee remained staunchly supportive of British parliamentary institutions and believed in their ability to respond

to changes in the class structure.⁷⁵ It has been noted by others that Atlee's position was consistent with that of most members of the Labour Party.⁷⁶ The Socialist League was defeated by the Labour Party leadership in 1937 and demands for a Popular Front led by the Labour Party were ignored. The reiteration of this demand in 1939 led to the expulsion of Stafford Cripps, Nye Bevan, George Strauss and Sir Charles Trevelyan. Bevan's comment was apposite: "If every organised effort to change Party policy is to be described as an organised attack on the Party itself then the rigidity imposed by Party discipline will soon change into rigor mortis."⁷⁷ Compared with the heady days of 1936 and 1937 the labour movement was certainly ailing on the outbreak of the Second World War, and to many it must have seemed that the rigor mortis had long since been replaced by the dry bones of the deceased labour movement.

As well as the internal weaknesses of the Left, the labour movement had to contend with the increasingly oppressive power of the state, directed mainly at those which the state defined as subversive. The 'state' is here defined as the several institutions, i.e. the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial bench, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies, which together constitute its reality.⁷⁸ A brief reference has been made to the 'Bolshevik scare' surrounding the 1931 election, but such manifestations were merely the most obvious ways in which the media and the opposing politicians waged their campaign against the Left. More seriously the labour movement had to contend with the infiltration of the police and the widespread use of the law, and,

new interpretations of the law, against individuals and organisations on the Left.

By the 1930's the role of the police force in the defence of the interests of the state had been consolidated by the governments' action following the police strike of 1919. The strike was broken, its leaders dismissed and the organisation of a police trade union prohibited. The Police Act of 1919 allowed swift and hefty retribution against any who sought to raise disaffection in their ranks. The Police Federation, recommended by the Desborough Committee in 1920, was expressly forbidden to affiliate to the T.U.C.⁷⁹ These changes guaranteed the loyalty of the police force in the many instances of confrontation with 'subversive' groups in the 1920's and 1930's. During the 1926 General Strike the police maintained their loyalty to the government and in the actions taken against sections of the labour movement in the 1930's the police never questioned the role they had by now come to assume. That role, in the context of action taken against the Hunger Marchers, organised by the N.U.W.M., has by now been well documented, though only with the help of a 'mole' working, presumably, inside the Public Record Office.⁸⁰ Infiltration and spying, raids on offices and attempts to manipulate the media, especially the newsreel companies, were common features of the political role of the police at this time. There was even a Special Branch in informer on the National Council of the N.U.W.M.⁸¹ It is interesting to note that at the time the police force was involved in such actions against the labour movement, including the breaking up of marches of the unemployed, the police pay was 50% higher than the

average industrial wage.⁸²

The argument as to whether the police in this country were 'pro' or 'anti' the B.U.F., an argument which has occupied the minds of most writers on British fascism, and which was of continuing contemporary interest, is really of little significance when compared to the role of the police force in the developing power of the state, as a servant of the state. The actual attitude of the police regarding the B.U.F. is referred to in the final chapter, but there too the argument revolves round the power of the state. This is not to argue that there existed in the 1930's a 'police state', in the sense that the police were unrestrained by all other sections of the state, especially the judiciary. However it is to argue that the actual powers of the state, of which the police were part, underwent a considerable change after the First World War. We have seen that the police themselves became much more integrated into the state apparatus in this period, but there other developments, of a more nebulous character, which nevertheless can be discerned as adding to the hegemony of the capitalist state. One of these developments was the emergence of large new industries, which, as corporate bodies, wielded a power which served the interests of the state. Not that businessmen would necessarily see themselves as serving the interests of the government or the state, but their interests did in fact coincide. Another development, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, was the development of the media; not only newspapers, with their circulation battles, but also the B.B.C. and newsreels developed as potent forces in presenting an

unquestioning loyalty to the interests of the state. The role of the B.B.C. in the General Strike is well known, and it will be shown later how the B.B.C. (and also The Times newspaper) complied with the Board of Deputies of British Jews (reflecting 'establishment' views) when the latter brought pressure to bear on the B.B.C. to restrict the reporting of left wing pressure within the Jewish community.⁸³ The bias in newsreels, particularly concerning the filming of Hunger Marchers, is also now well known.⁸⁴

When it came to the presentation of news items concerning the labour movement on the one hand and the B.U.F. on the other, it is not difficult to discover why a bias should emerge. Communism was feared more than fascism. Communism, for example, was already linked with violence 'anarchy' and revolution. There was a greater fear in the 1930's because of the experience of the Social Fascist stage of the C.P.G.B. and throughout the 1930's any anti-fascist organisation was considered to be a Communist Front. The National Council of Civil Liberties was in fact considered to be such a 'front' too. As far as fascism was concerned, although it was sometimes seen as 'alien', there were other considerations which often outweighed this factor. Sir Oswald Mosley was British and a well known and respected politician in Parliament before he founded the B.U.F. The B.U.F. did not hold allegiance to an outside power as it was considered the Communist Party did. It supported the monarchy and it claimed to unite the country by rejecting the concept of class. It was supportive of the police and the armed forces and the Union Jack was often to be seen prominently displayed at its

meetings. The B.U.F. also considered the Communists to be 'traitors'. The support of the B.U.F. by the Daily Mail was only the most overt example of the bias of the media.

Yet another development in the inter-war period, and particularly in the 1930's, was the development of the two party parliamentary system. On the one hand there was the decline of the Liberal Party as a political force in the country, superseded by the Labour Party. On the other hand there was the separation of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party and also the formation of the National government. The two parties occupied a common ground at the centre of the political spectrum, with only issues at the margin of politics involving any real divergence of opinion. Even the election of the Labour government in 1945 with its radical programme of state intervention does not negate the argument that the two party system strengthened the power of the state in the inter-war years, a process which has continued unabated since then.⁸⁵ Within this development of the two party system of government there was a strengthening of the executive power of the state. The power of the House of Commons was increasingly giving way to the powers of the Cabinet and the prime minister. The growth of the civil service only added to this development.

We must end this all too brief survey of the development of state institutions in the 1930's by turning to the problems of fascism in the period. Continuing the broad sweep of history, we are not concerning ourselves here with the detailed history of the B.U.F.,

which is the concern of much of the rest of this work, but rather with the implications of British fascism in the 1930's and the reasons for the failure of the B.U.F.

Explanations for the failure of the B.U.F. centre inadequately round the advent of the Second World War,⁸⁶ or the nature of political culture and the ability of a democratic pluralist society to contain various forms of political extremism.⁸⁷ These themes could be said to be the product of the continuing 'celebration of Western democracy'⁸⁸ which has informed various 'objective' accounts of the rise of fascism in a generic form and, in particular, the rise of the B.U.F.

The reason why the B.U.F. was formed and the reason for its ultimate failure are related to the nature of capitalism itself. The whole history of the B.U.F. can be seen as a product of a set of dynamic forces within British capitalist society. The B.U.F. arose because of the frustrations and despair over the old style political leadership (the 'old gang' according to Mosley) and a set of state institutions and institutionalised ideas that were reluctant to acknowledge the developments outlined above. Mosley was impatient. He had the ability to see the general direction in which society was moving and he wanted to be there to lead the nation into the new world. Unfortunately his desire did not correspond to the sluggish nature of the development of the state and the economic base of society. The inter-war years were years of tension between the remnants of Nineteenth Century Liberalism on the one hand, and the growth of

the executive and powerful new pressure groups which characterised the period on the other. The politicians in the Labour Party, Thomas, Snowden etc, were still living, essentially, in a pre 1914 world. The old politicians in the Tory Party were still living in a world dominated by the image of Disraeli. This is the reason why Mosley moved from Tory to Independent to Labour and the I.L.P. and finally to fascism. The existing political parties really could not offer what was required to cope with the many problems of a capitalist society experiencing the many disadvantages of being the first industrial nation while essentially remaining a small island with few natural resources.

The B.U.F. failed because the Movement was too impatient and that impatience brought with it many follies, not least of which was its anti-Semitism. Political movements have to grow out of economic conditions which foster such growth. The rise of Liberalism (and its decline) and the rise of the Labour movement are just two such examples of this phenomenon. The B.U.F. arose because of the political will of one man and the imitating of fascist movements overseas. While it was able, initially, to capitalise on the political and economic frustrations of many people in the 1930's, it did not arise from the grass roots, moulded and shaped by the requirements of capitalist society.

The B.U.F. also failed because the heightened political consciousness of the nation did not allow the B.U.F. to flourish for long in the industrial heartlands of the country. The opposition to the B.U.F. was perhaps slow in developing, but when it did it led to local

authorities refusing fascists entry to public halls and eventually led to the passing of the Public Order Act. The B.U.F. did not fail because, somehow, democracy is able to cope with political extremism on the Left and the Right.

Western democracy was attuned to many of the demands that fascism made. Since the end of the Second World War we have witnessed in this country the steady drift towards conservative authoritarianism. The development of a repressive and racist state, built on the foundations of a corporate economy, has largely gone unnoticed - simply because it is not 'fascist' in the sense that people normally understand that word. We are 'democratic' because we are not 'fascist' in the old sense.⁸⁹ Fascism in the old sense was what the B.U.F. aspired to, but in that aspiration could be found all the contradictions of bourgeois democracy; the contradictions between classes in society and between different layers of bourgeois ideology. Similarly the policies of the B.U.F. predated some of the developments of the British economy. Skidelsky is surely right, though for the wrong reasons, when he observes that "If there was going to be fascism in England, it would be introduced under the auspices of the National Government, not by a grass roots fascist movement."⁹⁰

CHAPTER TWOTHE IDEOLOGY OF BRITISH FASCISM AND THE POLICY OF THE B.U.F. FOR
THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

Theories of Fascism are to be found in abundance. It is not the place, here, to provide a survey of even the most recent interpretations of Fascism. Such a task has already been accomplished by others.¹ All one can do here is point to the danger of employing a rigid theoretical framework in a study which has to rely on a great deal of empirical evidence. Of more recent writers, Poulantzas in particular has been taken to task for making the evidence fit the theory.² The proliferation of theories of Fascism may be seen as a product of the fact that Fascism itself embodies a series of contradictions. This is supported by the evidence of heterogeneity in the ideology and membership of the British Union of Fascists.

John Cammett, after concluding that there four major models employed by Communists to analyse Fascism, viz: A reactionary movement of the industrial bourgeoisie and the great landowners; The expression of twentieth century imperialism; A petty-bourgeois movement in its origins; An "irrational" movement expressing a crisis in Western civilisation, commented that:

The point is that Fascism is surely all these things. The apparent contradiction between these interpretations is a contradiction inherent in Fascism itself. It is

an attempt to resolve two of the most fundamental developments in this stage of capitalist society: (1) an ever growing concentration of political, military and economic power in the hands of the few; (2) the unavoidable necessity of securing at least the passive consent of the masses to this rule.³

A suggestion was made in the last chapter that the B.U.F. was the product of a set of dynamic forces within British capitalist society in the inter-war years. The task now is to develop this theme by scrutinising the ideology of the B.U.F. both in theory and in practice.

It has been suggested by Nugent⁴ that the ideas of the B.U.F. can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the 'authoritative' ideas of the movement, emanating from Mosley himself and the inner core of Fascists who were considered to be the leadership. This group included, at various times, Alexander Raven Thompson, Niel Francis-Hawkins, William Joyce, A.K. Chesterton, John Becket and W.E.D. Allen. Secondly, the 'non-authoritative' ideas, consisting of the publications of the B.U.F. - Blackshirt; Action; and Fascist Quarterly, later to be known as British Union Quarterly - and the pronouncements of those Fascists on the fringe of power, especially B.U.F. parliamentary candidates, together with 'all other pronouncements'.

Nowhere does Nugent use the term 'ideology' to describe the ideas of the B.U.F. and the reason is clear. For if he were to employ such an analytical tool he would necessarily have to refer to the way in

which the ideas of the B.U.F. were interpreted by the mass of its membership and, indeed, discuss the type of member attracted by those ideas.⁵ It is true that ideas may be seen in isolation and removed from their social and political context, but the ideas thus remain arid and drained of all vitality. If we look at the way in which the policy of the B.U.F. was interpreted in the North of England, for example, especially those policies which were devised for the region, we may provide the skeletal structure of ideas with flesh and blood. However, if we do this, it quickly becomes apparent that Nugent's suggested classification is inadequate. In Nugent's scheme 'all other pronouncements' are relegated to a most insignificant role in the classification of ideas emanating from the B.U.F. If such ideas are located in the wider ideological framework however, then 'all other pronouncements' achieve a greater significance. Such pronouncements made up the greater part of the propaganda of the B.U.F. which most people in the areas most affected by the presence of the B.U.F. were subjected to. It is certainly true that 'non-authoritative' Fascist ideas drew upon and repeated the 'authoritative' category, but it is also true that those ideas emanating from the leadership of the movement were often, to put it lightly, 'interpreted', often out of all recognition. There is some evidence that many Irish people, for example, became interested in the B.U.F. because they considered that the movement supported the claims of the Catholics in the North of Ireland. That was certainly what they heard at street corner meetings in Manchester, but does not appear in the 'authoritative' pronouncements of the movement.

We need, instead, to employ the concept of an ideology which has different layers. This will enable us to see that, while it was indeed true that some ideas were more 'authoritative' than others, there was some interchange between the two categories. Anti-Semitism, for example, was a development in the movement's ideology which gained sustenance not only from the pronouncements of 'authoritative' figures, but also the actions of fascists in the streets. The behaviour of ordinary fascists in turn fed the stance taken by Mosley on the issue. Dividing the ideology of the movement into different layers also allows us to deal with the populism of the B.U.F. and to show that people could be seduced by the populist rhetoric of the fascists on street corners and be gradually sucked down into the deeper layers of B.U.F. ideology, so that they emerge as fully fledged fascists espousing the anti-Semitism, militarism and corporatism that were the hallmarks of the Fascist movement. Similarly many people, having joined the movement for populist reasons, turned away from the movement when they began to discern the other, more ominous, characteristics of Fascism.

In utilising such a concept of ideology, it is possible to analyse the chronological development of Fascist ideas more fully and to show how all 'other pronouncements' in the non-authoritative category assume as great an importance as the speeches and writings of Mosley himself. Different layers of ideology assumed greater importance at different times. To be specific, throughout the 1930's the depth ideology of the B.U.F. came to dominate the surface or populist level, though the latter was very much in evidence throughout the

period. That the different layers of Fascist ideology contradict each other is quite compatible with Cammett's view of the essentially contradictory nature of Fascism as a whole.

Not only do we have to deal with the ideology of the B.U.F. however, but that ideology is in turn placed within the ideology of society at large. It is not the place here to develop a discussion about ideology in general terms. The hegemony of ruling elites and the state of capitalist society in the 1930's have been discussed in the previous chapter. What is important is the place of people in that general ideological setting whom the B.U.F. was attempting to win over. George Rudé has identified two types of ideology in popular protest groups.⁶ The first consists of an "inherent" element - a sort of 'mother's milk' ideology, based on direct experience, oral tradition or folk memory and not learned by listening to sermons or speeches or reading books."⁷ This could be said to correspond to the ideology of politically non-committed people in Manchester in the 1930's, whom the B.U.F. was attempting to influence. The second element is the

stock of ideas and beliefs that are 'derived' or borrowed from others, often taking the form of a more structured system of ideas, political or religious, such as the Rights of Man, Popular Sovereignty, Laissez-faire and the Sacred Right of Property, Nationalism, Socialism, or the various versions of justification by Faith.⁸

It follows that, as Rudé notes, there was no tabula rasa. That is,

in the case of the history of the B.U.F., Mosley could not implant his ideas into the minds of people who did not have any ideas before. They did have ideas - an ideology - 'inherited' from their own traditions and experiences. The degree of failure or success of the Fascist movement was a measure, in part, of the receptivity of people to the 'derived' ideology of the B.U.F. We must now turn to the content of that 'derived' ideology, particularly, in the first instance, the ideas projected by the leader of the B.U.F. Sir Oswald Mosley, before dealing with just a few of the main points in the Fascist programme.

That Sir Oswald Mosley was an original thinker is open to serious doubt. The development of his economic ideas is overshadowed throughout by those of other, more able, men. Mosley's great attribute was his ability to adapt quickly to new ideas and to argue his policy in public. It is important to deal with Mosley's earlier public pronouncements on economic policy in order to refute the claims made by his supporters regarding his originality.

Mosley's first significant statement on economic affairs was addressed to the I.L.P. conference at Gloucester in April 1925. The ideas spilled over into the correspondence columns of The Times in the same month, when he took issue with a banker who was critical of Mosley's address.⁹ Mosley's ideas crystallised in the form of the 'Birmingham Proposals' which were announced to a packed meeting at Birmingham Town Hall on 3 May. Three months later they were presented to an I.L.P. Summer School at Easton Lodge and they later

emerged in a publication under the title Revolution By Reason. John Strachey, who collaborated closely with Mosley, published a more detailed study of the proposals under the same title in December 1925.

Mosley's Revolution By Reason was a fourfold plan for immediate action to relieve economic stagnation and unemployment. Firstly, instead of merely redistributing resources slightly, a basic expansion of demand would be created, which would employ unused capacity. Secondly, the expansion of demand would be centrally planned, An Economic Planning Council would direct new money to the poor, creating an expansion of the staple industries and increasing employment. The state would purchase food and raw materials direct from foreign producers, thus eliminating the 'middlemen' and reducing the capitalist 'sabotage' of speculators. Inflation would be avoided by an expansion of credit to create demand, which would be met by a new and greater supply of goods. Thirdly, the Gold Standard came under fire. If the implementation of Revolution By Reason led to a drain on gold, the pound would be allowed to float. Fourthly, the export trade would be controlled and as much production as possible switched to the home market.

Mosley has claimed that "these proposals went beyond the concept of Keynes".¹⁰ This is far from the truth. They were an exercise in populism. The ideas behind most of the proposals originated elsewhere and were discussed in various circles before Mosley spelt them out in Birmingham. The idea of a planned economy was familiar to the I.L.P. and both Wheatley and Brailsford had shown some understanding of the works of Keynes. Snowden's book The Living Wage, advocating

an Arbitration Board to fix minimum wages, predated Mosley's ideas by thirteen years. The I.L.P. policy included the nationalisation of banks and also the central control of credit as a means of keeping up the price level, which, in Mosley's scheme, would be undertaken by an Economic Planning Council.

Mosley's plan to avoid the 'middlemen' who speculated on the price and supply of goods and which was the first indication of his later attacks on 'Jewish financiers' had already been voiced by H.M.H. Lloyd, Lloyd George's controller of food during the war who, like Mosley, had advocated the direct purchase of raw materials and food by the state from the foreign producers.

The inflationary period of the early years of the Weimar Republic probably alerted Mosley to the dangers of such a phenomenon occurring in Britain. It is Mosley's proposal for dealing with inflation, by expanding credit to create demand which would be fed by increased production, which, as his biographer has pointed out,¹¹ is most damning. The proposal amounted to an acceptance of the Quantity Theory of Money (the larger the supply of money, the higher the price level) which Mosley never abandoned, even in the 1960's, and reinforced "The strong supposition that Mosley never read, or never properly understood, Keynes' later General Theory..."¹² This apart, although the General Theory was not published until 1936, Mosley himself acknowledged his early debt to its central ideas.

...I had many conversations with Keynes during

this period and he was publishing many articles and reviews; the later excuses of politicians that they could not have been aware of his thinking in 1929 because General Theory only appeared later was in no way valid.¹³

Where Mosley did follow Keynes was in his plan to float the pound if the recovery programme led to a drain on gold. Keynes had argued in his Tract for Monetary Reform, published in 1923, for the stabilisation of prices, since this would encourage investment and reduce unemployment. It followed from this that the attempt to restore the pound to its pre-war value was wrong.¹⁴

Mosley's final point in Revolution by Reason concerned the control of the export trade. This proposal must be seen in the context of the wide ranging discussions over the problems of Free Trade. The 1923 general election had been fought on the issue, with the Conservative favouring protection. In the following year the McKenna duties, the last remnants of war-time protection, were abolished by the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden. Mosley's plan for export control was very much a part of the ferment of ideas circulating at the time and which were undoubtedly discussed between himself, John Strachey and Keynes. It has been said, for example, that Mosley's social imperialism was an amalgam of the views of Chamberlain, Hobson, Blatchford, Karl Pearson and other social imperialists; "sotto voco, Mosley shouted, but the elements of his doctrine were the same as theirs."¹⁵

Reference has already been made to the correspondence in The Times in 1925 between Mosley and a banker, named Brand. However it was John Strachey and not Mosley who gave the answer to Brand's question of how an increase in internal purchasing power would help exports. Strachey's view was that an increase in British demand for foreign goods would follow from an increase in domestic demand and, in turn, expand the foreign market for British goods. The fact that Mosley did not provide an adequate answer to Brand's question not only points to his "major economic heresy: the belief that domestic trade better than foreign trade."¹⁶ but also raises the question of Mosley's ability as an economist, and supports the claim of Hugh Thomas, Strachey's biographer, that, of the two, "Strachey was the thinker, Mosley the interpreter."¹⁷

Mosley's 'Memorandum' to the Cabinet in February 1930, his subsequent resignation speech in the House of Commons in May of that year and his appeal to the Labour Party conference at Llandudno in October, followed by the 'Mosley Manifesto' of the New Party, have all been acclaimed, as Mosley proudly notes in his autobiography, by many people. A.J.P. Taylor has described Mosley's proposals as "more creative than those of Lloyd George" and "an astonishing achievement."¹⁸ For R.H.S. Crossman, Mosley was "Revealed as the outstanding politician of his generation...this brilliant manifesto was a whole generation ahead of Labour thinking."¹⁹

Would the acclaim for Mosley's pre-Fascist policy have been so pronounced had he stayed within the confines of conventional party

politics? To put the question another way, would not the radical economic policies put forward by Lloyd George in 1929 or the schemes put forward by MacMillan in 1932 be similarly acclaimed if they had later turned towards Fascism? One cannot help feeling that the response to Mosley's pre-Fascist proposals has been the result of his later political development. It is true that Mosley was ~~not~~ acclaimed at the time, but was this not more a result of his ability to publicise his plans and to choose the right moment for doing so, than true acknowledgement of their originality? The Times was continually critical of Mosley's proposals. In a letter to The Times Harold MacMillan queried the paper's criticisms. Skidelsky quotes somewhat selectively from the letter to show that MacMillan was praising Mosley for daring to stick to his party's programme.²⁰ This was true, but the emphasis should not have been on the fact that Mosley was receiving support but on the fact that his proposals were indeed not new. MacMillan continued in his letter:

...Your Parliamentary Correspondent remarks this morning that Sir Oswald's speech (at the Socialist Party meeting) 'contained little in the way of new proposals, most of his suggestions having already been made public in Labour and the Nation'. That is exactly my point. Had these proposals been novel, a Socialist Cabinet might properly have resisted them. In point of fact they are part of their own official prospectus...²¹

It has been argued elsewhere that Mosley dwelt in the 'underworld of rejected knowledge',²² which was not based on the British empirical tradition. His freedom from the constraints of the "all-

parvading, Treasury dominated, neo-classical, liberal economic traditions of the university-trained political establishment"²³ led him to a consistent doctrine of 'synthesis, eternal synthesis' which, as we have seen, led him to utilise the thoughts of other men and the policies of other parties in a novel way and which led to him being seen as an original thinker.

This synthesis of thought continued right through the 1930's and informed his view of the future of Britain as a Fascist state.

The first major statement of Mosley's Fascist ideas in The Greater Britain, published in 1932, set out to prove "by analysis of the present situation and by constructive policy, that the necessity for fundamental change exists."²⁴ The problem now was

to reconcile the revolutionary changes of science with our system of government, and to harmonise individual initiative with the wider interests of the nation...Hence the need for a New Movement, not only in politics, but in the whole of our national life.²⁵

The New Movement was defined as Fascist because it was "based on a high conception of citizenship" and "because it recognises the necessity for an authoritarian state, above party and sectional interest."²⁶ At the heart of the 'analysis of the present situation' provided by Mosley was the 'crisis' of society. The immediate crisis was the 'farce of 1931' of which one of the main ingredients was a government without any constructive policy and without any

authority. The nature of the crisis, however, went deeper than the problems associated with current events and became one of wider social and political dimensions. The country was 'hag ridden'. "In the public affairs of national life we have disorder and anarchy: in the private affairs of individual life we have interference and repression."²⁷ The state would have no use for the "drone and the decadent". "An ordered athleticism of mind and body is the furthest aim of justly enforceable morality."²⁸ The 'justly enforceable morality' was bound up with Fascist ideas of the Corporate State, though the publication of The Greater Britain was by no means the final word on the organisation of the Corporate State. Not only did Mosley's own ideas change, but the analysis and explanation of the detailed workings of the Corporate State was left to Raven Thompson, Director of Policy of the B.U.F.

For Mosley, The establishment of the Corporate State was "the main object of a modern and Fascist movement"²⁹ which he considered more suitable for adaption to the 'British temperament' than to that of any other nation. In essence it was the rationalised state with the power to limit the free operation of individuals and interests within the confines of the 'welfare of the nation'. This was not to imply a direct control of the everyday affairs of industry - individual enterprise and profit making would in fact be encouraged. If anyone went beyond the limits of the nation's welfare 'the mechanism of the Corporate system descends upon him.'³⁰

Rather than chronicle the development of the model of the Corporate

State by the Fascist leadership, a task already achieved elsewhere,³¹ a more useful exercise would be to outline the concept of the Corporate State at its most sophisticated level as proposed by Raven Thompson, its 'chief propogandist' according to Mosley,³² in his booklet The Coming Corporate State (1933), before going on to see what this would mean for the people and industries of Lancashire.

It is useful to divide the outline of the Corporate State into two parts, Government and Parliament, as in Diagram 1. Under the system of government each industry would be organised on a local basis, with representatives of the local Employers Federation (compulsory membership), Trade Unions (also compulsory membership), and the District Councils (representing Employers and workers), sitting together to deal with local affairs. The local industry would then be represented as a corporation dealing with that particular industry (e.g. textiles, iron and steel, agriculture, etc.).

Twenty such corporations would provide the framework for the economic system. Each corporation would be made up of representatives of employers, workers and consumers, the latter to be appointed by the government. The corporations would produce development plans for the industry and deal with social welfare (pensions, insurance, recreation, etc.), and control the more important day to day decision making.

Since wage rates and conditions of work would be controlled by the corporation, strikes and lockouts would be forbidden. Each corporation would set up a labour court to settle disputes by compulsory arbitration, and an industrial court to deal with unfair competition. Representatives of the corporations would sit on a National Corporation

(which would control a National Investment Board to advise individual corporations, and a Foreign Trade Board). The National Corporation would have an administrative minister, who, along with other such appointees representing other facets of government, would be consulted by an inner cabinet. The important decisions of state would be made by the inner cabinet and the administrative ministers, though the leader would maintain the power of veto.

Parliament would not be abolished under the Corporate State. Instead it would assume an advisory role. Mosley's original plan to abolish the House of Lords³³ was scrapped in favour of making it into a chamber of specialists which might produce advice and ideas for the government. The radical change in the nature of the House of Lords was not meant to cast any doubt on loyalty to the Crown. "Here at least is an institution, worn smooth with the frictions of long ago; which in difficult experience has been proven effective and has averted from this Empire many a calamity."³⁴

The House of Commons would provide technical and constructive criticism and assist the passing of government bills, a task made easier by the banning of opposition parties after two years. M.P.'s, elected on an occupational franchise, would divide their time between the House of Commons and constituency work. Local government would be in the control of locally elected councils, whose departmental heads would be responsible to the M.P.'s.

The organisation of the Fascist Corporate State has been commented on by other writers, but there are certain specific features which

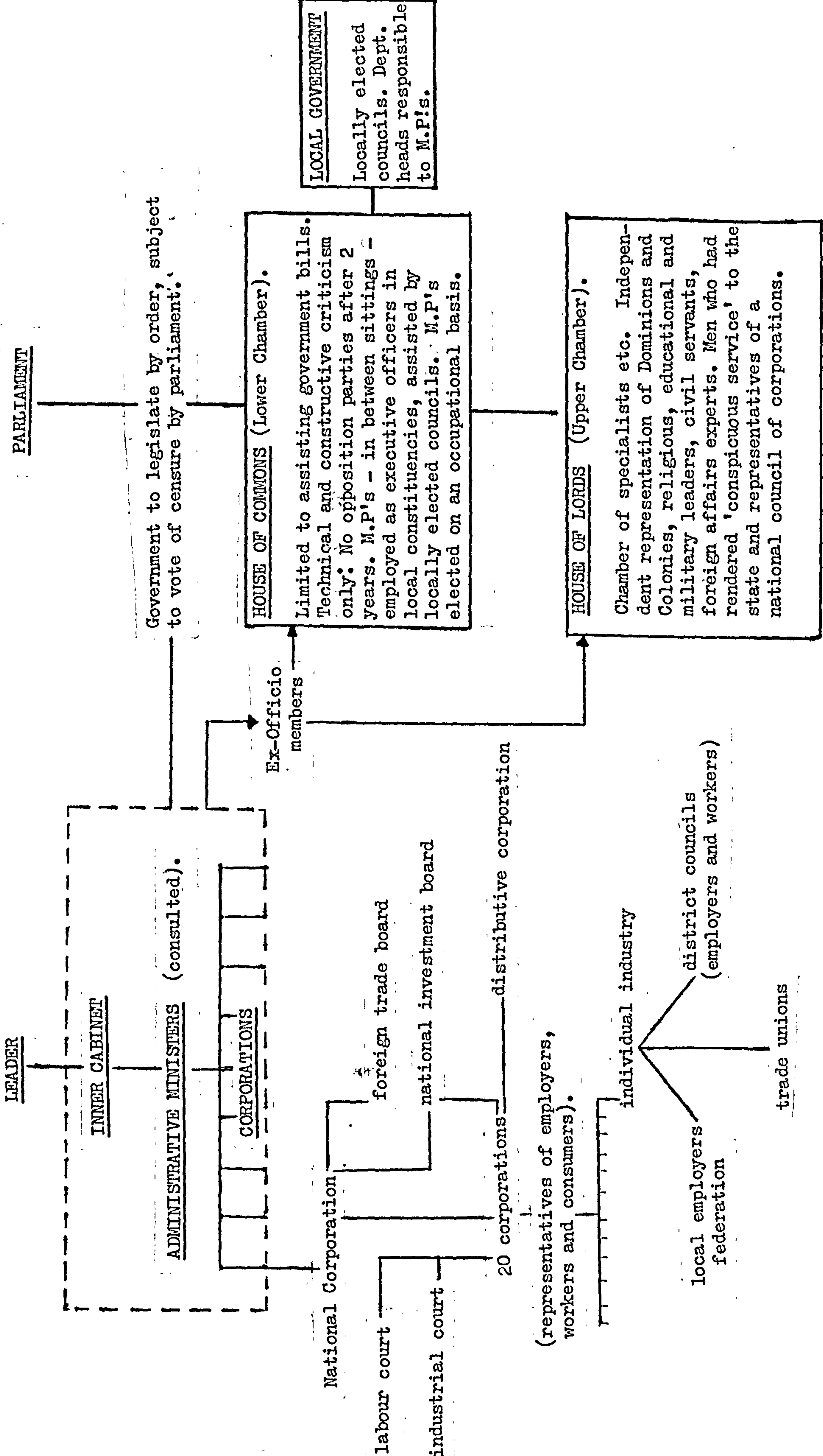


Diagram 1.

have escaped attention. Two such features are briefly noted here in order to focus attention on the repressive nature of the proposed Corporate State. The first is the role of women, the second that of the role of workers in general.

The role of women in the fascist state was touched upon, though never clearly defined, by Mosley and others. The emphasis throughout was on 'normal' women and the tone of the arguments became distinctly anti-feminist. "The part of women in our future organisation will be important, but different from that of men; we want men who are men and women who are women."³⁵ The implication was that there was something odd about women who became politicians. Thus though women in industry would not be excluded from their 'natural representation' in their industry's corporation, doubt was cast on their effectiveness.

The great majority of women do not seek, and have no time for, a career in politics. Their interests are consequently neglected and their nominal representation is accorded to women whose one idea is to escape from the normal sphere of women and to translate themselves into men.³⁶

"Womens questions are usually handled by ageing spinsters."³⁷

Married women would receive an occupational franchise as housewives and mothers. How women would be allowed to translate the use of their franchise into direct political action remained unclear, since a women's true interests were in the home rather than in public life. We have some indication of how the B.U.F. looked upon its women members. The practice seemed to fit the theory. In a survey

of 103 of the B.U.F. leaders, all were men.³⁸ In Nelson, Lancashire, Nellie Driver formed a branch of the B.U.F. in the town. Mainly due to her enthusiasm the membership reached over 100, yet she was not allowed to become District Leader. She was instead placed in charge of the women. The position of District Leader was a male preserve and a rather ineffectual man was appointed to that position, who was "clay in the hands of the Women's District Leader (Nellie Driver)."³⁹ When plans for the organising of an effective electoral machine were announced in January 1935 women members were allocated the task of leafleting the constituencies and servicing the Blackshirt 'Political Organisation'. This, presumably, meant brewing cups of tea and so on, since the main work was under the control of the men.⁴⁰

Thus women were deemed equal but different, an anti-feminist argument^t that had a wider audience outside the fascist circles.⁴¹ It was part of a general reaction against the rise in feminist consciousness before the First World War, though it was in the Fascist movements of Britain and Europe that anti-feminism achieved its most sinister form.⁴²

We have already seen that under the Corporate State, strikes and lockouts would be banned. This seemingly fair system, by which both sides of industry would be treated equally, gave some credence to Mosley's claim that the Corporate State would treat employers and workers impartially.

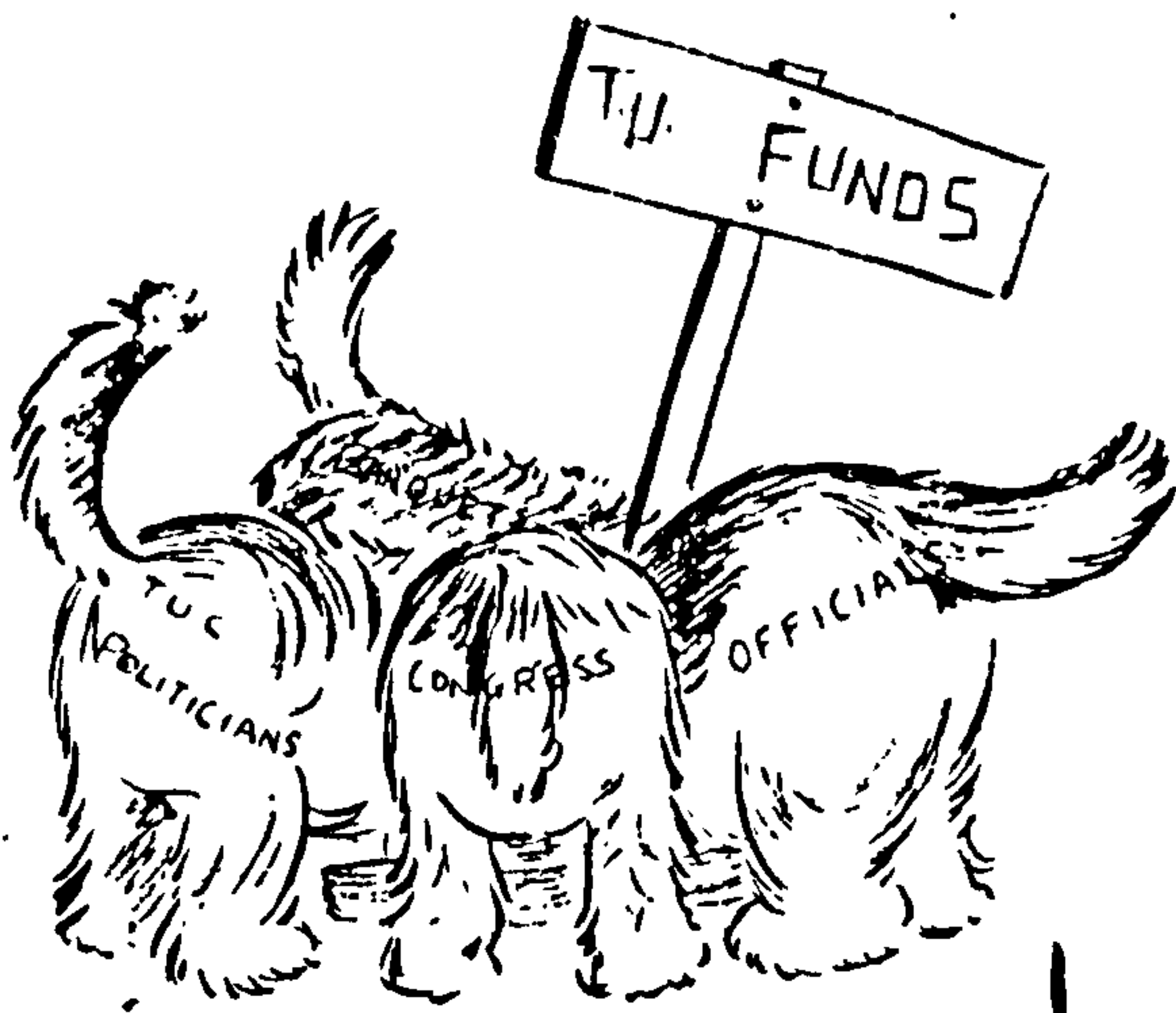
Wage questions will not be left to the dog-house of class war, but will be settled by the impartial

arbitration of State machinery...Instead of being the general staff of opposing armies they will be joint directors of national enterprise under the general guidance of corporative government.⁴³

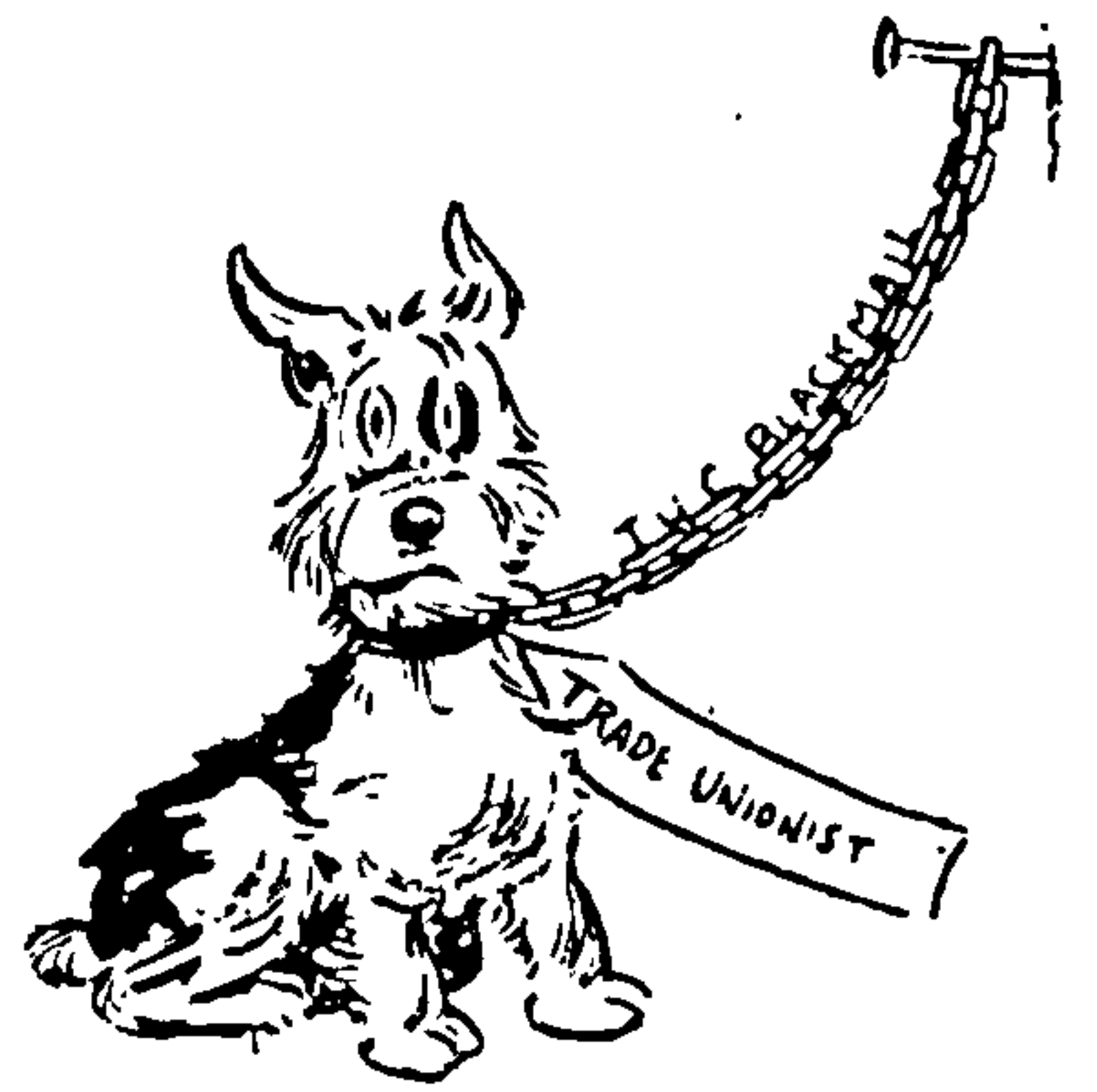
It is important to note however, that B.U.F. policy was far from impartial in this matter. The restrictions placed on employers of labour were ill-defined while those on workers were more explicit. The whole of the argument was weighted very much against the employee. Mosley, in fact, rarely referred to employers of labour as such. When he did, it was to defend them against financiers. It was not individual employers who kept the workers in misery but the "giant rogues of international finance who rob (the millions of factory workers) of their wages with soaring prices and of their employment with crashing prices..."⁴⁴ The problem was not one of employer versus employee but rather international finance versus employer, and in that equation it was the employer who would receive protection.

The forces which thwart and destroy productive enterprise will be met with the force of national authority...The incalculable powers of finance will be harnessed in the service of national production...There will be no room for the unorganised operations which have led to such enormous complexities and have rocked the structure of British industry to its foundations.⁴⁵

One of the few specific examples of the equation is provided by Mosley's plans for the retail trade.



" MY SUPPER!



B.U.F. view of the T.U.C. published 1937.

There is room for both co-op and small trader in the new state, but not for the great chain and multiple stores largely created by international finance which today injures them both. These stores will be eliminated, and the retail business will be divided between co-operatives...and individual traders...⁴⁶

The individual did not enter into the equation except in that his rights as a worker would be controlled by the corporate system to benefit the national interest. Hence strikes would be banned. And if strikes were banned, there would be no need for lock outs. Hence the ban on lockouts was nothing more than empty rhetoric to provide a balanced and impartial stand between employer and employee.

Under the Corporate State trade unions would be crushed, and employers would be free to exploit their workforce, which in turn would be completely helpless once its industrial and political strength was removed. The indication of such action is provided by the attitude of the B.U.F. towards existing trade unions, which provides some insight into the relationship between theory and practice in the movement's ideology. The B.U.F. had a clear idea of the role of the trade unions in the proposed Corporate State and at the same time was able, in its involvement in particular industrial disputes and its general reaction to existing organised groups of workers, to illustrate just how it would apply its policy to practical situations.

The B.U.F. had some problems in applying its authoritarian principles

in situations in which the populism of the movement was more relevant and was more likely to win support. This ideological conflict was illustrated by the Fascist Union of British Workers and its attempts to gain the support of the working classes by representing claimants before public assistant boards and by intervening in industrial disputes.

The F.U.B.W. was started early in 1933 with the aim of "(protecting) the interests of workers, whether in employment or unemployed. To fight against wage cuts and all reductions in the standard of life, to fight the Means Test and all measures to bully the unemployed..."⁴⁷ Its leaders in the first few months were J.P.D. Paton, a 'former leader of the National Union of Unemployed Workers' and Michael Goulding, of the Manchester B.U.F. From the very beginning the B.U.F. was claiming success in its defence of workers before the Public Assistant officials. By July 1933 it was offering employees the chance to use its 'labour exchanges'.⁴⁸ A year later the B.U.F. claimed that the F.U.B.W.'s representation of workers was recognised by Public Assistant Committees and Courts of Referees, and that "workers' grievances, often given up by the Socialist Trade Unions as hopeless, have frequently been remedied by officials of the Fascist Union."⁴⁹ No evidence was offered to support the claim and the frequency of remedial action may be doubted, given the spasmodic but inflated accounts of assistance appearing in the B.U.F. press.⁵⁰ The B.U.F. could not be said to be reticent in exploiting, for publicity purposes, the help and encouragement it gave to the underprivileged in society, and one might have expected much more

coverage for the F.U.B.W. Rather more publicity was given to the general problems of confusion over relief payments to the Manchester unemployed,⁵¹ with banner headlines such as "Life on the dole - untold sacrifices of the unemployed."⁵² More often than not the actions of the F.U.B.W. created more confusion, with local P.A. officials becoming as irate with them as with representatives of the N.U.W.M. Unlike the N.U.W.M. however, the F.U.B.W. did not advocate organised opposition against the Means Test or the level of unemployment. The unemployed were encouraged instead to develop hobbies as a way of making money.⁵³

Central to F.U.B.W. strategy were the attacks on the existing trade union structure. The criticism was twofold. The overall strategy of the trade union movement, which defined the workforce in class terms, was attacked, as might be expected given the anti-Marxist stance of the Fascist movement. A second criticism, much more populist in nature, was levelled at individual trade unionists, and degenerated at times into terms of personal abuse. Within months of the founding of the F.U.B.W. Blackshirt published an article 'by a T.U. Chairman' in which it was claimed that:

Fascism is not hostile to the trade unions, and there are large numbers of trade unionists who are fascists...The trade unions are so mixed up with the Labour Party, and so many of their leaders are just loud mouthed bullies, living off fat salaries sweated from their rank and file...Their present officials are not, in the great majority of cases, fit to be entrusted with the responsibilities that will then (when the Corporate

State is established) have to be borne by the leaders of the unions. For that reason it is urgently necessary that Fascists who are eligible for trade union membership should be in the unions now, and taking an active part in their affairs, preparing for the day when they may be called upon to take over their leadership.⁵⁴

The same theme was pursued by Wegg-Prosser in an article The Worker and the State⁵⁵ which attacked the Marxist concept of class - "based though it is on the absurd Labour theory of value of the Jewish banker Richardo (sic)" - and criticised trade union leaders about big salaries. An attack on the trade union political levy soon followed,⁵⁶ and in April 1938 Mosley himself addressed a 'meeting of London and provincial trade unionists' in which the trade unions again came under attack - "We want to see young and virile men taking the place of the leadership of their trade unions in place of old men who are living in the past."⁵⁷ The members of the A.E.U., N.U.R. and T & G.W.U. who were on the platform with Mosley were presumably good examples of the 'young and virile men'. Needless to say the meeting did not have the support of the T.U.C.⁵⁸

By the summer of 1934 the Labour movement had become deeply concerned about the attacks on trade unions and also the Labour Party. In June the National Executive of the Labour Party issued an instruction to all of its affiliated organisations ordering them to ban any of their members who were in the B.U.F.⁵⁹ A month later the General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, Marchbank, warned of the dangers of secret fascist activity within the trade union

movement.⁶⁰ The Left were alerted to the dangers of fascist interference when the B.U.F. extended its attack on trade unions by intervening in certain industrial disputes. If the aim was to gain the support of more trade unionists by such action, the fascists could not, by any account, be judged successful. In June 1934 the B.U.F. attempted to support lorry drivers at the Ham River Grit Co. in London who were on strike over a pay dispute. The fascists, according to the press, were trying to effect a settlement.⁶¹ This consisted of encouraging the drivers (some of whom were members of the B.U.F., which presumably is why the F.U.B.W. became involved in the first place) to leave their lorries in different parts of London with the ignition keys removed. Dirt was also put in the petrol tanks. The general manager of the company said he understood that the drivers felt they would get better results if they placed their case in the hands of the F.U.B.W. rather than the Transport and General Workers Union.⁶² The ~~men~~^e were sacked and the T & G.W.U. redoubled its efforts to remove fascists from their ranks, of whom there must not have been more than a handful at the most. In another intervention, this time in Birmingham, where the local bus drivers were working more than the legal number of hours, the F.U.B.W., in its belief that it was working in the interests of the drivers, took out a summons against the local authority.⁶³ The employers were fined and the F.U.B.W. suffered the wrath of the local drivers when they discovered that their hours and earnings were somewhat reduced.⁶⁴

One instance where the F.U.B.W. caused great consternation occurred in Manchester, where workers at the factory of Richard and Johnson were on strike. It was known that the firm was using blackleg labour

and the local branch of the Communist Party attempted to find out who they were. Eventually a group of blacklegs were followed from the factory to the B.U.F. headquarters in Higher Broughton and some of them were recognised as B.U.F. members.⁶⁵

In March 1936 the Blackshirt adopted 'The Patriotic Workers Paper' as its sub-heading, and from then on the paper was said to be devoted to "matters appealing to workers".⁶⁶ The principles of the Corporate State were still repeated but the adoption of the sub-heading symbolised the triumph of populism in this particular aspect of the ideology of the B.U.F.

One feature of the policy of the B.U.F. which is particularly relevant in this study of Fascism is the movement's proposals for dealing with the ailing cotton industry. The proposals were clearly set out and expounded in various 'cotton campaigns' in South East Lancashire, during which the B.U.F. gained some support from members of the Lancashire Cotton Exchange and from some owners of cotton mills to the South of Manchester.

The two major strands of B.U.F. economic policy came together in its policy on cotton when it emerged in 1934. The first was the idea of the Empire as an economic unit. The second was the concept of the Corporate State and its inherent authoritarianism. In clarifying the policy on cotton, Mosley was to revise drastically his attitude towards India and the Congress Party, and in so doing exposed the weakness of his claim to consistency. This point has

been made by Skildesky, who quotes Mosley in 1925 as saying, of Gandhi,

(He) was one of the great world forces, not by the power of his considerable intellect and personality, but because alone amongst statesmen he appears to have conquered in himself the ordinary weaknesses of humanity.⁶⁷

Yet by 1934 Mosley was saying that there was no one who could speak for India. The members of the Congress Party "were people who were inspired by a bitter animosity against Britain, and they would use their power to erect prohibitive tariffs against Lancashire goods."⁶⁸

Mosley's analysis of the problems of the cotton industry in The Greater Britain was basically the same as that for all industries. Scientific advance produced lower prices and high employment until new markets were exhausted, leading to an overproduction of goods. This process of 'rationalisation' was at the heart of the problem of all the staple industries. Only the Corporate State could resolve the situation. "Nothing but the rationalised state can hope to overcome the problem created by the rationalised industry."⁶⁹ In dealing with particular industrial markets, Mosley dealt with the export of textile machinery to the underdeveloped areas of the world. The manufacturing output of those countries was subsequently improved at the expense of the Lancashire markets. There was a loss of the yarn export trade to Japan which, in competing with India and China was beginning to focus her attention on the production of

piece goods. Scientific advance had rendered the use of skilled labour unnecessary in many sectors of industry.

No limits are now set to the exploitation of the backward labour of the Orient in competition with the skilled labour of the West...that tendency is bound to increase and to become a deadly menace to the whole white standard of life, and indeed to the whole structure of Western civilisation.⁷⁰

So far, however, the analysis of the problems of the rationalisation of industry and foreign competition had not produced a policy to deal with the specific problems of the cotton industry.

When a fascist policy for the cotton industry was arrived at, in 1934, great play was made of the fact that it was Manchester that had produced the concept of Liberal Free Trade. This theme was first expounded by Raven Thompson⁷¹ who, over the following three years, expanded on the theme. The B.U.F.'s 'analysis' of the problems of the cotton industry developed this theme and Manchester came to be seen as the victim of 'financial power' which had reigned supreme until the Manchester Free Traders had temporarily "usurped the leading place in economic affairs" in the nineteenth century.

By 1900 the City (of London) had fully regained its old power, and had involved the country in the Boer War in pursuit of its gold interests, despite the disgust of the Manchester Liberals. Already the great finance houses were engaged upon a campaign of financial expansion abroad

far exceeding in magnitude and scope the earlier expansion of Lancashire. Manchester was reverting to a mere provincial centre, and the powers of international finance were planning a revenge, even more drastic than the punishment she herself had inflicted upon Tory landlords by the repeal of the Corn Laws.⁷²

Since the power of Free Trade had been usurped by 'International Finance' the time had come for Free Trade itself to be overturned.

By the time the first B.U.F. cotton campaign in Lancashire was organised, in July 1934, the B.U.F. pamphlet Cotton, India, and You! had been published. The pamphlet was addressed to the 'Lancashire Workers' and coupled the rejection of Free Trade with attacks on the government's attitude to India, which was described as 'surrender'.

The future of Lancashire is ultimately concerned with the 'White Paper' policy of surrender to India! Our politicians are determined to hand over India to those few native agitators who are hoodwinking the ignorant Indian masses. Behind them loom the rich mill-owners of Bombay, who have subscribed huge sums to Congress. What does it all mean? It means that international finance has determined to exploit cheap native labour in India and drive out Lancashire altogether. Are you prepared to lose your last great Imperial market, to see unfortunate Indian natives herded into the hideous tenements of Bombay to sweat dividends for international finance, while you walk the streets of Bolton and Manchester?⁷³

The B.U.F. feared that government policy would hand over control of India to "...Indian financiers, who have notoriously supported Gandhi and the Congress. Swaraj movement. These rich mill-owners rigorously exclude Lancashire goods from India and bring about the final ruin of the British cotton trade."⁷⁴

Cotton, India, and You! went on to outline a four point programme for saving the cotton industry and which became the focal point of the B.U.F. cotton campaigns in Lancashire. Firstly, by excluding foreign textiles from the Crown Colonies, immediate employment could be given to 11,000 workers in the industry in Lancashire. Secondly, the Indian tariff barriers against Lancashire would be removed, providing work for another 25,000 workers. The corollary to this point would be strong government in India and full fiscal control placed in the hands of Britain. Thirdly, the exclusion of Japanese textiles from India would create employment for 29,000 workers in Lancashire. Thus a total of 65,000 jobs could be saved. The fourth point was that Indian mill owners would be compelled to raise wages and thus provide a decent standard of living for their workers. The employers would also be forced 'to gut and rebuild the foul industrial slums of the East!.

The use of force required to implement this policy, or the type of government needed to use such force, was never spelt out in detail at meetings, nor were the means by which Mosley arrived at his figures. The policy would in all respects have been impossible to implement successfully, though the point is that it brought cheers from the

audience and a belief that Mosley would be able to do something. On the street corners the policy was translated into clichés and slogans and embellished with any other propaganda the speakers could think of.

It was not to be long before 'international Finance' was translated into 'Jewish International Finance', exploiting 'oriental labour'.⁷⁵ This move was partly a result of Mosley's own hardening anti-Semitism but was also a result of the fact that this was how Mosley's original words were translated from the beginning by the ordinary fascist members in the B.U.F. branches.

It is here that the 'authoritative' and non-authoritative' sources of B.U.F. ideas became entangled. One fed the other, until the result, as perceived by the general public, was confused. The over simplified and populist panacea for the ills of the cotton industry was seen as part of the B.U.F.'s general anti-Semitic campaign on the one hand. On the other hand the authoritarianism and use of military force implied in the B.U.F.'s policy for the cotton industry was never far below the surface. The different layers of Fascist ideology could be seen most clearly. The authoritarianism implicit in much of the policy of the B.U.F. was made explicit in the actual organisation of the movement. The command structure and the emphasis on Mosley's leadership was continually stressed and affected the relationships between different ranks at branch level. While 'survival of the fittest' was, as we shall see, the way of solving local leadership problems, Mosley himself imposed his own

brand of leadership on the movement. Both in his personal control over the movement and in the logical conclusion of many of the movement's policies, the classical fascist concept of 'dictatorship' can be discerned. Part of the authoritarianism of the B.U.F. was linked to the movement's policy on anti-Semitism, and it is to this aspect of British fascism that we must now turn.

There are three possible explanations for the campaign of anti-Semitism pursued by the B.U.F. The first is that Mosley was opportunistic and used anti-Semitism to increase the support of his movement, without personally being a convinced anti-Semite. The second is that the Movement's anti-Semitism was genuine. The third explanation is that the movement responded to irresistible internal pressures.⁷⁶ The second explanation, that the anti-Semitism of the B.U.F. was genuine, is the one adopted here. Not only was it genuine, but it was present from the early days of the formation of the New Party, which preceded the B.U.F., and thereafter provided a continuing theme throughout the life of the B.U.F.

There is of course a history of anti-Semitism in this country, and that history has been adequately researched.⁷⁷ All one can point to here is the fact that that history of anti-Semitism provides the social setting for the anti-Semitism of the New Party and the B.U.F. The B.U.F. did not suddenly produce a new policy out of a hat which shocked the sensibilities of the British public. The Jewish community for one, was certainly aware of the continuing danger of anti-Semitism rearing its head, though, as we shall see, the leaders

of the Jewish community were quite unprepared for the anti-Semitism of the Fascist movement.

By the summer of 1932, the Jewish community was beginning to be aware of anti-Semitic opinions being expressed by sections of Oswald Mosley's New Party. An attempt has been made to lay the blame for incidents of an anti-Semitic nature in the New Party fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the individuals involved,⁷⁸ since the declared policy of the New Party did not include any reference to anti-Semitism. When similar 'individual' acts of anti-Semitism were carried over into the British Union of Fascists, similar claims were made.⁷⁹ Mosley himself, it seems, has been cleared.

The point to be made here is that a political movement does not solely become anti-Semitic when the leader of that movement describes it as such, or when the public at large see the leader attaching himself to that doctrine. A political movement, such as the B.U.F., can be said to have adopted anti-Semitism when the general body of its membership does so and when that membership or sections of that membership takes part in anti-Semitic acts. It is not enough for the leader of the movement to disown anti-Semites within the movement if such people are allowed to continue their activities, especially when the leader himself states later that he is of a similar frame of mind.

In August 1932 an unemployed youth aged nineteen, who was a member of the New Party and gave his address as 1 Great George Street,

Westminster (the headquarters of the New Party), was convicted of sticking labels on windows in Oxford Street, London. The labels contained the slogan 'Nationalise the wealth of the Jew Banks and expel all Jews from the country.'⁸⁰ Earlier, in July, a speaker at a New Party meeting held in Westminster, spoke out against the Jews.⁸¹

The New Party did in fact issue a statement following the court case referred to above, which the Jewish Chronicle printed in full.⁸² In it, the New Party acknowledged that the defendant in the case was a member of their organisation and that he lived on the premises of the New Party headquarters. However, 'since the youth was acting in a private capacity the New Party did not provide any defence for him. Anti-Jewish propaganda, the statement added, was neither authorised nor approved by Sir Oswald Mosley. The youth remained in the New Party.

While the Jewish press welcomed the New Party statement, it was not entirely satisfied. In October 1932, by which time the New Party had been transformed into the B.U.F., Mosley himself was saying:

We attack Jews if they are engaged in subversive activities such as the direction of the Communist Party or equally when they are engaged in international financial transactions such as those which have recently shaken this country. We never attack Jews because they are Jews. Jews who are loyal citizens of Britain and who serve their country rather than its enemies will always have a square deal from us.⁸³

As the Jewish Chronicle pointed out, in the minds of many people, a Jew must necessarily be either a Communist or a banker.⁸⁴

The link between the Jewish community and 'international financial transactions' or the Communist Party had certainly already formulated in Mosley's mind. At a B.U.F. meeting in the Memorial Hall, London, at the end of September 1932, Mosley, in reply to three questioners, shouted out "Three warriors of class war, all from Jerusalem".⁸⁵ The New Statesman for one, was already wondering why Mosley had taken up anti-Semitism as part of his creed.⁸⁶ Nor was it just a question of the leader, or sections of the movement in London adopting such a creed. As early as December 1932, the Yorkshire B.U.F. table tennis club resigned from the Leeds Tables Tennis League when it found that its list of matches included one against a Jewish team.⁸⁷ Even so, Mosley could write to Lord Melchett in January 1933 as follows:

It is quite in accord with my definition of the British Union of Fascists attitude upon this question to say that anti-Semitism forms no part of the policy of this organisation and that anti-Semitic propaganda is forbidden in this organisation.⁸⁸

The B.U.F. did in fact disown some members who were obviously giving the movement a bad name, though the members were not actually expelled. They were merely said to be acting in a 'private capacity'. This was the case in March 1933 when a Manchester member, Daniel McNichol, was arrested and charged in Rochdale with conduct likely

to cause a breach of the peace, assault, and being armed with a rubber coil filled with lead.⁸⁹

McNichol and many others were connected with what the Jewish Chronicle referred to as 'anti-Jewish manifestations' in Manchester in February 1933, Jews were--

...threatened with personal violence. Jewish shopkeepers have found their premises plastered with inflammatory incitements such as 'Down with the Jews' and 'Perish the Jews'. Offensive notices are reported to have been posted on the walls and railings of a local synagogue and chalked on the pavements, with the swastika decoration. Moreover, a brick has been thrown through the window of a house where a woman was lying seriously ill, while a piece of paving brick, hurled with great force through the window of the Talmud Torah, had labels attached bearing attacks on the League of Nations as "a plot for world control of Jews", on the Peace Conference as a "Jews Conference" and on Jews in general as controllers of politics, purveyors of "sensual films", "temperers with white girls" and the cause of all the national troubles in Ireland, India, Egypt and even China.⁹⁰

It was not just Manchester that had to put up with 'anti-Jewish manifestations'. They were repeated in Leeds and London and identical labels to the ones found in the Manchester Talmud Torah were pasted on to Jewish owned shops in the Strand in London.⁹¹

It was also reported from Ruskin College, Oxford, in a letter to

the Jewish Chronicle that "...Mosley can deny what he likes, his members are frequently notorious anti-Semites, and some of them told me last term that they had affixed labels to the doors of Jewish students (not Communists)." ⁹² In fact, the members of the B.U.F. in Oxford went further than this.

Last term in Oxford a branch of the British Union of Fascists was started by Sir Oswald Mosley himself, and it was not long before labels were posted on the doors of Jewish students rooms "Down with the Jews!"; "The Jews are the enemies of the human race!"; "The Jews control the Press, the Cinema and the wireless!" were among the least offensive. Several Jewish students were 'ragged' in a disgraceful and unprovoked way by squads of Fascist bullies from various colleges. The Blackshirts were to be seen everywhere in the city streets, and the devices of the Swastika and fasces were chalked upon every important building.

Matters came to a head when gangs of Fascists attempted to invade club meetings at which Jewish students were present. I took it upon myself to organise a defence for these meetings. When Dr Thost, Hitler's chief correspondent in London, came to Oxford to address the German club, he found that more than fifty per cent of his hearers were violently opposed to Hitlerism. Demonstrations were held at intervals, and there was a marked diminution in the ardour of the Fascists. So uneasy did they become, in spite of their numerical superiority to our organisation, that they adopted the custom of fixing the dates and times of their meetings in private and of publicly announcing the wrong dates

and times. This happened on several occasions, and must have occasioned them no little expense.

Towards the end of term attempts at molesting Jewish students became more frequent and there were a few ugly cases. I need hardly say that we administered effective reprisals.⁹³

Perhaps people did have some grounds for thinking, as the Jewish Chronicle was keen to stress, that the "anti-Jewish manifestations" were the work of misguided individuals which did not suggest the existence of any widespread or important movement. The Manchester Jews were, for example, advised that the wisest course was "just to leave the dogs to their vomit and the police."⁹⁴

However, the uniformity of the anti-Semitic slogans and 'sticky-backs' does suggest that the B.U.F., if it did not actually commission the campaign of anti-Semitism, did, at the very least, condone the activities of those members who issued such anti-Semitic material. By its sin of omission, failing, that is, to censure such members, the movement as a whole must be held responsible.

In May 1933 a representative of the Jewish Chronicle interviewed Mosley. During the interview Mosley stated that:

The Press of this country as a whole has completely misrepresented the position of the British Union of Fascists in relation to the Jews. This misrepresentation, of course, has been quite deliberate and on the facts is inexcusable. Within a month of the foundation of the B.U.F. in October

1932 an order was posted by me in all our premises forbidding Jew baiting in any shape or form and stating definitely that the B.U.F. was not anti-Semitic. I have repeatedly challenged any newspaper to bring to my notice cases which infringe this order and consequently would lead to the expulsion of a member. No case has been brought to my notice but the misrepresentation continues.

There are one or two small societies, but in no way connected with us, called Fascists, which still exist purely for the purpose of Jew baiting. Their activities and their attacks upon the Jews are often ascribed to us. They are entirely ineffective and for practical purposes can be ignored, as any effective membership which they ever possessed long ago joined this organisation and loyally accepts our discipline.

As I stated six months ago, any British citizen, Jew or Gentile, who is loyal to Great Britain will always have a square deal from us. Our attitude in this respect is very similar to that of Italian Fascism, whose attacks upon Jews are unknown.⁹⁵

When asked about the allegations of an international financial conspiracy which was levelled against the Jews, Mosley said that he not only accused the Jews of such conspiracy, but also Gentiles and that whether they be Jews or Gentiles he was openly hostile to them. Mosley went on to say that the word Jew was strictly forbidden in any of the Union literature.⁹⁶

This statement was, however, riddled with falsehoods. The press had not misrepresented the B.U.F., except in so far as sections of the

press, the Daily Mail and the London Evening Standard for example, played down the anti-Semitism and the violence of the movement. Other newspapers, the Manchester Guardian, the News Chronicle and the Jewish Chronicle among others, accurately reported the anti-Semitic content of Mosley's speeches and provided accurate coverage of the anti-Semitism amongst the membership of the movement. If the order referred to by Mosley had been posted in all the B.U.F. premises - and there is no evidence whatsoever of such a notice being posted in the Manchester headquarters - the ordinary membership was not eager to comply with it. No members were expelled because of their proven anti-Semitic outbursts; certainly not from the Oxford branch or the national headquarters in Great George Street London, or from the Manchester headquarters.

Mosley referred to "one or two small societies", by which he meant the Britons and the Imperial Fascist League which existed "purely for the purpose of Jew baiting." Mosley did not refer to the fact that in April 1932 he chaired a meeting of the Imperial Fascist League, at which the founder, Arnold Leese, spoke to the youth section of the New Party, NUPA, on "The Blindness of British Politics under the Jew Money-Power."⁹⁷ Nor did Mosley see the inconsistency in his statement that the B.U.F. was not anti-Semitic but that people left the Britons and The Imperial Fascist League, which existed "purely for the purposes of Jew baiting", in order to join the B.U.F.

Meanwhile some other actions of the leadership of the B.U.F. were

causing disquiet in Jewish circles.

In August 1933, four of the leaders of the B.U.F. paid a visit to Nuremburg at the invitation of the Nazi Party, where they took part in a Nazi rally wearing the full uniform of the B.U.F. The Jewish Chronicle pointed out to Mosley the old saying "men are judged by the company they keep. Will he now set himself right by a declaration that his deputies' pilgrimage to Nuremburg implied no approval of the war declared there on the Jewish people."⁹⁸

In fact Mosley had intended visiting Germany in January 1932 with Harold Nicholson. In the event he missed the German trip and met Nicholson in Rome. The trip was described by Nicholson to his friends as "an information gathering exercise."⁹⁹ Mosley certainly seemed impressed by the information he received from Nicholson, who noted in dismay, that "Tom cannot keep his mind off shock troops and the roll of drums around Westminster. He is a romantic. That is his great failing."¹⁰⁰

In April 1932 Nicholson wrote to Dr Robert Forgan, revealing his dissatisfaction with the New Party:

I joined for two reasons. (1) Personal affection and belief in Tom. (2) A conviction that a serious crisis was impending and that our economic and parliamentary system must be transformed if a collapse were to be avoided. Now I feel that the New Party as such has become too much identified with Hitlerism.¹⁰¹

Robert Skidelsky quotes a letter written to Mosley by Nicholson, dated June 29 1932, concerning the first draft of Greater Britain. Nicholson referred to Mosley's "destructive platform manner" and continued:

I dare say that the Jewish banking houses may have been a trifle international in their frame of mind. I am quite prepared even to believe that they have been the villain of the peace. But there is a Nazi note, a yellow press note in these denunciations which will cause many people to blink and question your seriousness. It is easy to tone down that sort of statement by a short qualifying phrase. English readers are always impressed by propogandists who take off their boots before they start kicking below the belt.¹⁰²

As a result of this pressure from Nicholson, Mosley did not include the pages referring to Jews in The Greater Britain.

As far as the anti-Semitism of the ordinary membership of the B.U.F. was concerned there are some interesting examples one can turn to. We have already noted the case of Daniel McNichol, which occurred as early as March 1933. That may be considered an isolated example, but we have available some general observations of the movements anti-Semitism from older members. The leader in Hull for example, has stated that anti-Semitic feelings ran high amongst local members.¹⁰³ A member of the B.U.F. speaking panel in Leeds spoke of similar feelings being expressed from a very early date (1932)

in his area and he himself still held extreme anti-Semitic views.¹⁰⁴ A common feature amongst old members who were interviewed as part of this study was their denial of any anti-Semitic feelings of their own, before going on to ascribe certain characteristics to Jews. We will see later how Sutherst, one of the interviewees, accused the Jews of causing the Second World War. Before making that statement, Sutherst had this to say:

The trouble at any local meeting was caused through organised opposition. Communist opposition. Even Jewish opposition as well. That doesn't make me anti-Semitic by the way, I always followed Mosley's lead on this anti-Semitism and this discrimination. He always said that he condemned the Jews, not for what they were, but for what they did. What caused them I think to be anti-Mosley and anti-Union Movement was the fact that our policy would hit them, not racially, but financially...they were more predominantly, somehow, in clothing factories, which were notorious for paying low wages. It was really sweated labour...¹⁰⁵

In Manchester, another old member, while refusing to believe that she was anti-Semitic, went on to say that "they (the Jews) brought it upon themselves. I mean, the way they controlled everything."¹⁰⁶ When Thomas Pickles was asked whether there were any feelings against the Jews in his branch in Manchester, he replied:

It never seemed to register to us that there was, but I don't think the British Fascist Movement was really as anti-Semitic as the Germans were. I think

it was the reaction of the Germans to Semites that caused the feelings here. They thought well one Fascist organisation was like another one. I don't know, the general run of British people are not aggravated minded are they really, against other races. To me a Jew is only another part of the country. He's one of us as far as I know.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, however, he praised the work of Hitler in Germany.

Of course you have got to realise that Hitler was making quite a success of things in Germany at that time and naturally you think that if you have got somebody in that area he could probably do the same. I mean as you realise that Hitler at that time was doing good for his country. He hadn't started the aggravation that subsequently came along.¹⁰⁸

Pickles explained his lack of activity in the B.U.F. by saying he didn't like aggravation. "I could see that was what it was you see. Where the present N.F. (National Front) have got the coloured people against them, at that time we had the Jews."¹⁰⁹

The most common form of Fascist behaviour in Manchester, in which a feeling against Jews was a motivating factor, was marching through a Jewish area. However innocent this may have appeared, it was a deliberately provocative act. It seemed to work; that is it provoked the Jews, as this example provided by Arthur Fawcett would indicate.

We had a meeting at the Free Trade Hall and Mosley had been there. We were walking back, a gang of us, a number of us, back to Northumberland House which was in Higher Broughton...and of course in those days it was a Jewish quarter and there was a Jewish cafe, there was a Jewish fish and chip shop and all this sort of thing. And the Jewish people used to go there, the young ones you know, talking about what have you, you know, and congregating on the street corners and this sort of thing and we were fully conversant with this and this was the reason we walked down there to tell you the truth. And if its trouble they want, its trouble they can have. If its trouble they don't want its trouble they won't get and so we walked down there and there was booing and the crowds was following us...¹¹⁰

The fact that the Jews had been provoked by Fascists marching in uniform was entirely missed by Fawcett.

Well, you see, it wasn't a movement against the Jews at the start. It evolves. They did eventually go, because the Jews were against us, more than you can understand the Jews being against us because we represented to them Hitler, didn't we? That was the link and you can well understand them, you see, and not taking our word that we weren't anti-Semitic, which we weren't at the beginning of time. But as time went by and all the attacks we got were from Jews, then we became anti-Semitic. I became anti-Semitic, but I'm not anti-Semitic, not now, not really you know. I can be as friendly with a Jew as I can be friends with you. It doesn't make any difference to me. And I think most of us were like

that at the time. But its just the fact that they were always attacking us and whenever there was trouble there was Jews. And, as you know there were a Jewish Communist Party in Russia. In the very early days the Jews were there in positions of power.¹¹¹

Fawcett's activities went beyond marching with his friends through the Jewish district of Higher Broughton.

I remember sticking anti-Jewish labels in telephone kiosks. Little labels, and it had on, well I remember one. Somebody had just been made a peer. Some Jewish chap had been made a pæer and it said "Look at the long noses of our aristocracy." They would be the B.U.F. stickers. I don't know where they came from, but we had them at the club. That's the only one I can remember but various things like that happened you know. Insults to the Jewish people as it were.¹¹²

Fawcett made the point that Jews were against them W...because we represented, to them, Htler." It is true that, in calling his movement Fascist, Mosley implanted in many people's minds the idea that it was a movement similar to that in Germany, where the persecution of Jews was already taking place. Even if there was no connection with the anti-Semitism rife in Germany at that time, many people could be excused for thinking there was. Mosley's visit to Germany in August 1933 merely served to emphasise the point. People, especially Jews in this country, could not be blamed for putting two and two together. The Jewish Chronicle, remarking on

that visit, said:

Few people - and certainly few Germans - would suppose that you could 'heil Hitler' and denounce at the same time one of the chief things for which he stands.¹¹³

The paper went on to point out that the diplomatic representatives of Britain, France and America had turned down the German invitation to attend the same rally.

We have already noted Harold Nicholson's remark that the New Party itself was already "identified with Hitlerism". This identification could not but increase when the New Party became the British Union of Fascists in October 1932. Not only was Mosley's movement anti-Semitic but, as we have seen, at the heart of the different levels of ideology was the revolutionary concept of the Corporate State. That, in turn, was deemed to require a use of force and the dictatorship of Mosley himself over every aspect of the Fascist State. The British Empire would become a fortress, presided over by an armed dictatorship equalling that of Hitler's Germany. That was the deepest layer of ideology to which the leadership and many other people in the movement adhered. We shall now see that these ideas co-existed with other levels of ideology. In focusing our attention on the B.U.F. in the North of England, and on Manchester in particular, we can reveal the populism of the movement as well as its more sinister side.

PART TWO

FASCISM IN THE NORTH WEST OF ENGLAND.

WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MANCHESTER.

1932-1940

CHAPTER THREESPRING OFFENSIVE

A picture of the organisation and history of the B.U.F. in Manchester is something that can only be built up in a piecemeal fashion. The records kept by the Manchester headquarters of the movement are inaccessible. Internal rivalries and disputes led to frequent re-organisation and a fairly high turnover of leading figures. As a result it has sometimes been rather difficult to keep track of events, particularly as the Fascist press would not be the first to disclose and analyse such upheavals. However it is possible to present a general idea of the development of the movement in the Manchester area by using as many sources as possible. The Fascist press, of course, carried some news and articles relating to the area and local and national newspapers maintained an interest in the movement. However, in October 1938, the Fascist newspaper Blackshirt split into a Southern edition and a Northern edition. It seems that copies of the Northern edition placed in the British Library newspaper section were destroyed by enemy action during the 2nd World War. It has not been possible to trace the newspaper either in the Union Movement archives or in any of the major libraries in the North of England, though the paper may be available in some private collections. Various groups kept the B.U.F. under surveillance and, when those observations were recorded, are another source of information. Left wing political groups, together with groups within the Jewish community, have proved to be important in this respect. Valuable

information has also been provided by ex-members of the B.U.F. who responded to requests for help in the building up of a picture of the movement in the North.

By following the progress of the movement in Manchester, it is possible to learn something about its national significance. This is particularly the case since, outside London, Manchester was the most important area for the B.U.F. Indeed, in some respects, Manchester achieves a greater importance than London in terms of the development and progress of the movement. We need to distinguish between the various claims made by the B.U.F. about its strength and development, and to relate them to what actually happened. We need to monitor the response of the movement to the particular difficulties posed by a city such as Manchester, with its varied problems resulting from the vulnerability of its staple industries in a harsh economic climate; its heterogeneous population, with a large mixture of Jews and Irish, and yet its strength as an important major city in the United Kingdom. Part Two of this thesis attempts to achieve these tasks. The exercise will result in a better understanding of the growth and development of the B.U.F. than we have so far had at our disposal.

* * ** * * *

The B.U.F. was not the first Fascist organisation to appear in Manchester. Eight years prior to the appearance of Mosley's movement in the city, the Manchester Fascist Brigade was formed. This particular organisation was founded by members of the substantial community of

Italians in the district of Ancoats, near the city centre. It is perhaps worth looking at this organisation in some detail, since it has so far evaded the eyes of contemporary historians. It provides an interesting insight into one of the many immigrant communities in Manchester and is relevant to the later history of the B.U.F. in the area.

The Manchester Fascist Brigade was formally established in January 1924 at the home of 'Ingeniere Bertolas' in Cecil St., Ancoats. The people who attended the first meeting were known as the 'della primara' (of the first hour), and were drawn from the professional, cultural and religious leaders of the local Italian community. Apart from Ingeniere Bertolas, those present were "Dr Laetre Azzoni, the geometrician/land surveyer, Prof. Piero Rebora, Dr Azzoni, Cav. D. Antonelli, Mr Megatti of the Midland Hotel, the lawyer Himini, Mr G. Pessagno, a representative of the Newcastle Fascist League and a good number of Italians from Ancoats." This account of the first meeting is taken from a previously untranslated history of the Italian community in Manchester,¹ which went on to outline the aims of the organisation and, in providing information on other Italians involved, showed the level at which the Brigade was organised and its links with Mussolini.

(The) 'Fascists of the first hour' encountered great difficulties. Its leaders in particular, had to face grave risks, the more so because at first the movement was regarded with deep suspicion abroad. The first attempts were therefore hazardous.

However, with boldness, enthusiasm and unshaken faith in the Duce who had started the drive towards rebirth, it was possible to continue, at least for a time, at liberty and safe from any 'hitch or hindrance'. The presence in subsequent assemblies of the Concil Cavalieroe Uff. E. Fontana Jucher and of Cav. Uff Ten de Cavolis, Vice Consul General at Liverpool, instilled the neophytes, if such we may call them, with faithfulness, and in turn, around these gathered the ex-combatants. The first President was Prof. Piero Cav. Rebara, at one time Captain of the Alpini, a resolute man, with great initiative. He announced frequent reunions, held conferences and commemorations, organised feasts and banquets, with the aim of revitalising the Colony, which for some years... had fallen into lethargy, so that it could re-establish its existence and regain its conscience. On Dr Rebara's retirement in 1928, the Fascist Brigade, as a testimony to his worthwhile and fruitful work, presented him with a gold medal with a portrait of the Duce and an appropriate inscription. However he did continue to take part in the organising committee and to serve the cause readily, especially by defending to the bitter end the fascist regime in the columns of the principle critical English newspapers.²

On the retirement of Dr Rebara, Dr Laele Azzoni became acting secretary until he returned to Italy for business reasons. Cav. Rantozzi took over from Azzoni as secretary and also became honorary treasurer. Under the guidance of Rantozzi, the Fascist Brigade apparently increased its membership and funds. Rantozzi retired in 1928 because of ill health and was presented with a framed portrait

of the Duce for his services to the Brigade. He was succeeded by Giovanni Panizzi, Chancellor to the Consulate in Manchester, who managed to increase the membership, and co-ordinated the activities of the Brigade by issuing regular circulars.

Panizzi eventually became Chancellor to the General Consulate in Liverpool and took up the post of secretary to the Fascist Brigade there. The Fascist Brigade in Liverpool appeared to be well organised, with regular issues of information bulletins. Fascist Brigades were formed in other cities where Italians had formed small communities. Dr Reborra, who was present at the inaugural meeting in Manchester, was instrumental in forming a Fascist League in Leeds, in which interest was shown by the Italian Consul in Bradford. There was a 'vigorous' Fascist League in Sheffield, whose trustee was Sig. Giovacchino Stefanutti, which had some links with the Manchester section. There was a flourishing Fascist Brigade amongst the Italian community in Newcastle and also in Glasgow. In December 1931 the Fascist Brigades of Manchester and Glasgow were noted, out of all the Fascist Leagues of Great Britain, for 'services rendered' by the General Secretary of the Fascist Leagues Abroad.

When Panizzi left Manchester he was replaced as Secretary of the Brigade by Cav. Domenico Antonelli. Circulars continued to be distributed and Antonelli "(developed) the various activities of the Fascist League with zeal and intelligence. Circular No. 46 stated that at the end of October 1931 there were 140 members in Manchester and that net funds were £259 6s 2d. in credit." 3

The Fascist Brigade in Manchester provided many benefits for those members of the Italian community who paid their membership fees. An annual 'whist drive' was held in November which produced a profit in the region of £40. Such fund raising events, together with donations (In 1931 the President contributed £50) enabled the Brigade to provide annual outings for the children of the local community. The Fascist Brigade, in fact, took over the management of schools for Italian schoolchildren, at St. Alban's Church, Ancoats. The Parish Priest of St. Alban's, Father Gaetano Fracassi, provided the premises for the day school. There was an annual Fascist feast day of the Befana (la festa della Befana is Epiphany, a traditional Italian holiday) at which the schoolchildren were provided with sweets and presents. In July 1931 the Consul in Manchester invited the children and the staff of the school to his residence in Fielden Park. Children of the community attended summer school camps in Italy every year. The benefits resulting from membership of the Fascist Brigade were considerable in the Italian community. The community leaders were members (their leadership of the community may in fact have depended to a large extent on their membership of the Brigade) and others in the community gained some respect by their social intercourse with members of the Consulate and intellectual and religious leaders of the community.

There was another important function performed by the Fascist Brigade, which could be realised by sending children to the summer camps in Italy. Valgimigh provided a description:

Thus children of Italians are kept in contact with the motherland, and learn to appreciate the natural and artistic beauty of the districts of origin of their fathers, neither can it escape them, albeit they of tender years, the 'restful lives of the citizens'.

This innovation also serves to keep alive a spirit of Italian-ness amongst emigrants, more so because through the severe restrictions, especially in these islands, the number of our compatriots is decreasing, and in time maybe the different colonies might disappear or would become absorbed. In any case, as it was rightly said by a writer in the Marzocco of Florence: the Italians abroad 'are a real and living part of the common homeland. They are no longer, as was once the case, turned away from the life of the nation'. No one, therefore, can deny the beneficial and salutary affects of the new regime in all their manifestations. ⁴

The Fascist Brigade was fully aware that if the Italian community in Manchester was to maintain its identity, its language and its culture, it had to be constantly reminded of its links with the 'motherland'. However, the links were not only to be with contemporary Italy, but with Italian history, its greatness and its leaders. Mussolini was seen as the present incumbent of the honourable post of 'great leader' who had rescued Italy from turmoil and defeat.

Religion and politics were close allies in the Manchester Italian community, reflecting the relationship which existed in Italy itself. St. Albans church, Ancoats, was the centre of religion for the community and did as much to preserve the identity of the community and

instil in it a sense of history as the Fascist Brigade attempted to. The Church organised its own Whitsuntide procession which was distinct from those of other Catholic churches. The older Italian generation of the 1930's conversed in Italian and the St. Albans school, under its headmistress and her two assistants, instilled in the children a sense of national awareness.

One of the many interesting personalities thrown up by the Italian community was Father Gaetano Fracassi, the Parish Priest of St. Albans, who highlighted the close relationship between church and politics. Fracassi was one of the leading figures in the Fascist Brigade. He organised a youth club at St. Albans which was, in effect, the Fascist club for boys. The members of the youth club wore black shirts, black ties and black berets. Old members of the congregation of St. Albans remember the club well and also remember the Italian boys marching and training on a 'croft' near the school.⁵

The black uniforms worn by the Italian Fascist Brigade members were obtained from Italy, as was the black dress worn by the Italian schoolchildren. When the Public Order Act became law on January 1st 1937, there was some doubt as to whether the Italians would be able to continue wearing the black 'uniform'. The Italian ambassador to Britain, D. Grandi, was warned that the dress constituted a political uniform. After attempting to argue the point, Grandi eventually issued a direction to the schools, by which the black shirts and pullovers were to be replaced by ordinary blue jerseys.⁶

In the late 1930's Father Fracassi supervised the collection of gold wedding rings and other valuable trinkets from the Italian community, which were sent to boost similar collections in Italy for the war effort. When the Second World War broke out, Father Fracassi became known locally as the 'Rebel Priest' because of his continued support for Italy in the war.⁷

Defence Regulation 18b was introduced in 1940 to restrict the movement of aliens, and Fracassi was arrested on June 11th 1940, within 24 hours of Italy's entry into the war. Many of the Italians who were interned under Defence Regulation 18b were transported by ship to the colonies. Father Fracassi was escorted aboard the Andora Star which sailed for Canada. On July 2nd 1940 the ship was attacked by a German U Boat in the Atlantic and eventually sank. There were some survivors. Father Fracassi was not one of them.⁸

It is apparent that the Manchester Italian Fascist Brigade must be seen in relation to contemporaneous events in Italy and not as part of the development of Fascism in this country. The Fascist Brigade was as much a cultural movement as a political one and sought to strengthen its ties with Italy rather than take its message out to the people of Manchester. Yet the isolation of the Brigade does highlight some problems which faced the B.U.F. in Manchester in the 1930's. The B.U.F. was seemingly pursuing similar ends to the Fascist Brigade. Mosley's movement, as we have seen, certainly drew many elements of its ideology from the experiences of Italy under Mussolini. At the same time, however, we know that the two

movements had virtually no contact with each other although each must have known of the other's existence.

The reasons for this mutual isolation are relevant to the history of the B.U.F. and can be related to the discrepancy between the two levels on which the ideology of the B.U.F. operated. While the B.U.F. did indeed draw a great deal, in terms of ideas, from the Italian experience, the similarity ends there. The surface ideology of the B.U.F., which accounted so much for the type of membership in Manchester, mitigated against any official contact with the Fascist Brigade. The Italian community was very close knit and had its own very distinct cultural life. Hence they were separated socially and culturally from, say, the Irish Catholic community in Manchester, from which the B.U.F. drew much of its support. Community identity, even the group identity of a particular street, was important in the cultural and social life of the city. Street gangs were a symbol of the territorial identity of such communities.⁹ Such forces were at play, for example, in the developing anti-Semitism in the city, with the Irish Catholics of Levenshume 'ganging up' against the Jews of Cheetham Hill. There could be little contact of a social kind, which was a prerequisite to political contact in this context, between the Italian community and the groups from which the B.U.F. drew its support. Out of all the many different types of people who became members of the B.U.F. in the city, only two, and those to the knowledge of only one of the ex-members of the B.U.F. interviewed, came from the Italian community in Ancoats.¹⁰

Another group of people in Manchester belonged to the British Fascists, whose President, Brigadier-General R.B.D. Blakeney, visited the city in December 1925. The British Fascists, which originated as the British Fascisti in May 1923, was the brainchild of Miss R.L. Linton-Orman, the daughter and grand-daughter of military men. Robert Benewick has identified three phases in the life of the movement,¹¹ the first of which, from 1923 to 1926, covers the period in which it is known there was a branch in Manchester. Initially the movement was nothing more than a military version of several anti-communist groups which existed at that time. The General Strike produced a split in its ranks, from which a more positive political programme emerged. In the last stage, in the 1930's, a Fascist policy modelled on Italian Fascism was developed.

Blakeney used the occasion of his visit to Manchester to explain to the public the policy of his movement. There was a strong hint of anti-Semitism as well as anti-communism in the movement's policy, both of which were held together by an extreme sense of patriotism. The aim was to 'revive the spirit of sane and intelligent patriotism, uphold the established constitution and prevent the spread of Bolshevism and Communism.'¹² Blakeney spoke to a small audience in the Memorial Hall, Albert Square on December 16th 1925. It seems that more than half of the small group were opposed to Fascism. 'A strong dash of Stevenson Square soon manifested itself in the mental outlook and vocal capacity of the audience' commented the Manchester Guardian,¹³ intimating a strong Communist presence much given to heckling. Blakeney was at pains to distance himself from other Fascist movements,

'We have nothing to do with blackshirts and that sort of thing'.¹⁴

Apparently the President was unable to explain much more about the policy of the British Fascists before the meeting ended in chaos, with part of the audience singing the National Anthem and another part the 'Red Flag'.

There was no indication of the strength of the Manchester branch of the British Fascists. It could certainly not have been very large if the audience at the Memorial Hall meeting was anything to go by. Nothing was heard again of the movement in Manchester. Most of the national membership joined the B.U.F. on its formation in 1932, though nothing is known of what happened to the members in Manchester.

* * * * *

The links between such existing fascist organisations and the precursor, of the B.U.F., the New Party, were, at the most, somewhat tenuous in the City of Manchester and, presumably, in the North West of England generally.

The Manchester branch of The New Party ran into trouble almost as soon as it was founded in March 1931. One of the key national figures in the New Party was Allen Young, who was in charge of the organisation of the Party. Young had been a Labour Party agent in Birmingham when Mosley fought the Ladywood constituency for the Labour Party against Neville Chamberlain in 1924. Young became Mosley's private secretary in 1929 and played an important part in the formation of the New Party.

He was instrumental in forming a branch of the New Party in Manchester.

In March 1931 a meeting was held in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, at which Young was the main speaker. As a result of this meeting, several people described by the press as Socialists, who had been active in the Labour Party in the area, decided to form a local branch of the New Party. They held a meeting of their own which was presided over by Young.¹⁵ A Mr James Mathews became President of the local branch, with Harry Maské as Vice-President. George Clancy was nominated as Secretary and James Norbury as honorary General Secretary. This arrangement was short lived and came to an end as soon as Allen Young was nominated as the New Party candidate for the Ashton parliamentary by-election the following month. Young's nomination was announced without any consultation taking place with the New Party branches outside the London Headquarters in Great George St. As far as the Manchester branch was concerned, this proved to be the final straw. It seems that the contact between the Manchester branch and the National Headquarters had been minimal right from the start.

Arrangements concerning the development of the Northern region were made solely from London and, when Young was announced as a candidate, matters came to a head and the executive of the Manchester branch resigned en bloc in protest. None of the executive members of the Manchester branch of the New Party were heard of again in connection with Mosley's movement and it can be assumed that they did not become involved with the B.U.F. in Manchester. The New Party did not collapse altogether however, and some of the remaining members went on to serve in the B.U.F. in Manchester. After the resignation of the executive

the executive members, the New Party quickly degenerated into a social club as much as anything else. There was only one branch in Manchester, with around forty members. Eighteen or twenty of the members met for a drink and a social evening, known as 'club night', in a city centre public house.¹⁶

The transition from the New Party to the B.U.F. was conducted in precisely the same authoritarian and centralised way as the New Party's nomination for the Ashton by-election had been. The New Party's political agent in Ashton was Wilfred (Bill) Risdon, and it was he who was instrumental in the formation of the Manchester branch of the B.U.F.

Bill Risdon was typical of a certain section of the membership of the B.U.F., in that his political roots lay in Socialism. As a miner in South Wales he had become involved in politics with Aneurin Bevan, and went on to become the Labour Party candidate for South Dorset in the 1924 general election. Risdon found himself on the left wing of the Labour Party and was soon appointed Independent Labour Party organiser for the Midlands, based in Birmingham, where he first met Mosley.

The B.U.F. was formally founded on 1st October 1932, at a meeting in the New Party headquarters in Great George St. London, with Mosley in attendance. Risdon, who was appointed the first Director of Propaganda of the B.U.F. was soon dispatched to Manchester in order to organise a branch which was strong enough to appoint all of its own officials. The inaugural meeting of the branch was held in a

city centre cafe and the chair at that meeting was taken by Walter Dent, a New Party member in Manchester.¹⁷ At the meeting, Dent, at the age of 31, was appointed Commanding Officer of the B.U.F. in the City.¹⁸ Meetings were held at Dent's home in Stretford and sometimes at the homes of other members of the movement, until branch headquarters were opened in Deansgate in the city centre in March 1933.

In the first years of the movement, the County Headquarters were based in Preston, and were referred to as Northern Command Headquarters, under the leadership of G.G. Vincent, who was assisted by Captain Vincent Keens. The same complaints that were voiced against the centralist policies of the New Party, which led to the resignation of the Manchester executive, began to be heard about the administration of the B.U.F. in the area. Vincent and Keens ruled the area in what seemed to be a dictatorial manner, with no room for dissenters or appeals to higher authority.¹⁹ The propaganda department in Preston was run by Captain Wright, a cigarette salesman employed by Imperial Tobacco. Wright was said to have been a 'big noise' in the Scout movement, and had taken many scouts with him into the B.U.F. He was thought by many to be the 'life and soul' of Preston.²⁰ His wife was in charge of the women's section of the B.U.F. in the North. Wright was helped in the propaganda section by Mr Fisher, who was closely involved in the leadership of the local branch, the offices of which were in 'Mosley Hall' in St. John's Place. The Northern Command Headquarters in Preston were run from a house supplied by a Lady Tooley.

Preston was chosen, presumably, because it was the traditional administrative centre for the county. In practice, however, Preston was far removed from the main areas of Fascist support in Lancashire and the arrangement did not last long. The immediate consequence of this arrangement was that the Deansgate premises in Manchester dealt only with the Manchester area and was subordinate to the Preston headquarters.

The first few months in the life of the Manchester branch paralleled the fortunes of the movement in a national context. Members of the B.U.F. did not wear blackshirts or adopt the later trimmings of the military side of the movement until 1933. Mosley himself was certainly not ostracised by society. Indeed, his social links with politicians and members of the aristocracy continued to flourish, and he was still sought after as a public speaker and a contributor to debates. He addressed a meeting of the Manchester Sales Managers Association in October 1932 in the presence of the Lord Mayor and local M.P.s. This visit must have provided some stimulus to the local Fascists and they seemed to be quietly working away at the task of building up local support. The membership of the Manchester branch was beginning to take on the features which were to become the hallmarks of the membership nationally, with a strange mixture of people whom it was perhaps only possible to draw together under the umbrella of a Fascist movement. Risdon, as we have seen, had been politically active as a socialist and had arrived in the B.U.F. through the I.L.P. Walter Dent was a painter and decorator and, as it turned out, something of a petty criminal. In 1935 he was charged in the

Westminster Police Court in London, with breaking and entering a restaurant in Great Smith St. and stealing a sum of money.²¹

Another man who was charged with the same offence was Frederick Knowles, who was also a member of the Manchester branch in its early days, having joined at the age of 28, and was employed as a solicitors' clerk. There is some evidence that Dent was ostracised by the B.U.F. when he ceased to be the leader in Manchester. He was thrown out of a Fascist meeting at the Albert Hall, London, in October 1934 by Fascist stewards and was arrested by the police for using insulting behaviour.²² More attention will be paid to other members of the Manchester branch as we discuss their role in the organisation.

Within a few months of the formation of the Manchester branch, Sir Oswald Mosley announced arrangements for a 'Spring Offensive' in the North of England, to take place in March 1933, and to be launched at a mass meeting in the Free Trade Hall on March 12th.²³ The few months since the founding of the B.U.F. had been taken up with the organisation of the movement in London, and Manchester was the first area outside the capital city to which Mosley turned his attention.

The 'Spring Offensive', in fact, was to achieve a certain notoriety, since it was accompanied by the first serious disturbance at a Fascist meeting at which Fascist stewards used weapons to beat down hecklers in the audience. By the time of the 'Spring Offensive', the movement's newspaper Blackshirt had begun publication and the B.U.F. had adopted the blackshirt as a symbol of full membership of the movement, and had organised a 'defence force' to steward large meetings. It was

this defence force which was used to full effect at the Free Trade Hall meeting on March 12th.

At the very start of the meeting, in response to a heckler who was thrown out of the hall by the stewards, of whom some 180 were on duty, Mosley said:

We do not want any fighting or violence. On the other hand we are going to have free speech. That is why we are organised to preserve free speech and have our defence force here tonight. No one will be molested by us providing he gives us a chance to put our case. If anyone has come with the object of preventing free speech in Manchester he may go out head first.²⁴

Mosley then went on with his speech, which outlined the aims of the Fascist movement and the circumstances which had given rise to such modern movements. He described the system of industrial organisation which would operate in the country once the fascists achieved power. In spite of a few interruptions, Mosley completed his speech and there was then an interval, during which Mosley accepted written questions. The organ in the hall played passages from 'The Maid of the Mountains' to while away the time. When Mosley started to answer the written questions, some verbal questions were asked from the floor of the hall. One questioner wanted to know whether the Union was anti-Semitic or no. Mosley denied that was the case. Another questioner apparently wanted to pursue the point when, standing near the press table, he was approached by a Fascist steward and told to be silent. A reporter from the Manchester Guardian was sitting at the press table and observed the

following scene.

There was some argument and much disorder, in which Sir Oswald could be heard at the press table telling the steward to leave the interrupter alone, but he did not hear and continued the dispute, which ended with a blow which could be heard at the press table. This plunged the whole of the watching audience in tumult. One steward pinioned the interrupter by the arms and carried him along the front aisle, sweeping the people off the front row chairs immediately below the platform. Immediately after an indignant Scotsman rushed at the platform loudly calling on Sir Oswald to tell him that one of the stewards had hit a woman and asking if he allowed that. A large part of the audience was booing, and the rest appeared to be shouting and screaming. In no part of the hall were there people sitting down.

Sir Oswald stood helpless, with his arms folded, looking at the confusion which increased every minute. The centre gangway was filled with people fighting: civilians, grey shirts and black shirts. A row of three chairs was lifted in the air. Some men could be seen using what looked like rubber truncheons. At the moment it appeared that the hall would never be cleared without serious injury.²⁵

However, the hall was cleared when the police entered and moved the Fascist stewards outside. Mosley decided to end the meeting and followed his stewards out of the hall.²⁶

This meeting demonstrated several points which have since been of

central importance in the debates surrounding the history of Mosley's movement. At the risk of labouring the issue it is important that they are pursued and clarified.

It has already been pointed out that this was the first major B.U.F. meeting which ended in violence, thus setting a pattern for subsequent B.U.F. meetings all over the country. As far as violence was concerned the Free Trade Hall meeting was of particular importance because of the use of weapons by the Fascists. In a libel case brought against the Star newspaper in Nov. 1934, Mosley had this to say when asked if his movement had often been in conflict with the 'Reds':

Yes, when they have attacked us. We have never interfered with the meetings of our opponents, but when our meetings are violently attacked, we resist attack. If people try to shout down speakers at our meetings, fascists are sent to throw them out with their bare hands and nothing more.

'Do you not issue rubber truncheons to your forces?'

Rubber truncheons are not issued to our forces, and the carrying of any weapon is absolutely forbidden in fascism. Only once, in a very heavy fight in Manchester, rubber truncheons were used after our men had been slashed with razors for weeks. Subsequently I forbade these weapons being used. 27

A year later, in 1936, Mosley again admitted that weapons had been used in Manchester. He was being cross-examined by D.N. Pritt, K.C. for the defence, in a case of slander brought by Mosley against John

Marchbank, an official of the National Union of Railwaymen.

Apparently the fascist defence force had arrived from London for the Free Trade Hall meeting in March 1933. Under the questioning of Pritt the following admissions were made by Mosley:

Mr Pritt: A large number of men at that meeting were using truncheons? -

Not a large number. That was an occasion on which the order against the carrying of weapons was disobeyed. I believe 24 out of something like 140 used rubber hosing at that meeting.

Who supplied them? - Mr. Piercy, who was in charge of the men.

Where did he get them? - I understand they were bought at Woolworths, ordinary garden hose.

And filled with? - Nothing.

Not even lead shot? - Not even lead shot.

A store of them was kept in a convenient room under the platform and the men, in the military phrase, were 'issued' with these truncheons? -

Twenty four were, contrary to orders.

And while they were knocking people about you stood on the platform with your arms folded? -

No. There was a very short fight and then the police entered the hall.

Sir Oswald added that it was always his practice at a meeting to remain on the platform until complete disorder occurred, and then go to the body of the hall. He therefore remained on the platform.

Mr Pritt: Would it be fair to say that on that occasion you condoned the use of weapons? -

No, because I immediately investigated the matter and forbade

any repetition of that incident. That is the only occasion at a meeting at which I was present that any form of weapon was used by our people.

Did you dismiss Mr Piercy? -

No, because Mr Piercy had, but a few weeks before, been slashed in the face with razors and I couldn't greatly blame men who used ordinary rubber hosing against people accustomed to slashing faces with razors.

Knowing you didn't really blame him, did he use them again? -

He did not.

Were some of your men also using knuckledusters? -

No.

Did you know there is quite a volume of evidence that your men have used knuckledusters? -

So far as I am aware I saw no knuckledusters being used.

What happened to the (knuckledusters) after that meeting? -

I understand they were destroyed. 28

Several important points are raised here. Without wishing to place too much emphasis on one particular meeting that occurred at the beginning of the Fascist movement in Manchester, it is important to clarify certain issues before going on to describe in more general terms the subsequent history of the movement in the City and the North of England generally.

Firstly, no attacks on B.U.F. members previous to the Free Trade Hall meeting were reported in any of the Manchester newspapers. If the razor attacks on members had occurred as Mosley stated in the Star libel case, either the press ignored them, which is unlikely since they would have been good news items, or the victims did not report the

cases to the police and the B.U.F. chose to ignore the attacks, which again would have been unlikely, since, if the attacks had occurred, the B.U.F. would have wished to make as much political capital out of them as possible. Alternatively, the attacks could have occurred in other parts of the country, in which case it would have been premature, to say the least, to assume that similar attacks would occur in Manchester and to lay in asstore of rubber truncheoms for use in such an event. It must also be noted that no anti-Fascist was arrested after the meeting. Nor was there any evidence in newspaper reports, or eye witness accounts, of anti-fascists using weapons.

Secondly, some three years after the Free Trade Hall meeting, Mosley stated that the fighting was limited to the back of the hall and that was why he remained on the platform. Yet we know from what was presumably a responsible eye witness, namely a Manchester Guardian reporter, whose observations were never refuted by Mosley or anyone else at the time, that the fighting was not confined to the back of the hall. A blow by a Fascist steward at an interrupter was heard from the press table, which was at the front of the hall. The reporter saw the man being ejected by the steward and, in the process, people who were sitting in the front row of the hall, nearest the platform, were swept off their chairs. Mosley stood on the platform and watched the violence escalate.

Thirdly, Mosley denied that knuckledusters were used at the meeting. That may well have been the case. However it is known that certain members of the Fascist movement in Manchester did wear knuckledusters

or heavy rings on their fingers whenever they left the Deansgate headquarters to attend meetings. Stevenson Square was a popular venue for small Fascist meetings and such weapons were seen there at the same period as the Free Trade Hall meeting. A member of the B.U.F. at the time distinctly remembers knuckledusters and rings being worn.²⁹

Mosley later stated, in 1936, that the meeting was 'the only occasion at a meeting at which I was present that any form of weapon was used by our people'. Mosley chose his words carefully. He could not refer to meetings at which he was not present, because he must have known that the very same type of weapon used at the Free Trade Hall meeting on March 12th 1933 was used in another incident at Rochdale, twelve miles away, on March 14th, just two days later. This time the rubber hosing was filled with lead shot. A Manchester member of the B.U.F. was arrested and charged in Rochdale with conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, assault, and being armed with a coil of rubber filled with lead.³⁰

The man, Daniel McNichol, who was a painter and decorator, had travelled to Rochdale in a lorry with about a dozen other Blackshirts. A meeting was arranged on the Town Hall square and Wilfred Risdon spoke to a crowd of about 250 from the back of the lorry. Before the meeting began, Risdon was asked by a police inspector if anyone in the party had rubber staffs or other weapons with them. Risdon denied that any of them carried any weapons. The meeting went on for half an hour in a peaceful manner when a section of the crowd started to sing 'Tell me the old, old story'. The Blackshirts

responded by charging the crowd with their fists clenched. McNichol lashed out with a piece of rubber filled with lead, hitting several people. One person in particular was hit and found himself under attack later, during the court case, for being a member of the National Unemployed Workers Movement. The inference was that he was hardly beyond blame himself for being attacked by McNichol. However, McNichol was remanded in custody and was later sentenced to three months hard labour.

Perhaps it is worth noting a couple of secondary points which emerge here. Firstly, the barrister who held a watching brief for the B.U.F. and represented McNichol in court, was Mr Edgar Lustgarten, a Manchester Reform Jew. He later became famous, of course, for his radio and television presentations of famous or infamous trials. The second, and more important point here is that on the same night that McNichol attacked the crowd in Rochdale, he returned home to Manchester after being released from police custody. He walked down Miller St. in the city and saw a Jew walking in front of him. He attacked him from behind, shouting 'Here is another Jewish ———'. He was later fined £5 for that offence, Having just completed his stint of hard labour.³¹ It was also disclosed at the Rochdale court case that McNichol had been going round Jewish districts in Manchester, placing 'sticky backs' containing antisemitic slogans, on to premises occupied by Jewish tradespeople.

The Free Trade Hall meeting and the incident in Rochdale were not the only cases where rubber tubing was used as a weapon by Fascists. It

has not been within the scope of this research to undertake a systematic study of the provincial press of Britain in the 1930's in order to look for cases where Fascists used weapons. However, two other cases have incidentally come to light. One of the very first of the meetings organised by the B.U.F., in Battersea Town Hall, in December 1932, ended in disorder when fights broke out between sections of the audience described as 'Communists' and Fascist stewards. Weapons were said to have been used on that occasion, with the stewards using rubber truncheons.³² In 1936, the year in which Mosley, during the Marchbank case, denied the use of such weapons by Fascists, a case came before the Manchester magistrates in which five men were fined for fighting in Oxford Rd in the city centre. Four of the accused were members of the B.U.F. in Manchester. The other person, Thomas Garnett, was not a member of the B.U.F. but was described as a sympathiser and had been in the Fascist Club with the other defendants. Garnett used a piece of rubber tubing in the fight against anti-fascists. When the five were taken to be questioned, Garnett inadvertently dropped a piece of rubber tubing down his trouser leg and then tried to remove it out of sight with his foot.³³ It could be said that in this case no B.U.F. member was found to have carried such weapons, but it cannot be denied that they, and a friend who carried a weapon, got into a fight with others. The Fascists must have known of the existence of the rubber tubing. They made no attempt to remove it from Garnett.

The use of rubber truncheons and the like by Fascists could be quite easily denied as long as the Fascists using such weapons did

not appear in court and the facts substantiated. Many confrontations did not have a sequel in a court room and, as a result, did not necessarily achieve press coverage. However, it is apparent, through discussing the fights between Fascists and anti-fascists with some of the people involved, that the cases recounted above were not isolated examples and that it was common knowledge that sections of the Fascist membership in Manchester regularly used weapons, including rubber hose. Of course one has to use this sort of evidence carefully. In the highly charged political atmosphere of the 1930's it would be easy to assume certain actions on the behalf of political opponents and to draw general conclusions concerning the use of weapons from particular examples. There were people who opposed the B.U.F. who also resorted to acts of violence and clearly the use of force was not all one sided. In Manchester, the pattern of violence was set by the Fascists, in a way which will be further elaborated as we unfold the history of the movement in the City. Those anti-fascists who resorted to physical attacks on members of the B.U.F., or regularly heckled at Fascist meetings, were responding to a violent situation which was not of their making.

It would seem then that the 'Spring Offensive' in the North West, and particularly in Manchester, got off to a rowdy start. The Manchester Fascists quickly gained a reputation as bullies and their meetings and speeches were permeated with provocative references to the 'Reds' and the 'Jews'.

The conflicts between the Fascists and their opponents continued,

though only rarely did they end in court appearances, at which point the usual charge to be answered was that of obstruction.

A rather more serious note was struck when a disturbance occurred after a Blackshirt meeting at Belle Vue in October 1933. This meeting was obviously of some importance to the movement. Mosley was billed to speak and 400 Fascists arrived from London in a special train hired for the occasion. Many were driven into the City by coach from surrounding parts of Lancashire and between 800-900 came from Manchester itself. The meeting was conducted in what had come to be seen as an expected manner. When Mosley entered the hall, the Fascists rose en masse and honoured him with the Fascist salute. Powerful spotlights directed at Mosley replaced the ordinary lights of the hall as the main source of illumination. Towards the end of Mosley's speech on Fascist economic policy, a woman caused an interruption, which resulted in a fight at the back of the hall. The Manchester Guardian reported the following scene.

The spotlights were turned on the scuffle, and the cinema photographers busily photographed the scene. After 2 or 3 minutes of struggling the interrupters were thrown out of the hall.

A man who was seated near the disturbance told a Manchester Guardian reporter that the Blackshirts tried to eject the woman interrupter. A man sitting next to her intervened and then they set upon him. "He shouted out 'They are trying to murder me', his screams were pitiful to hear. I am not a Communist, but I do not think that people should be treated as this wretched man was". 34

There was further trouble at the end of the meeting when a small group of people in the audience started to sing 'The Red Flag' while the National Anthem was being played.

When the London contingent marched away from Belle Vue, headed by a band, they were set upon by a gang of about 60 youths who threw stones at them.

The fascists immediately broke ranks and charged the men. There was a brisk fight in which several fascists with military decorations took part. Two at least of the anti-fascists were seriously hurt. . . the fascists chased their assailants for a considerable distance up the street, but were recalled by the 'fall-in' played on the bugle.³⁵

There was no court sequel to this clash, but rather a sequel of a different kind, when the Secretary General of the Italian Fascist Party, Signor Achille Starace, congratulated Mosley by telegram on 'the gallant performance of British Fascists at Manchester'.³⁶

This episode served to reinforce several generally held beliefs about the ideology and organisation of the B.U.F. Meetings were crowded with groups of Fascists from different parts of the country. The military style of the movement was evident throughout, right down to the bugle-call for the men to 'fall-in', and the telegram sent on behalf of the Italian Fascist party emphasised the links between the B.U.F. and a Fascist dictatorship whose use of violence was well known. The received wisdom was that Mosley's movement was a serious threat to the English way of life and yet one more sign

of the impending disintegration of Western society. In a decade of economic lunacy, political upheaval and war, it would have been difficult to think otherwise.

CHAPTER FOURFASCIST ADVANCE

There were many indications that the British Union of Fascists was gathering fairly rapid momentum in the city of Manchester throughout 1933 and into 1934. The Deansgate headquarters became something of a social club and attracted many people who had little idea of the concept of the Corporate State or, indeed, the meaning of the term 'Fascist'. By the autumn of 1933 the local headquarters had been organised to the extent that it could field a boxing team against a team from the I.C.I. works at Blackley.¹ Ju Jitsu classes were also held and there was a lounge and bar in the club. The basement rooms were fitted out as a gym where members could take part in training for various sports and games. Boxing, in fact, seemed to be the most popular sport.²

In 1933 and 1934 the Manchester branch was producing a high turnover of members. Many were attracted by the social facilities provided by the movement. The lure of the uniform and the sense of comradeship were added incentives to people who otherwise might not have been involved in any political organisation. Many of the short term members, those who remained in the movement for a couple of months or so, probably never attended the mass meetings at which Mosley spoke. Their normal experience of Fascist meetings would be those held just across the city centre in Stevenson Square, which was the favourite meeting place for the B.U.F. in Manchester. Before the square began

to be used as a terminus for buses serving the North East side of the city, it was a well known speaker's corner, where many political and religious groups held meetings and arranged for speakers to address the crowds who would sometimes gather in the early evenings, or more particularly, on Sundays. As soon as it became known that the Fascists held regular Sunday meetings in the square, people began to arrive to oppose the frequently inflammatory speeches. The Fascists spoke of Jews in a derogatory manner and referred to the Jewish area of Cheetham Hill as a 'ghetto'. The meetings were often disrupted by fighting, with some of the Fascists wearing, and using, their heavy rings and knuckledusters, and some of the anti-fascists retaliating in a like manner. The police were usually in attendance whenever the B.U.F. were in the square. In February 1934 a local member of the B.U.F. was fined for creating a breach of the peace when fighting broke out following a speech he had delivered. The press reported that 'the crowd seemed to be unfriendly towards what he was saying'.³ In fact the Fascist, Alexander Miles, who lived in Chorlton-on-Medlock, was known to make speeches which were often anti-Semitic and which inflamed the passions of the crowd gathered in the square. Of course it was not just the speeches that inflamed the crowd. The meetings in Stevenson Square must be seen in the context of a wide ranging campaign of anti-Semitism in the city, which included attacks on synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Jewish shopkeepers found their shops covered with graffiti of an anti-Semitic nature and there had even been physical attacks on Jews in the Cheetham Hill area by members of the B.U.F.



Sir Oswald Mosley at the opening ceremony of new
B.U.F. premises in Northumberland St. Manchester

April 1934.

Anti-Semitism, rowdiness to the point of physical assault, a high turnover of membership, with many members seeing the movement's social facilities as being at least as important as its political creed were, then, the dominant characteristics of the first couple of years in the life of the B.U.F. in the city. These factors did not deter Mosley from continuing to look upon Lancashire as a very important centre of growth for his movement. In 1934 special recruitment campaigns were organised and popular political issues of relevance to the area were taken up. The movement expanded at a fairly rapid rate in the North in this period and new branches began to be opened up in towns around Manchester. In the spring of 1934, Mosley arrived in Manchester to open new headquarters in Northumberland St. Higher Broughton, in the heart of the north Manchester Jewish community (the premises were later converted into a Jewish synagogue). The Union Jack was raised on the building and 100 Fascists paraded in the street. After the opening ceremony the Fascists boarded coaches and followed Mosley by road to Stoke for another meeting.⁴ Three months later, at the end of June 1934, a shop known as 'The Blackshirt' was opened in Piccadilly, Manchester, where there was a uniformed officer in charge of selling Fascist literature and where new members could be enrolled.⁵ Ambitious plans were announced for the formation of new branches to the south of Manchester. The offices for the area were to be opened in Ashton-Under-Lyne, Mosley and Stalybridge, and Hyde. Included in the area were the boroughs of Ashton, Stalybridge, Hyde, Mossley and Dukemfield and also the urban districts of Audenshaw, Denton, Failsworth and Droylsden.⁶ By the summer of 1934 the movement claimed

to have gained about 40 members in Bury, and Mosley opened new premises for the headquarters in the town in July.⁷ In the same weekend new premises were also officially opened by Mosley in Blackpool, Heywood, Accrington, and Moss Side in Manchester.⁸

In Manchester itself during this period, we are presented with a rather confusing picture. In the first two years of its life the Manchester branch had had its fair share of upheavals and internal disputes. Personal rivalries had led to some resignations and the progress of the movement in the area must have suffered as a result. In August 1934 rumours of differences of opinion in the Manchester leadership appeared in the local press. The Manchester Evening News got hold of a **report** of a 'mutiny' among the local blackshirts and that as a result the B.U.F. had suspended about 100 of the local members.⁹ The National Headquarters denied the story and added that it amounted to an attempt to discredit the organisation in Manchester. However there does seem to have been some truth in the report, since Mosley claimed in July that there had been wholesale expulsions from the B.U.F. branches in an attempt to weed out the less desirable elements who ran the branches more as social clubs than political organisations.¹⁰ It was also at this time that Walter Dent ceased to be the leader in Manchester. Dent was replaced by Charles Dickinson without any official explanation from the B.U.F.

The new leader was the son of a squadron sergeant major and was well known locally as a boxer. He led the Manchester branch boxing team

of 12 men against teams from National Headquarters and teams in the North.¹¹ The B.U.F. claimed that Dickinson had led a successful recruitment drive in the North in the winter of 1934/35, resulting in a trebling of membership in Manchester.¹² How accurate this report was is difficult to judge, given the fact that various branches often sent in widely exaggerated membership information to Blackshirt and Action. However it is known that recruitment in the North of England was so encouraging in 1934 that Mosley actually considered moving the National Headquarters from London to Manchester. This story was denied by Dickinson at the time,¹³ but was confirmed by the contemporary leadership of the Union Movement, the present day remnant of the B.U.F. Mr Bob Row, a member of the Directorate of the Union Movement and an old member of the B.U.F. in the North, thought that the idea of moving the Headquarters to Manchester was possibly dropped because of the lack of suitable premises.¹⁴ The story is given further credence by the fact that the East End of London had not been penetrated by the B.U.F. at this time and the organisation in London centred mainly around the National Headquarters. The North West of England in general, and Manchester in particular, were undoubtedly the areas in which the B.U.F. made most headway in this period. It would be reasonable to consider setting up the National Headquarters in Manchester to control and capitalise on this growth more effectively. At the same time it would serve to emphasise the rejection of the 'Old Gang' parliamentary system centred on London.

The North West of England was the scene of more special B.U.F. campaigns than any other part of the country. We know that the 'Spring

Offensive' launched the movement proper in the area, but this was followed by campaigns of a rather more specific nature. One of the themes which dominated the thinking of the movement in the North was the problem of the declining cotton industry, and this theme provided a vehicle for campaign after campaign in the cotton areas of South East Lancashire. The first cotton campaign, lasting three months, began in the summer of 1934 and was directed from the Lancashire area headquarters at Preston by Captain Wright.

The cotton campaign was supported by large coverage in the Fascist press and possibly more space was given to the problems of the cotton industry than any other topic. In fact, before the campaign started, the industry received a great deal of attention. In March 1934 comparisons were made between the organisation of the cotton industries in both Italy and Britain. A problem considered to be common to both countries was that of Japanese competition. In the face of this competition it was shown that Italy, under the leadership of Mussolini, had 'unified' the cotton industry by enabling the Italian Cotton Institute to 'liquidate and merge weaker units, to regulate conditions of labour, determine quotas of production and to fix minimum prices in the home market'.¹⁵ This initiative on the part of the Italians was contrasted with the British reliance on conferences. The theme was pursued later by Mosley in a speech at Preston in April. He said that he did not believe that politicians from London could teach Lancashire how to organise the cotton trade. "The Fascists would build a self-contained Empire and would exclude foreign cotton and textile goods from the Crown Colonies. By these means unemployment in Lancashire would be

reduced by a third 'at a stroke' ".¹⁶ 'International Finance' was drawn into the argument and was accused of being at the root of the decline of the Lancashire Cotton industry.¹⁷ Mosley repeated his arguments about the cotton industry at a meeting in Liverpool at the beginning of May, in which he also outlined his plans for the British shipping industry. However the cotton campaign itself was yet to begin.

Plans were made for a total of 500 meetings in the county and the campaign started in Southport with a speech by Mosley in the Floral Hall. He elaborated on his plans to save the cotton industry, which he claimed would create employment for a total of 65,000 cotton workers.¹⁸ Mosley's policy for the cotton industry was to provide the basis for the cotton campaigns, in which the cotton workers were urged to join the B.U.F. Attempts were made to infiltrate trade unions in the industry and overtures were made to the mill owners and stockbrokers on the Lancashire Cotton Exchange.¹⁹

By the end of August 1934, the Fascist press was claiming that over 400 meetings had been held as part of the cotton campaign. Meetings had been held in most of the towns in South East Lancashire and it could be said that the B.U.F. had met with some success in its efforts to win support for its cotton policy. The Communist Party certainly saw Mosley's success as a threat to its own campaign in the area and attempted to counteract Fascist policy by exposing the fallacy of Mosley's argument; and at the same time putting forward its own solution for the ailing cotton industry.²⁰ In Bolton the B.U.F. campaign was headed by the District Leader, Hardman, who organised

lunchtime meetings at the cotton mills in Bolton and Bury. Enough advance was made in Oldham, in terms of new members, to form a branch of the B.U.F. in the town. In Stockport one of the main organisers was Battersby, a director of a local firm of hat manufacturers of that name. Burnley was a particularly successful area and the campaign resulted in a relatively large membership in the town. Accrington was another strong area and the B.U.F. also met with some success in Chorley, Heywood, Blackburn and Nelson. In the latter town, the peak membership rose to over 100 under the guidance of the District Woman's Leader, Nellie Driver, who was herself a local cotton worker.²¹

Mosley was not the only representative from National Headquarters to take part in the cotton campaigns. William Joyce spoke at several meetings in the North and extended the argument about the Lancashire cotton industry by attempting to show the effects of the Jewish boycott of German goods on the cotton trade. Commander Tillotson and Captain Wright, the man in charge of the first cotton campaign, both of whom were from the Northern Administrative Headquarters in Preston, took an active part in the meetings and speeches, and were often to be seen with both Mosley and Joyce during the campaign.

The cotton campaign went beyond the organising of mass meetings and area recruitment drives. Fascist newspapers were sold outside factory gates and meetings were held outside employment exchanges.²² This sort of activity angered many Communist Party members in the

North who considered that they had worked hard to build up support in certain mills and factories, only to see Blackshirts move in and receive a rather better reception immediately.

It was not just among cotton operatives that the B.U.F. attempted to gain support. Some cotton manufacturers looked favourably upon the cotton campaign. According to G.P. Sutherst, who was instrumental in forming the Bury branch of the B.U.F. and who later became leader of the Middleton branch, contributions were made to the cotton campaign funds by the Ash Spinning Co. Lilly Mills and William Pickles, all large cotton manufacturing concerns based to the North of Manchester.²³ The campaign extended to a canvassing of the Royal Exchange building in Manchester, home of the Lancashire Cotton Exchange. Businessmen's luncheon's were provided by the B.U.F. and were apparently well attended, particularly in later cotton campaigns in which Mosley himself became more directly involved.

The 1934 cotton campaign was to be brought to a close by a mass meeting of Fascists at Belle Vue in Manchester on September 29th, with Mosley billed as the main speaker. The meeting was planned to be the largest ever held outside London, with special trainloads of Fascists arriving in Manchester from all over the country. The plans for the meeting were thrown into confusion when the Manchester Watch Committee decided that the cost of policing the meeting should be borne by the Belle Vue authorities, since it was they who had requested special policing of the meeting. The Watch Committee considered that the extra police required would cost as much as £1,000 and that it would be

asking too much to place this expenditure on the shoulders of the ratepayers.²⁴ When Mosley heard of this decision he immediately complained to the Home Secretary, since he considered that the Home Secretary had given an assurance to the House of Commons that this sort of action would not be taken by local authorities as it might hinder the right to hold public meetings.²⁵ The Watch Committee seemed to back down from its decision when it later appointed a special sub committee to sort out the cost of policing the meeting with the Chief Constable, Mr John Maxwell.²⁶

Further problems relating to the Fascist rally arose when it was discovered that the Manchester Anti-Fascist Campaign Committee, one of the main organisations which had been formed to oppose Fascism in the North,²⁷ was planning to march to Belle Vue with the intention of attending the meeting. The anti-Fascists were to assemble at three points in the city: Mile Street Croft; Bridge Street, Cheetham; and the Albert Memorial Croft, Plating. They would then march to a central meeting point at Ardwick Green, where they were to join up with groups from Ardwick, Hulme and Chorlton-on-Medlock. The Chief Constable responded by issuing a statement in which he said that all street processions would be banned on the day of the meeting. There was no doubt in most people's minds that the ban was aimed specifically at the anti-Fascists, especially since the B.U.F. had not made any plans to march to Belle Vue. The anti-Fascists decided to ignore the ban and went ahead with their plans. At the same time they decided to send a deputation to the Town Hall to interview the Chief Constable in an attempt to resolve the problem before taking the

step of breaking the law and carrying on regardless. The Belle Vue management was also contacted to see if an anti-Fasist rally could be held inside the grounds of Belle Vue, alongside the Fascist meeting. John Strachey, secretary of the National Committee Against Fascism, contacted the Council for Civil Liberties as soon as he heard of the ban on marches and they responded by telegramming a protest to the Chief Constable of Manchester.

The ban on all marches on the day of the Fascist demonstration had the effect of creating far more interest from the general public than might otherwise have been the case. Many important politicians and other public figures protested against the ban, including Professor Harold Laski, Lord Manley and Professor Lascelles Abercrombie.²⁸ The Home Office received a deputation of anti-Fascists on the day of the meeting, to petition the Home Secretary to reverse the decision of the Chief Constable. A deputation arrived in London from Manchester with the same objective. Yet another anti-Fascist group expressed its wish to see the Lord Mayor of Manchester in order to protest against the ban, Manchester and Salford Trades Council, although not directly connected with the proposed anti-Fascist march and demonstrations, added its voice to the growing campaign to get the ban lifted.²⁹

Amidst all the fuss created by the ban, the B.U.F. went ahead with its plan to hold the rally. The problem of who was to pay for the policing of the meeting had been clarified by the decision of the Watch Committee to reluctantly pay for the bill out of the rates. Bill Risdon, from the National Headquarters of the B.U.F. had high hopes

of attracting a massive audience. Throughout the day of the meeting, on Saturday 29th September, thousands of Fascists and anti-Fascists arrived in the City. One of the organisers of the anti-Fascist demonstration, Mick Jenkins, remembered the scene from the anti-Fascist point of view in some detail.

This (march) plan was carried through. Hundreds marched from Mill Street Croft in Openshaw; Albert Croft, Miles Platting, and New Bridge Street Cheetham. At Ardwick Green more hundreds were already waiting to march to Belle Vue there, as a united demonstration of between two and three thousand workers and middle class people proceeded to march along Hyde Road towards Belle Vue. The Chief Constable had eaten his words. Two or three policemen accompanied the march. The march arrived at Belle Vue to find hundreds of people assembled on the croft opposite.

Most of the people who marched would not stay for the meeting. As the march reached the croft so large numbers broke ranks, crossed the road, paid their entrance fee and entered Belle Vue. They were not listening to speeches that night - and one speech in particular, and they were prepared to pay for the privilege. ³⁰

The Manchester Guardian reported that 'from 40 Lancashire and several Yorkshire centres, B.U.F. contingents arrived in motor coaches'.³¹

The scene was being set for a conflict which could outstrip the Olympia meeting in London, held four months earlier, in terms of the numbers of people injured and also in terms of the subsequent

outcry, permeated with claims and counter claims as to where the blame should lie.

However, nature intervened in the form of a continuous rain storm prior to the meeting. In spite of the large numbers of people present, the crowd was not as large as many people had predicted. The anti-fascists had hoped to organise a demonstration of 25,000, while the Fascists anticipated the arrival of thousands of their members in the city.³² A month previous, an official of the Manchester Fascist Headquarters was quoted as saying that 200,000 people were expected to attend and that it would be "the biggest political demonstration that the North had seen for years".³³

About 1000 Blackshirts and 3000 members of the public heard Mosley's speech. They were surrounded by 500 police and the Fascists were fenced off from the rest of the crowd. A fire engine was in attendance ready to pump water from the lake onto any rioters, and a searchlight was mounted on the roof. 'Its beam frequently raked the audience below and could at any moment have been directed on a group that was deemed to need the attention of the police or the firemen.'³⁴

The meeting was interrupted for the first fifteen minutes by the shouting of anti-Fascist slogans. Police moved into the area of the shouting, but it was the use of powerful amplifiers which allowed Mosley to be heard. He spoke of the two party system being part of an international racket and the speech was not without its anti-Semitic

content. Referring to the hecklers he said ". . . Socialists and Communist organisations are here to make a row and Jewish finance are here to make a row. . . we challenge the alien finance which has paid for the mob here tonight. Look at the mobilisation of all those Jews from Cheetham Hill." ³⁵ This meeting, in fact, seemed to mark a new stage in the movement's anti-Semitism. The invective against the Jews was now approaching the order of a systematic campaign and Mosley continued his tirade against the hecklers, referring to them as "sweepings of the Continental ghetto's, hired by Jewish financiers" and "an alien gang imported from all quarters of Britain by Jewish money to prevent Englishmen putting their case."³⁶

The meeting in fact proved to be something of an anticlimax after the massive demonstration at Olympia. Only one person was arrested and that was a woman who was charged with being drunk and disorderly. The Chief Constable considered that the meeting had been conducted satisfactorily and he was later congratulated by the Manchester Watch Committee. It turned out that the actual cost of policing the meeting was only £7, which was spent on the transporting of policemen. This was far from the £1000 quoted by the Watch Committee before the meeting and it helped to quell the expected flow of complaints about the meeting. In fact, although the issues surrounding the meeting rumbled on in the press, it seems that the passions aroused by the whole affair were soon forgotten by the general public, though not, of course, by the Fascists and anti-Fascists themselves, both of whom claimed the meeting a victory for their particular cause.

The Belle Vue meeting may have helped the Fascist recruitment drive in the city, both immediately before and after the event. It is probable that the sales of Blackshirt in Manchester increased in this period if the Fascist press is to be believed,³⁷ It is known that the new Commanding Officer of the B.U.F. in Manchester, Charles Dickinson, brought a certain flair to the position he held, though he took over the leadership of the Manchester branch at a particularly crucial time for the B.U.F. nationally.* It is in this period also, as has already been noted, that the movement considered moving the National Headquarters from London to Manchester because so much headway was being made in the area. More and more meetings were organised in public halls in Manchester. Churnett Street Hall in Collyhurst was a popular venue and the B.U.F. claimed audiences of 300 at the meetings held there. In September meetings were held in Moston each week at which the Fascist press claimed there were audiences of 400. Hulme Town Hall was also a favourite meeting place, where William Joyce spoke in the first week of November. Dickinson claimed in November that the movement was looking for new premises in Manchester, preferably near Piccadilly, which would enable the organisation to expand.³⁸ There were also claims that Mosley was

* The alliance between the movement and the Rothermere Press, in which the Daily Mail provided supporting news coverage for the Blackshirts, was beginning to break down after the violent Fascist meeting at Olympia in June. The B.U.F. was at this time taking a much more explicitly anti-Semitic line and anti-Fascists were beginning to gather their strength and organise more effectively.

planning a new recruitment drive in Lancashire to capitalise on his recent successes, and in the middle of November Mosley stated that the B.U.F. would contest some parliamentary seats in Manchester and other parts of Lancashire at the next general election. Other seats in the country were also to be contested, but Lancashire was singled out for a special campaign.³⁹

Mosley returned to Manchester in the last week of November to address a meeting at the Free Trade Hall on the 25th. He arrived with Lady Mosley, who had been staying with Captain and Mrs Wright in Preston. She went on a tour of Preston, Southport and Liverpool branches and was met by Bill Risdon in Manchester where, as well as visiting local branches, she attended Mosley's meeting on the 25th.

Mosley spoke to a packed Free Trade Hall on the issue of the Lancashire Cotton Industry. He repeated the themes outlined in the recent cotton campaign and denounced the use of international Jewish finance.⁴⁰ One woman who repeatedly heckled the meeting from the balcony was removed by Blackshirt stewards and a crowd of anti-Fascists gathered outside the hall and surrounded Mosley's car as he drove off. On leaving, the Fascists marched home through the Jewish district of Strangeways.⁴¹ Fourteen men and one woman appeared in court on the following Monday to answer charges of disorderly behaviour, obstructing the police and assault. All but one of those arrested were anti-Fascists.

Shortly after Mosley's Free Trade Hall meeting, Captain Vincent Collier spoke at the first indoor meeting held in Stretford, where the Town

Hall was the venue. A move was made to increase the number of outdoor meetings in a campaign launched by Collier in which he was assisted by other national speakers. The team, which included A.C. Miles, P. Moran and Micheal Goulding, toured many towns to the North of Manchester in the first weeks of December 1934.⁴² It was in this period that new branches were started in Rotherham and Wakefield. The branch in Barnsley increased in numbers and in Bolton the B.U.F. was particularly strong under the leadership of Leslie Hardman. There was a degree of contact between the Bolton Rover Crew of the Scout movement and the local B.U.F. branch. The B.U.F. liked to stress the common emphasis on patriotism, public service and training for manhood between Baden Powell's Rover Scouts and the Fascist movement.⁴³ Regular social events were held in the Bolton area to boost local funds and there was talk of a local Fascist weekly newspaper being produced.⁴⁴ Membership in Bolton in July 1934 totalled 61, with twice as many men as women.⁴⁵

We have some idea of the type and number of branches in the Manchester area at this time. In June 1934 the Labour Party distributed a questionnaire about the level of local B.U.F. activity to a total of 900 secretaries of Divisional Labour Parties, Industrial Trades Councils and Party agents. The replies from the North of England were the most detailed.⁴⁶

In Manchester itself the Moss Side branch was said to have 200 members. In Platting, where there two branches, one, at Charlton Street, had about 20 members. They were unable to pay a gas bill because of the

lack of funds. There were also two branches in the Blackley area, one in Moston and one in Crumpsall. All four of these branches would sometimes combine for their activities in order to create the impression of strength. There were also branches in Rusholme and Withington.⁴⁷ In Rusholme there were possibly as many as 80 members.⁴⁸ Gorton and Ardwick also had branches at this time.⁴⁹

It would be fair to assume that at this time the Fascist movement in the North was in a particularly confident mood. New recruits were pouring in. Mosley was paying particular attention to the area and the organisation was beginning to settle down after the interruptions and dismissals of the summer months. The Fascists could feel reasonably satisfied on the conclusion of their cotton campaign, and the movement had found new and larger premises from which to control the Manchester area.

From a distance this picture of 'success' would seem to be fairly accurate. On closer observation however it was apparent that the movement in the North was experiencing difficulties, as was the movement generally. One of the problems was that of internal upheavals. The leader of the Manchester branch, Dickinson, had arrived at that position through a series of internal disputes. Mosley's view of the control of local branches was that they should be led by those most able to lead. In other words, it was the strongest who would become leaders. Those most adept at intrigue and manœuvre would do well. It is not surprising that in some areas the leadership changed hands as frequently as it did. Dickinson himself was to be the victim of this

system, as were his successors. Within a matter of months of assuming the leadership in Manchester, Dickinson had to rely on the system of intrigue to save his own skin, when he was sacked by Commander Tillotson. Tillotson, from County Headquarters, suspected that Dickinson was leading a group of unemployed members in a series of housebreakings and thefts from warehouses. Dickinson appealed to Mosley against this decision and was reinstated. Tillotson resented being overruled in this way and went to see Mosley. Reynall Bellamy, who was later to assume command of the B.U.F. in the North, was present at this meeting, at which Tillotson announced his decision to resign from the movement. Tillotson was from a very different background to Dickinson, and had a reputation for being a man of honour and a strict disciplinarian. Honour was more important to him than the movement, though he remained personally loyal to Mosley.⁵⁰

The instability of the leadership and the system of competition that fed it was reflected in the high turnover of ordinary membership and the number of uncompleted campaigns and membership drives and fund raising activities in local branches. It was true that 1934 was a good year for recruitment to the B.U.F., but the number of new Blackshirts who stayed in the movement for more than, say, one year, was probably a small proportion of the total.

Another problem facing the B.U.F. in this period was the increasingly hostile reaction to its policy of anti-Semitism. The reaction could be said to be in direct proportion to the importance attached to that

policy by Mosley and his followers. The official anti-Semitism of the B.U.F. became much more explicit in the latter half of 1934 and the reaction to it by anti-Fascist groups followed a similar line. The Belle Vue meeting in September 1934 proved to be an important stage in the development of the movement's anti-Semitism, with interrupters referred to as "sweepings of the Continental Ghetto's hired by Jewish financiers" and "an alien gang imported from all quarters of Britain by Jewish money to prevent Englishmen putting their case."⁵¹ This meeting provoked the anti-Fascist movement in Manchester to organise more effectively against attacks on the local Jewish community. Most of Mosley's speeches on his January tour of Lancashire contained anti-Semitic overtones. Perhaps the most virulent speech was the one he made at Accrington, in which he blamed the Jews for the Indian competition in the cotton textile market. "Men sitting in the City of London, enjoying your hospitality, using your wealth to draw a higher rate of interest from sweating Indians than they get from helping a White man."⁵² This outburst provoked Nathan Laski, Honorary President of the Manchester Zionist Central Council, to challenge Mosley to name names instead of resorting to generalities as a way round the libel laws.⁵³ Mosley never replied.

The reaction to the campaign of anti-Semitism must be seen in the context of escalating violence between Fascists and anti-Fascists. The B.U.F. was considered to be eager to use violence as a means of putting across its point of view and to silence hostile critics. The meeting at Olympia in June 1934 is considered to be something of a watershed in the history of the movement, at which violence broke

out on a scale never before seen at a mass political meeting in this country. The meeting itself has been the subject of major debate amongst observers who were present and amongst commentators and historians ever since.⁵⁴ It was also the subject of a parliamentary debate at the time.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the meeting the Fascist movement, was seen by the general public, rather than just anti-Fascists, in a rather different light. The Fascists in the North of England were more than ever considered to be anti-Semites ready to resort to violence in a campaign of terror. This may not have been an entirely correct picture of the Fascist movement, but it is certainly how it was interpreted and, as such, had an impact on the growth and development of the movement.

If we look at the reaction to the campaigns waged by the B.U.F. in this period, we are presented with another problem which tarnishes the veneer of success of the movement in the North. This was the reaction of local authorities and other bodies who controlled the letting of halls for meetings. This reaction was governed by the fact that meeting after meeting ended in disruption. Outbreaks of violence between Fascists and anti-Fascists had occurred at several meetings in the North. The Royton Co-operative Society refused an application by Mosley to use their meeting hall. When the Oldham Co-operative Society agreed to allow Mosley to hold a meeting in the Co-op Hall at Greenacres in Oldham, there were howls of protest from the Oldham branch of the I.L.P. and the National Unemployed Workers Movement,⁵⁶ though the meeting went ahead as planned. In November 1934, the B.U.F. applied for the use of Broughton Town Hall in Salford, in order to start

their first campaign in the city. The Salford Town Hall and Markets Committee refused them permission, thinking that damage would probably be caused to the hall. A member of the committee considered that it would be unlikely that the Fascist movement would be able to hold a meeting in any hall in Salford for many years.⁵⁷ Other council committees concerned with the letting of public halls were beginning to be aware of the problems of allowing the B.U.F. to hold meetings in premises under their control, and it was not to be long before many other councils followed Salford's example. A rather more ominous note was sounded when permission was granted by Swinton and Pendlebury Council to allow the B.U.F. to use Pendlebury Town Hall for a meeting, but only on the condition that Fascist uniforms would not be worn, and that the B.U.F. would ensure the safe policing of the hall by engaging the County Constabulary at their own expence.⁵⁸ Another setback, although of a much less important nature, was the refusal by the Manchester Watch Committee to allow the B.U.F. to fly the Fascist flag over the new premises in Piccadilly, into which the Fascists had recently moved.⁵⁹

Although the B.U.F. had somehow to live with these problems, they hung on the horizon like dark clouds. The leaders in Manchester and elsewhere attempted to capitalise on the problems of violence and anti-Semitism. They claimed that violence was caused by the Jewish dominated Communist Party, and hence it was only right that Jews should be attacked in speeches by Mosley and others. Physical violence was only used in self defence. or so the argument went.

Thus the B.U.F. in the North of England, and particularly in the areas around Manchester was making a seemingly astonishing advance for a political movement still in its infancy. However the rapid growth was due mainly to the dominance of populism in the movement's ideology, certainly at branch level, hence the rapid turnover of members.⁶⁰ Many of those members engaged in acts of sheer hooliganism, but many were also willing to engage in the violence and anti-Semitism led by its more ideologically committed members. The movement would have to alter course if it was to survive as a viable political body. If not the likelihood was that it would be engulfed by the many problems with which it had been beset from the start.

CHAPTER FIVEREFORM AND RETRENCHMENT

The underlying problems facing the B.U.F., exacerbated by the reactions to the Olympia meeting and the defection of Lord Rothermere, seemed to occupy the minds of the movement's leadership towards the end of 1934. Mosley apparently decided to face up to the situation and he reorganised his movement in an attempt to mould into shape an effective political machine, using more orthodox political means to gain support than had previously been the case. Mosley realised that the only support that really mattered would be that of his own B.U.F. M.P's in parliament. Hence he introduced reforms which, he hoped, would produce results at the next election in the form of parliamentary seats.

In January 1935 Mosley produced his new plans for the movement. There were to be two alternative methods of organising a 'unit' system, which would carry out B.U.F. policy.¹ The first, and the preferred method was as follows. Units would consist of members who could make themselves available on a certain night of the week. The aim was to build the unit into a 'section' of thirty members. Three sections would make a 'company'. Probationary members could attach themselves to the unit, achieving full membership after one month. If a new member joined the movement with enough friends to form a unit or section, he was permitted to lead the formation for the first month on probation. The second method, to be introduced into areas presenting particular

difficulties, provided greater flexibility though required more work from the Unit Leader, who had to make himself available on at least four nights a week. Each member of his unit had to be available on any two nights each week, with the Unit Leader in charge of such members who could turn out. In this case each unit would be made up of twelve members. The old Defence Force which provided the stewards for large meetings was to be scrapped, since all Blackshirts would henceforth act as stewards if their particular unit was asked to perform such duties.

Both systems, particularly the first, were intended to produce a high degree of competitiveness amongst members. Unit leaders could be removed if they did not produce a unit at full strength. Unit members could be similarly discarded if they did not turn out for duty. Every member had the opportunity for promotion, which would be by 'the natural selection of proved capacity and the ability to lead'. Indeed, this was positively encouraged. One could progress from being an ordinary member through to Unit Leader and then to Section Leader. If three sections could be formed it meant promotion to Company Leader. Theoretically this promotion ladder went on to the highest ranks of the movement. In order to promote this competitiveness, Unit and Section Leaders were to be encouraged to attend training courses in the 'leadership principle'. The system of competitiveness was to be enhanced by the various types of uniform allocated to the different positions in the movement. Members who gave two evenings work each week to the Unit were to be allowed to wear the basic uniform Blackshirt, already worn by ordinary members.

Differing degrees of service reliability and efficiency would bring rewards in the form of badges and additional bits and pieces to the basic uniform. The full dress uniform, worn by the 1st Division, National Headquarters, would be allocated to members who gave their services on five evenings per week. Even the club or branch premises were to be regarded as 'a concession to conspicuous service and development rather than as an ordinary growth of the movement'. Mosley even specified the number of rooms to be used, and what they should be used for. They were to be 'workshops' not 'playrooms'.

Although it was recognised that once the new plans had been put into practice it might prove necessary to modify them it was, nevertheless, maintained that two basic rules must be adhered to. These were that 'every Blackshirt must give a definite proportion of his time as a condition of membership' and 'every Blackshirt must work within a definite unit which will always operate as a whole'.

With the exception of those constituency organisations already formed, all the existing branches were to be taken over by the Blackshirt Organisation at National Headquarters, which would also be in the control of the Womens Unit. Headquarters Inspectors, touring the branches, were to replace the area system. In the North West of England this, presumably, was to mean the end of the Lancashire Area with its headquarters in Preston, although in June 1935 Manchester took over the administrative responsibility of a much larger area which had formerly been the responsibility of the Preston headquarters. The 'area' system seemed to be continuing, at least in the North West.

Finally a 'Political Organisation' was to be formed in order to create the desired electoral machinery. All existing constituency organisations and the Womens Organisation were to be under the control of the Director of Political Organisation. Members of the Political Organisation were not to wear uniforms but would be provided with badges. The work of the Political Organisation was simple. Members would give their service 'in the same way as members of other parties - to develop definite constituency organisations on a constituency, ward and polling district basis'. The aim was that every constituency in the country would have a Fascist constituency organisation. The Blackshirt organisation would provide essential services, such as the provision of a room in the club or branch headquarters, but would in fact be organised on separate but parallel lines.

These reforms were far reaching and reflected the concern of the leadership over some of the problems encountered in the boom years of 1934. Given the nature of the changes involved, it was almost certain there would be some delay in reorganising the whole movement. This certainly proved to be the case in Manchester, where, as will be indicated when we turn to an analysis of the 1938 municipal elections,² six months elapsed before a general meeting was held to inform the members of the new changes.³ Almost a year elapsed before the new system was introduced in Stretford.⁴

The reforms announced by Mosley in January were, in fact, only the beginning of a series of changes which involved the closure of

Black House, the Chelsea National Headquarters of the B.U.F., in the autumn of 1935, and the introduction of a new constitution in January 1936, which involved a change of name from 'British Union of Fascists' to 'British Union of Fascists and National Socialists'. The emphasis would henceforth be on 'National Socialist' rather than 'Fascist', though the movement was commonly known, from the time of the change, as 'British Union'. Another change in the organisation of the movement occurred at the end of 1935 when the whole movement was split into two administrative areas, North and South, with the Northern headquarters operating from Manchester.

Since all these changes affected the very heart of the movement, it is not surprising that their impact was felt in Manchester, which was increasingly seen as an important administrative centre for the whole of the movement, taking over, firstly, the administration of Lancashire, and later that of the whole of Northern England.

The end of 1934 had witnessed an increase in B.U.F. activity in the North of England, and this continued into 1935. Mosley himself never seemed to slacken the pace. In the first week of January he visited Burnley, Accrington (where there was an audience of 1,200) and Bury, producing his familiar speech on the cotton industry in each town. The following week he was in Blackburn (where an estimated crowd of 3,000 heard him speak at King George's Hall), Stockport, where he spoke at the Town Hall, and then on to a meeting at the Public Baths at Darwin.⁵ In the third week he spoke at meetings in Earlestown, Oldham, Ormskirk, West Didsbury and Eccles.

Life at branch level in Manchester seemed to reflect this high level of activity. Over the Christmas period of 1934 new headquarters of the Manchester 'sub' area were opened in Imperial Chambers, Piccadilly. What was precisely meant by the sub area was never explained and, as with the description of other administrative areas in the North, it has been difficult to discover the exact area involved. However it seems likely that the particular sub area linked to the Imperial Chambers headquarters covered the South East of Manchester, which included such districts as Gorton and Longsight. Over the same period two hundred people attended a B.U.F. new Year dance in Manchester. Their New Year resolution was that they would do everything they possibly could to further the cause of Fascism.⁶

Political activity continued on several levels. There was a debate on Fascism held by pupils at North Manchester Grammar School with the motion, in support of Fascism in Britain, being proposed by two senior boys at the school, who were members of the B.U.F. One of the boys was described as an Assistant Political Officer.⁷ 'At Homes' were held in members' homes, to which special guests were invited. One of these was held at the local organisers home in Crumpsall in April, with Henry J. Gibbs of the Blackshirt and J.R. Smeaton Stuart, the Political Officer of the Blackley district, as special guests.⁸ In Didsbury, a 'Fascist Centre' was opened at the home of Mr Robert, at Northern Grove, West Didsbury. Robert was a Frenchman who became a fanatical convert to the Fascist cause. The windows of his house were plastered with Fascist leaflets and his children were often to be seen pushing Fascist literature through letterboxes in the

surrounding district, which was substantially Jewish, while Robert himself went on a house to house sale of Blackshirt.⁹ When the B.U.F. Peace Campaign was launched in 1935, Robert again organised his whole family in distributing the campaign literature. His children even had to salute the Union Jack and the B.U.F. flag before they went to bed.¹⁰

A well known figure in Fascist circles, Miss E.V. Corderey, a full time worker in the Manchester headquarters, took charge of the Womens section of the Manchester area in 1935. In April the section was visited by Mrs Wright from Preston, the National Inspecting Officer for the Lancashire area. Two months later the section was visited by Oswald Mosley's mother, by which time speakers' classes were being organised by women members. The first public meeting organised by the womens' section in Manchester was held at Clough End, Plattin, where the speaker was Corderey, and by June a Womens Propaganda Section had opened in the area, led by Corderey, Mrs T Sharpe and Mrs Edith Scott. Women members who were considered suitable were invited from all parts of Lancashire to take part in the Speakers' classes, led by Moran, and to join in the other training activities connected with their role in the electoral machinery of the movement.¹¹

The Lancashire Womens Section headquarters moved from Preston to Manchester in 1935 when the new Lancashire Area Headquarters were opened by Mosley in June.¹² This move was a recognition of the importance that had been attached to the Manchester headquarters for some time. The city contained many more branches than Preston and was

much more at the centre of the huge expansion in membership that had taken place in the previous year. The Cotton Campaign had more connection with Manchester than with Preston and the city was the venue for more important speeches by Mosley than any other town or city in the North.

Shortly after the new Area Headquarters were opened, Manchester became one of the three areas outside London to have its own central school for training speakers.¹³ Along with those at Leeds and Cheltenham, it was expected to improve the standard of public speaking generally and to increase the number of Blackshirts able to mount a platform and provide a rousing speech. Raven Thompson led some of the classes in Manchester and the Womens Speakers classes were incorporated into the central school.

Although Mosley paid many more visits to the North of England in 1935 than in any previous year, his greater interest in the region was reflected in any increased support for the movement. The truth of the matter was that the movement in Manchester, in common with other areas, seemed to be suffering a reaction against the heady experiences of the first two years in the life of the B.U.F. Apart from the move of the Lancashire Area Headquarters, the other organisational changes that were introduced in the city seemed to amount to a recognition of the fact that membership had fallen drastically. For example, the branches in Hulme and Withington were combined into one Division, with a single headquarters in Parkfield Street, Rusholme.¹⁴ It was later disclosed that this division was also

to include the branches in Ardwick and Gorton.¹⁵

The B.U.F. continued to claim a high level of expansion in the North of course, though even the claims became fewer and fewer. It was claimed for example, that the membership in Manchester had trebled in the first three months of 1935. All one can say to that sort of claim is that if it was true it would certainly not have been confined to a couple of lines in Blackshirt.¹⁶ Another claim was that Mosley attracted a crowd of between 15,000 and 20,000 at a meeting in Oldham in October,¹⁷ Yet a month later, when Mosley addressed a meeting at the Free Trade Hall, the hall was no more than three quarters full, and it was clear that the audience included many opponents.¹⁸ Only a year previous Mosley had spoken to a capacity audience in the hall.

One of the essential problems was that social and sporting activities seemed to be taking precedent over more political matters. Ju Jitsu classes were organised by A.G. Woodgate, and the Manchester B.U.F. football team decided to arrange fixtures with the National Headquarters and with the branch in Birmingham. Until he was sacked Charles Dickinson remained in charge of the Manchester B.U.F. boxing team, which numbered fourteen, including Dickinson himself and which won a match against the National Headquarters team. In June a B.U.F. Athletic and Social Club was opened at 9 Morley Street, which served to emphasise the importance attached to such activities by the movement,¹⁹ and by November 1935 a B.U.F. swimming team had been formed in the Manchester East District.²⁰ A variety of social events continued to

be organised. For example a social was held at the Manchester headquarters to celebrate the Jubilee, at which the guest of honour, according to Blackshirt was a man who held the Victoria Cross and who was found on the streets of Manchester selling matches for a living.²¹ As early as the summer of 1934 Mosley issued warnings against B.U.F. branches developing into social clubs,²² yet that is what continued to happen. In May 1935, for example, the police raided the B.U.F. branch premises in Heywood, near Rochdale, after it was discovered that the bar often served drinks after hours and also sold drinks to non members. When the police arrived the Fascists, 'screaming and cursing', tried to block their way into the rooms.²³

In the face of this general decline in support and morale, and the drift away from political activity, the special campaigns launched at the end of the year seemed to take on a greater significance, indeed were partly moulded by the declining fortunes of the movement. The first of these was the 'Mind Britain's Business' campaign which began at the Free Trade Hall in September. The main thrust of this campaign was that Britain should not become involved in what were considered to be the domestic affairs of other countries. This included an attack on the role of the League of Nations, though the campaign centred initially on the Abyssinian affair. Mosley spoke at the Free Trade Hall on the dispute between Italy and Abyssinia and managed to introduce some anti-Semitic overtones into his defence of Italy, proclaiming that "Over the whole of this Abyssinian dispute runs the stink of oil and stronger than even the stink of oil is the stink of the Jews."²⁴

The Abyssinian theme was pursued by Major General Fuller in a speech in Liverpool the following evening and, also in the same evening, by Mosley in London. In Manchester the campaign was followed up with speeches in Stevenson Square and Miles Platting by Simmonds and Gibbs.²⁵ Similar meetings were held in Salford, Bolton and Stockport. The Mind Britain's Business campaign, which related initially to the Abyssinian crisis, was to become part of a much wider Peace Campaign, in which the movement came down strongly on the side of non-intervention and acknowledged the right of Germany to include all German speaking peoples in her territory. Peace campaign literature was distributed in Manchester on a door to door basis and special campaign meetings continued to be held for some time. Mosley was later to be on the side of Franco in the Spanish Civil War, though his position was coupled with the view that Spain was not a problem in which Britain should become involved either way.

In November 1935 the Mind Britain's Business campaign became intertwined with the approach of the general election. The response of the B.U.F. to the election was, of course, a negative one, in that no candidates were nominated. However the election was not ignored. Voters were encouraged to abstain from voting for the 'old gang' of any party, and in proclaiming 'Fascism next time' the movement was merely coming to terms with the fact that it did not have the resources to fight the election on a massive scale. Even if it did fight the election, Mosley must have known that the humiliating experience suffered in the 1931 election was more than likely to be repeated.

The Mind Britain's Business and general election campaigns did not receive the same support from the B.U.F. in the North as the cotton campaign had. This was partly a reflection of the relevance of the respective campaigns to the problems of the region, but it was also an indication of the decline in the organisational ability of the movement in Manchester.

The movement was, by the end of 1935, largely discredited as a political force. The various problems which it had to face in 1934 were now accompanied by severe financial difficulties. In 1935 the headquarters of the movement, Black House in Chelsea, were sold and the movement moved into smaller premises. The Central Defence Force was disbanded and there was a close scrutiny of the expenditure of the various branches. Robert Benewick, for example, has estimated that £20,000 was spent on salaries alone in 1934.²⁶ These financial problems became more apparent when several prospective contributors to the movement's funds withdrew their support as a result of the discredit attached to the movement after the Olympia meeting.

When it became known that Mosley was contemplating some drastic changes in the organisation of the B.U.F. the system of intrigue, on which the matter of choosing successors was based, intensified. It was obvious that there would be some plum jobs available, but not enough to go round all the available staff. Some heads would have to roll.

The changes introduced by Mosley in January 1936 amounted to a fundamental reorganisation of the structure of the movement.²⁷ The

whole of the existing B.U.F. organisation was split into North and South. The Northern region was administered from Manchester, where a suite of about a dozen offices in Corporation Street, previously used for the administration of the Manchester area, were used for the purpose, while the Southern region was administered from the old National Headquarters in Great Smith Street, London. The Northern Headquarters were opened on January 1st and the following appointments were made. John Hone, an ex-serviceman, who was a civil engineer and widely travelled in Europe and Africa, became Assistant Director General. Administration (Northern). Hone was untypical in terms of the average age of the B.U.F. leadership, being 55 when he took up his appointment in Manchester. He worked alongside John Sant (known as 'Blood and Sant' because of his rousing speeches) who was appointed to the post of Assistant Director General. Organisation (Northern). Sant had been in the Consular Service attached to the Balkan Boundaries Commission and had been with General Harrington's forces at Chanak. At one time he had been employed as a foreign courier. He had previously been a Section Leader of the Central London branch before being attached to the Chief of Staffs Department at National Headquarters in 1934. In January 1935 he had become a National Inspecting Officer for Yorkshire and the North East at the age of 29. The Organiser of National Meetings (Northern) was Richard Reynall Bellamy, middle class and educated at public school.²⁸ The Women's Organiser (Northern) was Miss Olga Shore, who had previously worked at the National Headquarters. Not much is known about Shore except that she spoke fluent Spanish. The B.U.F. had this to say of her:

During her world travels in the course of her duties in the shipping and marketing world, she learned several foreign languages and speaks them fluently.

A keen student of psychology, her powers of assessing character are invaluable. In her selection of women officers to work under her she displays a fine sense of discretion... a strong supporter of the idea of feminine emancipation. A summary of her views of this may be said to be 'liberty without licence'.²⁹

There was in fact a delay of seven months before Shore took up her new post in Manchester and she arrived in the city in July 1936.³⁰

All of these people were 'outsiders' and had been promoted over the heads of local leaders. One man who survived the game of intrigue however, was Tommy Ackroyd, who had started a charity for local children in the Platting area of the city in 1934. By 1935 Ackroyd's charity was known as the 'Fascist Fellowship Scheme' and was said to be in operation throughout Manchester, distributing clothing, bedding and coal to the 'poorer classes'. The Fellowship Scheme in fact was proving to be Ackroyd's means to power. He was provided with a room at the Corporation Street headquarters and was described as the National Organising Officer of the charity. By the end of 1935, when his position in the new administration was about to be confirmed, he organised a Christmas party for 900 children at Churnett Street Public Hall in Platting,³¹ though the correct attendance figure was

about 400 which was doubled for propaganda purposes.³² In May 1936, Ackroyd claimed to be providing clothing for children in Manchester so that they could take part in the annual Whitsuntide processions,³³ and had opened a national Fascist Fellowship 1/- fund.³⁴ All this was considered to be good solid work for the movement in Manchester, though it was, alas, also to be his downfall. Ackroyd could not resist the temptation of running away with all the Fellowship money that was trusted to his safe keeping. He fled to Australia, where he could not quite shake off his past, and where he was eventually imprisoned in 1940 under Defence Regulation 18b.

Ackroyd, however, had consolidated his position in the hierarchy of the Manchester leadership, and when the reorganisation took place he was appointed Senior Political Adviser (Northern). He was a local man of course and had been a Conservative Party agent before joining the B.U.F. His job as Senior Political Adviser was to instruct a team of election agents for each constituency throughout the North of England.

All the five senior B.U.F. officers received a salary of £3 per week and had a full time personal secretary each. In addition there were 2 or 3 accounts officers, a press officer, 2 or 3 mail register and filing clerks, a van driver and four orderlies and messengers. There were four National Inspectors who had to report to the Northern Headquarters, and who were chosen partly because they resided in the areas they were to take charge of. Captain Wright, who was a founder member of the movement and had been continuously active, surviving

all the changes in leadership that had taken place, was Inspector for Lancashire. He was of course based in Preston. The Yorkshire area was in the charge of P. Whittam, who lived in Normanton. He had been educated at Mt. Pelier public school before going on to Oxford and Cambridge universities. A man called Armstrong, about whom little is known, took charge of the North East area. The Midlands area was in the charge of Charles Bentinck-Budd, who had been to public school and had travelled in Europe. He lived in Birmingham and had been a B.U.F. organiser in Sussex and the Midlands.³⁵ There were also several National Organising Officers attached to the Northern Headquarters, whose job it was to try to form Fascist branches where none had previously existed. According to Bellamy, "These N.O.O.'s fluctuated in number, and were never posted to any particular locality for more than a few months. If by that time they had failed to produce anything, they were held to have fallen down or had been given an impossible wicket."³⁶

This fairly elaborate hierarchy was complemented by a panel of staff speakers who were the responsibility of Bellamy.

There must have been a dozen or more of them, quite well paid by contemporary standards, and considerably better paid than I who was several ranks above them. They were a mixed lot...the only thing they had in common was in being greatly articulate. One or two of them were almost illiterate, but their obvious sincerity cancelled that out; some of them were fools, and one at least was little removed from a

crook. Those with smooth cultured voices I sent to address university societies, and various cultural associations. Incidentally, they were the ones I had least time for. The ones with the rasping voices and erratic aspirates were for the queues outside the Labour Exchanges and dock and factory gates; they had my respect, as not only were they deeply sincere but they often showed considerable courage. There was one speaker I held in high regard: Douglas Revitt from Cheetham Hill, lower middle class rather than working class, who never 'ducked' a meeting, but bloody-headed would continue to the end. There were others almost as plucky but he was outstanding, 'never letting himself get excited or abusive under the grossest provocation.'³⁷

It is in fact possible to arrive at a rough estimation of the cost of the administration of the B.U.F. in the North of England in 1936 after reorganisation. If one assumes that all the top five people, Hone, Sant, Bellamy, Shore, and Ackroyd, were paid a salary of £3 per week, which is what Bellamy was paid, the total sum would be £750 for that year. If their secretaries were paid an average of 28/- per week,³⁸ the figure would rise to just under £1,100. The Staff Speakers, of whom there were at least a dozen, were paid more than £3 per week and it might not be unreasonable to assume their combined salaries would amount to £1,500, while the four National Inspectors, assuming a similar rate of pay as Bellamy, would net a total of £1,000 per annum. The total salary bill of over £3,600 excludes the salaries of other Headquarters staff. This sum must be added to the cost of renting a suite of about a dozen offices in the city centre and the

cost of providing stationery and other office equipment, lighting and heating as well as fuel for transport, etc. It is unlikely that the total cost would be lower than £6,000 per year and probably nearer £9,000.³⁹

A new administration in the North, with seemingly adequate resources of both finance and labour, might have been expected to produce more active campaigning and a higher membership. Yet the fact remains that the new year saw a continuation of the falling off of members and an intensification of the problems the B.U.F. was already faced with.

The rather grand start to the year proved to be illusory. If there was any revival of interest in the wake of the organisational changes, it must have been of a temporary nature, since the downward trend in the fortunes of the movement continued through to 1937 and 1938. This can partly be ascribed to the reputation the B.U.F. had gained for itself in the previous years. Reynall Bellamy, the new organiser of national meetings in the North, saw the effect this had on the membership.

There were also places in Lancashire which, despite the appalling economic conditions as an incentive, British Union made no impact in 1937 or 1938. Enquiries showed that these were towns where, in 1933 and 1934, particularly during Lord Rothermeres boost, The B.U.F. had taken hold like wildfire and had drawn to itself almost every unstable person and adventurer of either sex that the town possessed. Genuine people who

had been attracted by the programme and policy, felt that they could not afford to be associated with the types that congregated at District Headquarters and either refrained from enrolling or, having joined, soon faded out. In these spots nothing remained but a bad odour, still lingering three or four years later.⁴⁰

The reputation of the B.U.F. as an anti-Semitic body much given to acts of violence, not only derived from the past but could be seen in the streets of Manchester in 1936 and later. For example, although the membership was suffering a decline the incidents of violence were not. Regardless of who was to blame for the attacks on individuals and the disruptions of meetings, the fact remained that the public and the media associated the B.U.F. with violence. In February 1936, the B.U.F. held a most provocative meeting in Cheetham Public Hall in the heart of the Jewish area of North Manchester, which resulted in disorder. During the meeting Captain Wright, of Preston, spoke of the B.U.F. moving into Cheetham Hill.⁴¹ It is hardly surprising that the Jewish people in the area decided to protest at the meeting. At the beginning of March there were violent scenes at a B.U.F. meeting at Warrington, during which a Fascist van was overturned.⁴² A week later there was trouble at Barnsley and at the end of the month there was some disorder at Hull. Manchester B.U.F. members were present at all of these meetings.

A serious incident occurred in June 1936 after a B.U.F. meeting at Hulme Town Hall which was led by Mosley. After the meeting Mosley and his supporters adjourned to the B.U.F. club in Tomlinson Street, where

Mosley was to perform the official opening ceremony of the local headquarters. By all accounts it seems that the trouble was caused by the anti-Fascists who had congregated outside the building. The Manchester Guardian reported the incident in what by this time had become a rather perfunctory style of reporting on clashes between the B.U.F. and their opponents.⁴³ Nellie Driver, who was present during the incident, and whose comments are worth repeating, if only to catch the atmosphere on such occasions, provided a somewhat partisan account.

We had obtained a new district headquarters a few streets away, and the Leader had left the hall immediately after his speech with half the National Headquarters staff to open it. No one impeded him and the local people turned out of their homes to give him a friendly welcome. He was just drinking a cup of tea after the ceremony when a brick came crashing through the window not far from his head. He surveyed it in astonishment. That was only the beginning for very soon every window in the front of the building was smashed with missiles. A large mob of thousands was outside the headquarters, whilst another mob of equal size was picketing the Town Hall - preventing anyone from entering or leaving the building - and they were definitely not the local residents.

I was with my Manchester friend, who was Women's District Leader for the Hulme branch, and we escaped from the Town Hall with our coats buttoned up over our uniforms. The mob surged around us, and I can honestly say I have never seen a nastier crowd. Its

mood was evil, and our lives would have been in danger if they had known we were Fascists. Many of them were drunk, and the Red Leaders had spread the lie that two of our men had trampled a little boy of three to death! They knew how to get the women in a murderous mood.

We were determined to get into that headquarters, so we worked our way through the mob to the front and dashed across the street which was littered with stones and broken glass, to the door. A policeman ran up to us and shouted "There's two of your girls out here, for God's sake open this door!" He pushed us in and a howl of frustrated rage arose from the mob, and a shower of stones struck the closed door behind us.

Sir Oswald was stood at the top of the stairs, ready to rush to our aid if necessary (on a similar occasion he saved the life of one of his boy supporters by rushing into a mob and dragging him, wounded by a razor, from under their feet and carrying him to his car). "Welcome" said Sir Oswald, "I'm sorry its not much of a welcome we can give you, is it!" I never saw anyone calmer. As he spoke a shout went up. "They are on the roof, they are trying to fire the building!" A file came whizzing through a side window and it was at this juncture that the Leader started to pick up the chairs and examine the legs with a practical eye.

Telephone wires had been cut so that the pitiably small handful of police could not ring up for reinforcements, but with great courage they foiled the attempt at arson. As time went on the mob did not disperse and the Leader realised they would

not go whilst he was still there. We had given him a full report of conditions outside, as we were the only ones to get through.

So his car was drawn up quickly to the door, and the police fought to keep the mob back as long as possible, whilst Sir Oswald walked slowly round the car with great dignity and got in at the other side! Our hearts were in our mouths as we watched from the stairs. A bodyguard of tough men got on the running board and on the top, and it drove straight at the mob, which scattered in all directions. After he had gone the hooligans calmed down somewhat and became more facetious, shouting "Black Rats, come out and fight fair!" but we went on playing darts and held councils of war at intervals.

A Red climbed up and tore down the Union Jack which was hanging from a window, and several screaming hags with their hair flying in all directions danced on it and finally made a bonfire of it in the middle of the street. Heaven help this country, I thought, if that mob gets into power!"⁴⁴

This highly personalised account reflects on the B.U.F.'s own propensity to violence as much as anything else. The fights, however, were not always between the B.U.F. and their opponents. The heterogeneous nature of the membership of the B.U.F. led to rivalry and open hostility between groups of Fascists from different areas, and this added to the general reputation for violence. An example of this is the conflict between the Liverpool and Manchester B.U.F. branches. One particular incident was recalled by Bob Row, a member of

the Preston branch at the time, when asked about the 'rough element' in the B.U.F.

Well they were very bad, not so much in Manchester. Manchester was much more respectable strangely enough. Liverpool was a wilder lot. To get the Liverpool and the Manchester members together they often had a fight. In fact there was a shocking case where there was a meeting in Manchester and a lot of cars and people at the meeting were lining up outside. Someone made the mistake of asking the Liverpool branch to guard the cars against the Reds. Well, the buggers just rifled the cars. (These were) the wild boys, I mean Danny Gillan and his bloody lot. He was thrown out of the movement two or three times for his wild ways, but he had his whole gang up here you see, and the trouble was the discipline of these devils, but that certainly applied to London as well as down in the docks (Liverpool). There were some very odd characters, and they all flocked into the Mosley movement because it was fashionable...we got as bad a name for riotous behaviour as we accused the Communists of you see and that's the trouble.⁴⁵

It was such incidents of violence and intimidation, within and without the movement that made it difficult for the B.U.F. to attract members. The downfall in numbers gave rise to the paradoxical situation of the remaining members, generally more steeped in the core of Fascist ideology than the ones who had departed, actually strengthening and expanding the populist, or surface, level of ideology in order to

boost membership. The confusion of the two levels of ideology led to a failure to attract either type of new member, the deeply committed or the generally discontented, and the movement failed to secure the reversal of misfortune it so ardently desired.

That misfortune was compounded by the imposition of the Public Order Act on January 1st 1937, which banned the wearing of political uniforms in public places and at public meetings. The formation of quasi-military organisations was also banned, though the consent of the Attorney General was required before anyone could be charged with these offences. Powers for the preservation of public order were placed in the hands of chiefs of police, who were able to lay down conditions under which processions could take place.

A chief constable could, with the consent of the Home Secretary, place a ban on public processions for a period of not more than three months. The Act also prohibited the carrying of offensive weapons at public meetings and processions, and offensive conduct which could give rise to breaches of the peace was also prohibited.

Robert Skidelsky has claimed that the government was faced with two alternatives. Either it could enforce the existing law, which would harm the anti-Fascists, since it was they who were breaking the law and not the Fascists. ("Mosley was doing nothing illegal"⁴⁶). Or the government could change the law to deal with the problem of public order. The second alternative followed from the objection to the first, "Since it was the Fascist meetings and processions that were being

attacked, defence of the fight of free speech and assembly would in practice mean defending the Fascists against their opponents."⁴⁷

It will be argued later that Skidelsky adopts a false premise and that if the government had enforced the existing law it would be the Fascists and not their opponents who would suffer. If this action had been taken, the Public Order Act, with its consequent tightening of executive powers and infringement of civil liberties, would not have been required. The main point to be explored here, however, is the effect the Public Order Act had on the fortunes of the B.U.F. in the North of England.

The B.U.F. officer in charge of administration for the North of England, Reynall Bellamy, thought at the time that the banning of political uniforms would be disastrous for the movement,⁴⁸ but he later considered that the ban had little impact. The first uniform style of plain blackshirt and trousers was, he claimed, acceptable, and "helped to build up the comradeship", while the second uniform was a "mistake".⁴⁹ A member of the Moss Side branch of the B.U.F. in Manchester also thought the uniform had little impact on branch membership.⁵⁰ Some people left the movement in Lancaster when the uniform was introduced, but others of a "different type" became members.⁵¹ In Hull the B.U.F. leader thought the uniform had some attraction, since active membership declined when the Public Order Act was introduced though, to counteract this, the non-active membership actually increased.⁵² What may have occurred here, of course, is a swing by the same people from active to non-active

membership. In Nelson the Public Order Act partly affected membership, though it is not known to what extent.⁵³ It may be true that the Public Order Act had little effect on the numerical strength of the B.U.F. If this was the case, then it surely rested on the fact that the B.U.F. was already at a low ebb, in terms of numbers, morale and finance. The people who had remained in the movement throughout the upheavals of 1935 and 1936 were not likely to be easily put off by the lack of a uniform to wear. These were the people, by and large, who had imbibed not only the rhetoric of Fascism but also the underlying 'depth' ideology of the movement.

Reynall Bellamy summed up the effect the Public Order Act had on the Membership of the B.U.F. He does not indicate the numbers of new members at the time for they were, indeed, very small.

Political creeds, as well as religious, thrive on persecution. Therefore our movement now made some of its most significant progress...The men and women who now joined our movement came in with their eyes open and were under no illusion as to what was in store for them. They enrolled mainly for the preservation of peace, and in the conviction that peace could best be maintained by National Unity and strength and not by internal dissention and weakness. The exhibition of empty threats followed by humiliating defeat, which is how the Baldwin Government stood up to Mussolini, persuaded a number of people jealous of their countrymen's good name to go over to Mosley's cause. The Fascist recruits who came in during 1935 and 1936 knew that in joining a

revolutionary movement they were saying good bye to comfort and safety. They realised that hence forth they would be liable to victimisation at work or business. There would be loss of friends, even disrupted home life and always the risk of grave physical injury. From this time until the implementation of Defence Regulation 18b in May 1940, the quality of those who enrolled in British Union reached its best. The tone of the movement never stood higher.⁵⁴

To these people the uniform was useful, though less important than it was to those members who responded to the populist appeal of the 'surface' ideology of the movement.

One aspect of the exploitation of the populist level of ideology, which of course accompanied the deeper level to which the members described by Bellamy responded, was the attempt to secure B.U.F. representation on local councils. The Manchester municipal elections of 1938 provide an opportunity to study this attempt in some detail, since the B.U.F. nominated four candidates. The next chapter deals with the B.U.F. and its approach to elections generally, before attempting to determine the impact of the 1938 local elections on the electorate in Manchester.

CHAPTER SIXAPPEALING TO THE PEOPLE: THE B.U.F. AND ELECTIONS.

The 1938 municipal elections provided the first opportunity for the Manchester electorate to decide for themselves what they thought of the B.U.F. by the means of the vote. There are several aspects of the Manchester elections which tell us a great deal about the B.U.F. in general and its impact in Manchester in particular. We need to look at the areas in which the B.U.F. chose to place their candidates and thus find out why the areas were chosen. We need to look at the manifestos put forward by the candidates, and at what the B.U.F. hoped to achieve by putting forward candidates for election to local councils. The following analysis will attempt to define the support of the candidates and provide answers to the other problems outlined here. However, we must first proceed by way of historical background in order to place the 1938 elections in their proper context and to outline the attitudes towards elections which the B.U.F. held. We need to examine how those attitudes changed with the changing fortunes of the movement.

When the New Party, the embryonic form of the B.U.F., was founded in March 1931, Mosley decided immediately that he would appeal to the electorate for the support of his policies. It could be argued that Mosley was in a relatively strong position to do this compared, for example, with the positions held by the leaders of other minor political parties, especially that of the Communist Party. The leader of the

New Party, Mosley, was a member of parliament and an ex-Cabinet Minister, an important and well known figure at that, of whom great things were expected by many people. The New Party's strength was initially drawn from inside parliament and it was natural that Mosley would see a strong party base in the House of Commons as the way to achieve power.

As soon as the New Party was formed, Mosley announced that it would fight 400 seats at the next general election. In the event, nothing like that total was achieved. The first test of the New Party's strength came in April 1931 in Ashton-Under-Lyne. Allen Young, who had been Mosley's full time political secretary, was nominated for the seat by the New Party. The seat was held by Labour with a majority of 3407 at the 1929 general election. Young gained 4472 votes and saved his deposit, coming third behind the Conservatives, who received 12,420 votes, and Labour with 11,005. On an 80% poll, the swing to the Tories was in line with the general move in that direction at by-elections in the two previous years. In his autobiography, Mosley stated that "the vote was large enough to put us on the map and cause the New Party to be taken seriously."¹

If the New Party was now being taken seriously, the Party organisers did not capitalise on the situation, nor did the later election results fully bear out the confidence expressed much later by Mosley. His aim of fielding 400 candidates at the general election in October 1931 did not materialise. Only 24 candidates stood and only two of those managed to avoid being placed at the bottom of the poll,

including Mosley himself. Instead of building the base in the House of Commons as he hoped, Mosley found himself in a worse position than when he started. The New Party began with four M.P.'s in the House of Commons. Now it had none.

It is worth remembering these election results as we turn to the B.U.F.'s attitude towards elections. As leader of the B.U.F., Mosley must have known that, initially at least, he could not hope to fare any better than the New Party had in elections. As a Fascist leader, he was in an even more isolated position than he was when he led the New Party. He had no seat in the House of Commons from which to build support, and in any case he increasingly spoke of the structure of the House of Commons itself as being one of the reasons for the economic plight of the country. It was much easier to say, as he did, that, for the moment, elections did not matter, than to face the same humiliation as the New Party in the 1931 general election. If that happened again, the resulting damage to Mosley and his new movement would be irreparable.

However, Mosley put a brave face on the situation, and he had this to say about the 1931 election results:

Our constructive programme was derided and dismissed, only later to be adopted in part by the National government - but in so small a degree, so tardily and in such muddled fashion, as to render it entirely ineffective.

For all this we make no complaint whatsoever: such experience is merely the classic first phase of a Modern Movement. Actually we fared far better at our first attempt than any other of the modern movements which have been founded and which have come to power in other countries since the war. The Italian Fascists were more utterly defeated in the election of 1919, about three years before they came into power. Their leader polled only 5,000 votes against the 100,000 of his Old Gang opponent - a result only some 20 per cent as good as that which I was afforded by the people of Stoke-on-Trent in the election of 1931.

If we turn to the case of the German Nazis, we find that they were routed again and again by national combinations of their Old Gang before they approached power.²

Although the voters did not see fit to return his party to parliament, Mosley thought that the time would arrive when it could capture parliament by constitutional means. It is at this point that a paradox appears in Mosley's reasoning, of which he himself was aware. One of the main points of B.U.F. policy was the replacement of parliament by a corporate system of government. The whole election process by which M.P.'s were returned to parliament would be overhauled and replaced by an occupational franchise. Yet here was Mosley attempting to use the very means which he derided to gain the support of parliament. If, because of the structure of parliament, M.P.'s were as impotent in bringing about change as Mosley suggested, how would his M.P.'s bring about the change he desired? His answer was that

"Parliament will never be an end in itself; but only a means to an end; our object is not political place holding, but an achievement of national reconstruction."³ All very well perhaps, but the actual process of change in parliament, to bring about the 'national reconstruction' was never clearly defined.

Mosley admitted that he probably made a mistake in fighting the general election of 1931, adding that this was a mistake common to all new movements (meaning Fascism in Germany and Italy). He saw it as a phase of 'ridicule and defeat' which was a test of the movement's vitality. Some would say it was a phase in which the vitality of the movement was brought seriously brought into question. However, Mosley was not to make the same mistake again. Before the movement ventured once more into the election field, it had to do a lot more ground work 'invading every phase of national life and carrying everywhere the Corporation conception'.

It is interesting that Mosley left open the possibility of achieving power by other than parliamentary means. This path would not, of course, be sought by the movement and would not be an attempt to usurp the position of the Crown. It would only be a fight against the forces of anarchy when the machinery of state had become powerless.

Thus Mosley left his options open. If pressed as to why he did not put his movement to the test of the vote in an election, he would answer that he could by-pass the House of Commons when the time came

to fight the forces of anarchy that would be the result of the parliamentary system. The actual route to power was left suitably vague in order to take into account any contingencies which might arise. Mosley was becoming more committed to developing a fighting election machine within his movement, but once the B.U.F. had a base in the House of Commons, anything might happen.

In January 1935, Mosley outlined a new stage of Blackshirt organisation. The roles of Unit Leader and Branch Officer and the organisation of branches were clearly defined. Further, and what is of interest to us here, the role within the B.U.F. of a Political Organisation with 'electoral machinery' was clearly spelt out. The Political Organisation was to work parallel with the movement as a whole and was to be under the control of a Director of Political Organisation who would control the existing constituency organisations and, especially, the womens organisation, whose main task would be to develop constituency organisations under the supervision of the Director. The Political Organisation in fact, would operate in much the same way as other political parties. Members would give their services

...in the same way as members of other parties...
to develop definite constituency organisations on a constituency, ward and polling district basis. A constituency organisation will be constituted by a political officer directing a political agent and assisted by a Blackshirt officer appointed to maintain liason with the Blackshirt movement.⁴

Rooms were to be rented from existing club or branch premises and members of the Political Organisation were to wear plain clothes. Their only identifying feature would be a badge. The ultimate aim of the organisation was "...to have a constituency organisation in every constituency which will rely for certain essential services on the Blackshirt movement, which will be separately organised but on parallel lines."⁵

In the 1935 general election, the B.U.F. adopted a policy of 'Fascism next time', which formed part of an anti-Semitic campaign, in which people were encouraged to express their dissatisfaction with parliament by withholding their vote. The role of the ordinary M.P. continued to be ridiculed and the structure of parliament and the policies of the 'Old Gang' political leaders were similarly derided. In preparation for 'Fascism next time', the B.U.F. announced in November 1936 a list of 100 constituencies which they would contest in the next general election. According to Robert Benewick,⁶ who discussed the list with John Beckett and A.K. Chesterton, the constituencies were chosen on the basis of the strength of the local B.U.F. organisation. The availability of a candidate was also an important factor in deciding which constituencies would be contested. If these constituencies are studied it is possible to see that they were grouped into two main areas in England and Wales. Twenty six constituencies were chosen in the North West of England, with five of the ten Manchester constituencies, three of the six Leeds, and three of the ten Liverpool constituencies appearing on the list. Forty six of the constituencies appeared in

London and the South East. If we look at the percentage of constituencies in the major cities that were on the B.U.F. list, we can see that Manchester and Leeds featured prominently enough to be provided with the largest percentage, by number of seats, of candidates.

Table 1. Distribution of prospective parliamentary candidates in areas of high B.U.F. support.

AREA	Number of seats in the area	Number of seats chosen by the B.U.F.	% of possible B.U.F. rep.
Manchester	10	5	50
Leeds	6	3	50
London	61	10	33
Liverpool	11	3	27.2

It is clear that the B.U.F. considered the North West of England to be an important part of their election plans - more so than the industrial Midlands or the North East. However this does not hide the fact that the South East was particularly prominent in terms of the total number of constituencies allocated to prospective members by the B.U.F.

The main area which this analysis of the B.U.F. and elections is concerned with is, of course, Manchester, and if we look at the five prospective candidates nominated by the B.U.F. for five of the ten constituencies in the city, some interesting points emerge. The

The candidate in the Gorton constituency was Thomas Davies, who was a local man, having been born in Ardwick, which borders on the Gorton constituency.⁷ He started his working life as a labourer and was later

employed as a miner. He served in the 3rd Manchester Regiment during the First World War. Davies' previous political activity is interesting, since he joined the National Unemployed Workers Movement and took on the duties of a branch secretary. He was forty years old in 1936, when he was chosen as prospective B.U.F. candidate. It would appear that Davies was chosen because he was known locally and presumably was a popular figure in the Fascist movement in Manchester.

In Hulme the prospective candidate was R.T. Parkyn, who was also a man with local connections.⁸ Not much is known about Parkyn, except that he started his working life as a coach builder and joined the Army in 1916. After the war he spent $2\frac{1}{2}$ years in the Civil Service before taking a degree at Manchester University and then spending a period of ten years in Persia. He was 38 years old when he was nominated for the constituency.

The candidate for the Exchange constituency was Captain L. Wright, who was Chief Propaganda Officer for the North West area in 1936. He was a member of the Preston branch, though he was born and educated in Manchester.⁹

R.R. Bellamy was the prospective candidate for the Blackley constituency. He was 36 years old in 1936 and had had a varied career full of action. He was born in Liverpool and was educated at Sedbergh. He was too young to serve in the forces during the First World War, though the Fascist press described him as having joined the Red Cross in 1918. This may well have been the case, but what was not disclosed

was the fact that he also served in the 'Black and Tans' in Ireland.¹⁰ Bellamy later became a farm hand in Cheshire before joining the Merchant Marine. He was also widely travelled and at different times had worked on a sheep station in New South Wales and as a cotton planter in Queensland. Bellamy wrote about his travels and published two books; Real South Seas and Mixed Bliss in Melanesia, and had transcribed a book with the title Rumblin' Jack. He had joined the B.U.F. in 1932 and in 1936 was working at the Manchester Headquarters as a full time paid member in charge of Northern Propaganda. In fact Bellamy's connections with Manchester were closer than that. He had lived for seven years in Didsbury (or 'Yidsbury' as he described it when interviewed.¹¹), and his grandfather was Herbert Milne, (of Kendal Milne, a large and exclusive department store in the centre of Manchester). Bellamy thought that Blackley was chosen as a constituency by the B.U.F. because it was near enough to a Jewish area for the people to be 'Jewish conscious' and he considered that there was a certain amount of feeling against the Jews in the area which the B.U.F. could exploit. The B.U.F. did have a strong organisation in Blackley, with two branches in the constituency, one in Moston and another in Crumpsall. The neighbouring area of Miles Platting also contained two B.U.F. branches. Bellamy considered that he was chosen as a prospective candidate because of his connections with Manchester and, of course, as head of Northern Propaganda, he held a prominent position in the organisation of the B.U.F. and was well known in Fascist circles.

The last B.U.F. prospective candidate for the Manchester area

constituencies was L.E. Griffith, who was to fight the Moss Side constituency in the next election. At 24 he was the youngest of the five. He was a local man, having attended Chorlton Grammar School and the North Manchester Municipal High School. He was considered to be a well known figure in the B.U.F. and had been a Manchester member since October 1932. Griffith had also been a member of Toc H and the Boy Scouts before joining the B.U.F.

It is apparent that, firstly, the prospective candidates were selected because of their local connections and their standing in the B.U.F. organisation and, secondly, that the constituencies in which they were placed were able to rely on fairly strong support from established B.U.F. branches. This bears out what Beckett and Chesterton thought of as the reasons why the constituencies were chosen. From the B.U.F.'s point of view they would appear to be the most obvious reasons for making the choice.*

The general election plans of the B.U.F. never bore fruit because the movement had, of course, been eclipsed by the time the next general election was held, in 1945. There was no doubt as to the seriousness

* Interestingly, Nellie Driver, the Women's District Leader of the Nelson branch, was approached by the National headquarters, who asked if she would be willing to be nominated as prospective member for the Nelson and Colne constituency, since she was well known in the area and was instrumental in building up a strong branch. She declined the offer because she didn't think she had the remotest chance of winning.¹²

of intent of the B.U.F. in entering a general election with many candidates and, with the movement gaining some support in the months preceding the outbreak of war, one could not doubt its ability to field at least some of those candidates. As to the success the candidates could expect to achieve, we can only indicate the general pointers which emerged before the movement came to a sudden end with the introduction by the government of Defence Regulation 18b, in 1940. The main pointer we have, and certainly the most relevant, is the electoral success the movement met with when it fielded candidates in municipal elections.

In July 1936 the B.U.F. decided, in an apparent reversal of policy, that for the time being attention would focus on local elections. Once the decision was taken, the local election plans were carefully mapped out. It was a year before the first candidates stood in local elections but the ground work was laid long before. The first elections contested, in March 1937, were in three L.C.C. constituencies in the East End of London. Two B.U.F. candidates stood in each of the wards of Bethnal Green, North East; Limehouse (Stepney); and Shoreditch. The results of those elections have already been adequately dealt with elsewhere,¹³ but it is worth looking at the results again so that comparisons may be made with later elections in Manchester. (see Table 2, page 182).

The results, while not exactly disastrous for the B.U.F. in such areas of high Jewish settlement, were the best the B.U.F. were ever to achieve in British elections, Mosley could not brush off the defeats

Table 2. Results of 1937 municipal elections in East End wards
with B.U.F. candidates.¹⁴

Bethnal Green North-East

T. Dawson (Labour)	7,777
Mrs. R.S. Keeling (Labour)	7,756
A. Raven Thompson (British Union)	3,028
E.G. Clarke (British Union)	3,022
A.J. Irvine (Liberal)	2,328
H.K. Sadler (Liberal)	2,298

(Labour 59%, British Union 23%, Liberal 18%.)

Stepney (Limehouse)

R. Coppock (Labour)	8,272
Miss H.M. Whately (Labour)	8,042
V.G. Weeple (Municipal Reform)	2,542
G.E. Abrahams (Municipal Reform)	2,431
Mrs A. Brock Griggs (British Union)	2,086
C. Wegg-Prosser (British Union)	2,086

(Labour 54%, Municipal Reform 27%, British Union 19%)

Shoreditch

Mrs. H. Girling (Labour)	11,098
S.W. Jeger (Labour)	11,069
S.L. Price (Municipal Progressive)	3,303
R.S. Falk (Municipal Progressive)	3,217
William Joyce (British Union)	2,564
J.A. Bailey (British Union)	2,492
C.E. Taylor (Independant Labour)	385

(Labour 63%, Municipal Progressive 22%, British
 Union 14%, Independant Labour 1%)

in the East End constituencies as though they did not matter, since the B.U.F. had thrown everything into these elections, with literally hundreds of meetings being organised in the campaign and with strong candidates who were well known. Once again, as with the New Party results in the 1931 elections, a comparison was made with the National Socialist vote in Germany before the Nazis came to power. On that sort of comparison, claimed Mosley, the B.U.F. was in just about the same position as the National Socialists, with about 18% of the vote. It has, however, been pointed out that Hitler's votes were won from all over Germany, whereas Mosley's party had gained approximately the same percentage of votes from, by this time, the three strongest constituencies, electorally, in the whole of the country.¹⁵ The B.U.F. of course was searching around for any face saving evidence that might be at hand, and it was suggested that if the Jews in the three constituencies had not been there, the Labour vote would have dropped to the point where the B.U.F. could quite easily have won.

Similar results as those in the L.C.C. elections were obtained when the B.U.F. put up candidates in the municipal elections six months later in October. Other constituencies in London, and also in Leeds, Sheffield and Southampton were contested at these elections, and the B.U.F. never came in sight of winning. The results in the provinces were particularly bad.¹⁶

If we consider the organisation of the B.U.F. in the Manchester area, we can see that electoral considerations played a large part in the siting of branch headquarters and the choosing of administrative areas.

From the very beginning the Manchester headquarters supervised branches based on constituency areas. In the early days of the movement the area was organised by compass points. Manchester East, for example, consisted of the parliamentary constituency areas of Ardwick and Gorton. Manchester South was made up of the Hulme and Withington constituencies. When plans were announced for a new branch in the North in April 1934, with headquarters in Ashton-under-Lyne, it was envisaged that the area would cover the three parliamentary divisions of Ashton, Mossley and Stalybridge with Hyde.¹⁷ With the reorganisation of the movement at the beginning of 1935, the parliamentary boundaries took on a greater significance, though it took several months for the Manchester area to organise itself on the new lines laid down by Mosley. The activities at the various branches in Manchester, as well as at the city headquarters, were disrupted from time to time as jealousies and favouritism crept into the relationships between various members. When Mosley announced his new plans which, as we have seen, created new Political Organisation posts, and gave the Women's section particular political duties, these disruptive forces became more evident and it was some time before the pattern of political organisation emerged. In June 1935, six months after the plans were announced, a general meeting was held at the Manchester Central branch, where the new plans were announced to the members. All members were to work in units in their own constituencies, where it was stated that offices had been acquired, and they were to concern themselves chiefly with canvassing, the selling of Blackshirt and, of course, organising meetings.¹⁸ It was not until October 1935 that the leaders of the Manchester East

area, in the Gorton and Ardwick constituencies, explained to their members the new Political Organisation plans,¹⁹ while it took as long as December before the new plans, which Mosley in the previous January had said were to be brought into action immediately, were sorted out and introduced in Stretford.²⁰

In January 1936, election funds were opened in Flatting, Withington, Gorton, Hulme, North Salford and Stretford, with a separate but parallel central fund organised from the Manchester headquarters. How effective this fund raising was is difficult to say. Reynall Bellamy, the Organiser of National Meetings in the North, and in charge of Northern Propaganda, said that crooks kept appearing within the organisation and district treasurers would sometimes abscond with the money, and in some cases taking with them office equipment, such as typewriters.²¹ Socials and dances were sometimes held to swell the election funds, but just how successful these were is not known. The reports in the Fascist press of such events may well have been exaggerated in the same way that reports of meetings and the membership increases of various branches were sometimes falsified in order to create a good impression.

The only opportunity we have of analysing the strength of the B.U.F. in Manchester when put to the test of the electorate, and analysing it on a proper psephological basis, is provided by the municipal election results of 1938. The B.U.F. decided to contest four wards in Manchester in that year. Miss Margaret E. Pye stood in the All Saints ward; F. Fowden in the Collyhurst ward; James Simmonds in the

South Gorton ward, and Bernard Talbot in the St. George's ward. All the candidates were local people, and some were fairly prominent in their local organisations, though not nationally known. Simmonds was the Assistant District Officer of the East Manchester branch (Ardwick and Gorton), which included the South Gorton ward for which he was a candidate. He lived in part of Rusholme which was also in the East Manchester branch district and in fact, at least until October 1935, the branch headquarters were at his home address. Talbot lived in Fallowfield and, so far as it has been possible to discover, did not hold any particularly prominent position in the local organisation. In February 1939, after the elections, he was fined in the Manchester City police court for shouting anti-Semitic slogans. Margaret Pye was born in Ardwick and was a member of the local Toc H and its library. Her father and his brother had lived in Ardwick at least since they were children and may have been born in the area. Fowden was a local man from Blackley, though little else is known about him. He does not appear to have held a responsible position in his local branch, though it is possible that he could have done so.

If we take a look at the actual wards chosen by the B.U.F. in the election we may throw more light on the reasons why the wards were chosen and the sort of campaigns waged by the candidates. Manchester of course was at the centre of the Industrial Revolution in this country, and in more ways than one. The cotton trade, important in many aspects in the Industrial Revolution, was centred in the South East of Lancashire and particularly in the Manchester area, which expanded at an enormous rate as the cotton industry itself expanded. Of particular

interest to us here is the expansion in the population of Manchester that took place not only in the nineteenth century but in the twentieth century also and which is partly attributed to the fact that Manchester became one of the main centres to which people migrated from other parts of the British Isles and abroad.

The structure of the population of Manchester in the 1930's was a reflection of this very high level of immigration. Of particular interest to the study of the B.U.F. in Manchester were the Jews and the Irish. The growth of the Jewish community in Manchester is dealt with later. It is the influx of large numbers of Irish people which is important here. As early as 1820 twenty per cent of the working class people in Manchester were Irish.²² In 1845 Engels, living in and writing about Manchester, described the conditions that existed in 'Little Ireland', an Irish slum in the centre of the city.²³ This early influx of Irish people was related, in part, to the possibilities of employment afforded by the rapid industrial change occurring in the early nineteenth century. Canal building and, later, railway building, as well as the construction of the large cotton mills, provided employment for large numbers of Irish people in the area. The Irish potato famine however was the main cause of of Irish immigration, and the Irish arrived in the city in their thousands in the 1840's via the port of Liverpool. The influx was so great that a tremendous stress was placed on the capacity of the authorities to cope with the numbers. In November 1847, five thousand Irish paupers per week were provided with poor relief and fever periodically spread through the Irish community. Once the Irish had arrived in Manchester, of course, they

tended to stay. Since a large Irish community had been brought into existence in the area, Manchester continued to be a place of contact with people back in Ireland. Even after the initial burst of Irish immigration in the early nineteenth century, people arriving in England much later from Ireland, in search of work, would naturally gravitate towards the centres of Irish population in this country. Many people in Ireland would have relatives in Manchester and often arrived in the city to join them. From this point of view Manchester was still very important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the Irish citizen arriving in this country.²⁴

The influx of people into Manchester did not consist solely of Irish people of course. We have already noted in passing the immigrant Italian community, and Jewish immigrants formed a large percentage of the total influx. However, the point is that Irish immigration continued. From the point of view of this study it is interesting to note that the 1930's saw the influx of Irish people into Manchester, which had been dwindling over the previous few decades, was given added impetus by the fact that America could no longer offer employment to Irish immigrants and had in fact placed restrictions on the number of people entering the country. The Depression in America meant that Irish people who might otherwise have emigrated there, now turned towards England. In 1931 over 100,000 people, from all parts of Ireland, settled in Lancashire and Cheshire.²⁵ By 1951 the figure for Irish immigration into South East Lancashire was just over 40,000²⁶, the fall in numbers being mainly due to the impact of the Second World War.

If we turn to the actual number of Catholics, which is the nearest we can get to determining Irish population numbers, we can see that in the Salford Diocese, which includes Manchester, the numbers of Catholics attending churches in the Diocese increased considerably in the 1930's. In 1930 the figure was 86,878; in 1935 88,870; in 1940 97,097.²⁷

It is important to note the large numbers of Irish people in the four wards chosen by the B.U.F. because it has already been suggested that the relationship between the B.U.F. and the Irish community deserves special attention. The four wards were predominantly Catholic areas. The largest Catholic church in Manchester, St. Patricks, was on the edge of the Collyhurst ward and was a predominantly Irish Catholic church drawing much of its congregation from the Collyhurst district. In 1930 it had a registered congregation of 8,000 which had grown to 10,000 by 1935.²⁸ The second largest church, in terms of congregation, was St. Wilfreds, in the St. George's ward, which numbered 7,000 in 1930, with a slight drop to 6,800 in 1935.²⁹ The third largest church was St. Francis, in Gorton North, on the edge of the Gorton South ward in which the B.U.F. had placed a candidate. Miles Platting contained the fourth largest church, which bordered on the Collyhurst ward itself. In 1930 there was a total of thirty three Catholic Churches in Manchester and so it would seem that, using Church membership as a yardstick, the four wards chosen by the B.U.F. in the 1938 municipal elections were the most Catholic, and, by implication, the most Irish wards in the city.

Finding out what actually occurred in the B.U.F. election campaign has proved rather difficult. The local press ignored the campaigns and only reported that the candidates had been entered for the elections and the positions they subsequently held when the results were declared. The Fascist press did not cover each individual election. We are left with the published B.U.F. election material and the accounts of the election provided by various people who were either in the B.U.F. at the time or were engaged in opposing the B.U.F. and in doing so monitored the progress of the local elections.

The actual manifestos of the four candidates were very similar, as might be expected, with just the odd word altered here and there.³⁰ A 'non political' stance was taken by the candidates, arguing for example that such matters as foreign affairs should be of no concern to councillors. Political careerists were attacked and the money spent on prestigious buildings, by which was presumably meant the new Manchester Town Hall extensions, was also denounced. It was argued that the cost of social services should not be borne by local authorities, nor should the cost of Air Raid Precautions. Instead these should come under the supervision of central government. 'Britain First' was the catch phrase which was said to sum up British Union policy. The term 'Fascist' did not appear at all. One of the common themes was the fight against 'Communism, Cant and Corruption'. The 'Corruption' presumably related to the charge that favouritism was shown by councillors in giving local authority employment to friends and relatives, though no evidence was offered to show that such favouritism did in fact exist.

Fowden, the candidate in the Collyhurst ward, added his own comments in a separate leaflet. Reference to 'Alien Financial Interests' was made and the Labour Party was blamed for dragging Britain towards war over quarrels which were of no concern to workers in this country. Fowden again attacked the Labour Party, and the Manchester Labour M.P.'s in particular, for being anti-religious. In a letter to the Chief Librarian of the city, who had requested copies of the manifestos for the Central Library archives, Margaret Pye, the candidate for the All Saints ward, professed her patriotism. She seemed reluctant to use the term 'Fascist'. "I see the press advertising me as a Fascist. I am definitely a member of BRITISH UNION supporting all things that pertain to Britain and the British Empire, the finest Empire the World has ever known."³¹

One important feature of the manifestos relates to the problem of religion. We have already briefly referred to the fact that Fowden made an attack on the Manchester Labour M.P.'s, Clyne, Wedgewood Benn and Henderson, for their supposed anti-religious stance. Fowden appealed to the religious nature of his prospective constituents in a leaflet headed 'Socialists say - Abolish Religion'. The electors were asked "Are you going to vote for 'Labour-cum-Communist' Moscow's Anti-God Agents?",³² and were told that British Union guaranteed the freedom of religion. William Johnston was the retiring Labour councillor for the Collyhurst ward in the 1938 elections and, until the intervention of the Fascist candidate, was to have been returned unopposed. Once Johnston realised he had to contest the election, he issued a manifesto which included the claim that he stood for freedom in the religious

teaching of children. This was a reference to the problems over the provision of educational facilities to Catholic children. Johnston, like Fowden, the Fascist candidate, was stating that he supported the right of Catholics to send their children to Catholic schools, though neither he nor Fowden spelt it out in so many words. In fact, the point did not need to be spelt out. It was obvious to the Irish Catholic constituents exactly what the point was. Johnston, in fact, went further than his backing of religious freedom. He went on the attack and claimed that Fascism meant the end of political and religious freedom, and linked Fowden's policies with those of the Nazis in Germany.

The Fascist appeal to Catholics was not just a local phenomenon. It will be shown that a fair proportion of the membership of the B.U.F. was made up of Irish people, a fact which dates from the very beginning of the movement. The claim to support freedom in religious education also has a history and in fact dates from the days of the New Party. In the Ashton by-election of April 1931, when Allen Young stood for the New Party, one of the major local issues was that of freedom of religious education. As soon as the nomination papers were handed in at Ashton, the question of the Roman Catholics was uppermost in a lot of people's minds, since it was considered that the estimated 4,000 Roman Catholic votes could play a crucial role in the election results.³³ Several Catholics resigned from the Ashton Labour Party and went over to support Young because of the 'religious conscience' clause', and two Catholics who had originally nominated the Labour candidate decided to work for Young when they realised that a

New Party candidate had been nominated. It was thought that the New Party would gain much of the 4,000 Catholic vote purely because of the religious education question.³⁴

The situation reached a new height on the Sunday before the election day, when Gordon, the Labour Party candidate, while attending a service at a Roman Catholic church, was denounced from the pulpit by the priest because his attitude on the freedom of education question was considered 'evasive and unsatisfactory'. The priest went on to ask Catholics to support the candidate who would allow "freedom of conscience when Catholic principles conflict with party discipline" and who would "support the Catholic claim for financial assistance for non-providing schools."³⁵ The priest considered that the views of the other two candidates on this subject were 'satisfactory'. A local Catholic newspaper was later distributed which contained an attack on the Labour candidate over the religious question.³⁶

As far as the 1938 elections in Manchester were concerned, only Fowden specifically mentioned the problem of religious education. The reason for this was that of the four candidates, only Fowden issued his own individual leaflet. All of the candidates issued broadsheets which were similar to each other. These were issued from the Manchester headquarters of the B.U.F., and were, as we have seen, very general in nature.

As well as being predominantly Catholic, the four wards were, as might be expected, largely working class. If we look at the 1931 Census for

the Manchester city area, we can see that while the number of persons per acre for the city as a whole was 28.1, the four wards with which we are concerned were much more crowded than this. All Saints contained 79.8 persons per acre; Collyhurst 102.9; Gorton South 44.0 and St Georges 100.6.³⁷ If we compare the numbers of persons per room in the four wards with the number for the city as a whole, the following picture emerges: The number for the whole city averaged out at 0.87 persons per room. All Saints contained 0.94 persons per room; Collyhurst 1.09; Gorton South 0.93 and St Georges 1.01.³⁸

By 1938 the B.U.F. was specifically appealing to working class people for its support. The Blackshirt was headed 'The Patriotic Workers Paper'. A good example of the appeal to working class people in the Manchester wards is provided by a leaflet produced by the National headquarters of the B.U.F., and which was distributed in the Gorton South ward by Simmonds, the Fascist candidate. The B.U.F. was described as a 'classless movement', and it was stated that while the parties of class existed there would always be poverty. The poor had to be defended. "The snob and the parasite must go. The Rich shall not eat cake until the poor have bread."³⁹ In the manifesto issued by all the candidates it was stated that "The people's cause must win". The 'People's cause' was only vaguely hinted at and presented in populist terms. Homes for the people were a top priority. Rates should be kept down and local government should be cleaned up. Unlike political careerists the Fascists would express the people's will, and the people's fight was their fight.⁴⁰ However, the Fascists were not to be allowed to express the people's will in the council chamber. All the Fascist candidates lost overwhelmingly. The results were as follows:

Table 3. Manchester Municipal Election results in constituencies
with Fascist candidates. November 1938.

COLLYHURST

	votes cast	% of vote	votes cast as % of poll.
Johnston W. (Lab)	1709	87.59%	} 30.16%
Fowden F. (Fascist)	242	12.40%	

ST. GEORGES

	votes cast	% of vote	votes cast as % of poll.
Kearns J.H. (Con)	2267	53.39%	} 41.00%
Clapham J.G. (Lab)	1840	43.33%	
Talbot A. (Fascist)	139	3.29%	

GORTON SOUTH

	votes cast	% of vote	votes cast as % of poll.
Adams T.H. (Lab)	3643	93.91%	} 29.26%
Simmonds J. (Fascist)	236	6.08%	

ALL SAINTS

	votes cast	% of vote	votes cast as % of poll.
Harper R.S. jnr. (Con)	1817	64.63%	} 37.66%
Gower E.A. (Lab)	968	34.43%	
Pye Miss M.E. (Fascist)	23	0.81%	
Whittington L. (Ind)	3	0.10%	

The real picture was worse than the results, if taken at face value, indicate. An analysis of the local election results for the period between 1930 and 1939 in the Manchester area, in which Communist party candidates stood, enables us to make a comparison between the B.U.F. and another minor party. In the ten year period there was a total of thirteen Communist party candidates. The average vote for these candidates totalled 138. Expressed as a percentage, the Communist Party received an average of 3.5% of the votes cast. The average vote for the Fascist candidates was 160, which was equal to an average of 5.1% of the votes cast. On this sort of comparison it could be said that the B.U.F. did better than the Communist Party. However, this picture is distorted a little because there was no second major party in the Collyhurst and Gorton South wards, where, between them, the share of the poll was 9.24%. If these two wards are excluded, the average vote for the remaining two wards was 81 or 2.01% of the total vote. In other words, in the Collyhurst and Gorton South Wards, the results of the 1938 elections were distorted because in both wards there was only one other candidate. The result was that the fascist candidates received more votes than they were likely to have done if there had been more than one major party candidate.

Whenever a single major party candidate is standing in a straight fight with a candidate from a minor party there is a tendency for the major party candidate's share of the vote to go down and the minor party's candidate's share of the vote to increase, regardless of the actual policies adopted by each candidate and put forward to the electorate. This distortion arises from the fact that there tends to be a high

level of confusion and ignorance amongst voters. The 1938 elections of course, were held before a change in the Representation of the People Act allowed the names of the political parties for which the candidates stood to appear on the ballot paper. There was a good possibility therefore that some voters would confuse the Fascist candidates in the Collyhurst and South Gorton wards with a second major party, which, in fact, was not represented in the election.

We can analyse the Fascist vote further and show fairly accurately whether it came from the Labour Party or not. The Labour Party would be a more obvious loser of the votes than the Conservative Party, given the nature of the campaigns waged by the Fascist candidates and analysed above. The normal expectation of turnout of the Labour vote in the 1938 elections can be judged by looking at the Labour vote in nine wards in 1937 and comparing them with the Labour vote in the same wards in 1938. The wards have been carefully chosen in order to limit any distorting factors as much as possible. For example, none of the four wards with fascist candidates in 1938 were chosen, nor were any wards where a major party was absent. The result of this analysis shows that the normal expectation of turnout of the Labour vote in 1938 would be 108.6% of what it had been in 1937. If we now compare this with the Labour vote in the four wards in which Fascist candidates stood in 1938, we arrive at the following conclusions.

In the All Saints ward, the Labour vote fell down to 83% of what it ought to have been (108.6%). In St. Georges, the Labour vote rose

to 104.4%. In Collyhurst the Labour vote rose to 105.2% and in Gorton South the Labour vote rose to 107.1%. This suggests that all these figures are within the bounds of error, bearing in mind the nature of the figures we are dealing with. Thus the Labour vote in the St. Georges, Collyhurst and Gorton South wards turned out to be remarkably close to what was expected and the drop in the All Saints Labour vote could quite easily be explained by the selection of a new Conservative candidate. The significance of this is reduced when it is remembered that the total Fascist vote in the All Saints ward was only 23 (0.81%). Thus we can say that the Labour vote conformed to the general pattern of behaviour of the Labour vote elsewhere in the city, where there were no Fascist candidates. It is not possible to analyse the Conservative vote in the same way because there was no Conservative candidate in two of the four wards in the 1938 elections. To conclude this analysis then, it can be said that there is no evidence to suggest that the B.U.F. candidates produced any particular stimulus in the elections either way. A psephologist would consider the elections to have been fairly 'low key'.

We do however have to look beyond the limited horizons of the psephologist and place the lack of success of the B.U.F. in the 1938 elections in its proper context. The B.U.F. fought the elections in the areas of the city from which it considered it drew most of its support and membership, and it failed. This was a measure of the rapid decline in the fortunes of the movement in the city since 1934, though we have no way of knowing the electoral support the movement might have achieved in local elections before that year.

The decline of the movement was not to be halted. Indeed the problems the local Fascists faced were to be exacerbated by the continuing failure of the populist creed and the imposition of legal restrictions and the final banning of the movement at the outbreak of the Second World War.

CHAPTER SEVENECLIPSE

The reasons for the 1938 local elections being such 'low key' affairs were of course due to the fortunes of the B.U.F. as a whole and could not be completely ascribed to the poor campaign waged by uninteresting candidates. The movement had, as we have seen, suffered several financial and organisational reversals in the past few years.

The steady decline of the B.U.F. in the North of England between 1936 and 1940 may be registered by its increasingly divergent and seemingly paradoxical levels of ideology. On the one hand there was the steady drift towards populism (witness the 1938 local elections) and on the other hand the hardening of its ideology in terms of its appeal to a certain type of member staying with the movement, and their adherence to the depth ideology.

In the first case there were many examples of professed concern for the local population, which was supposed to be faced with corruption and inefficiency in local government. The most notable examples of this were to be found in the election campaigns of the Fascist candidates in the Manchester elections of 1938. Those campaigns, however, should be seen alongside a continuing derision of local public figures. An extreme example of this was the series of attacks on Alderman Joe O'Toole, a prominent Labour politician and Lord Mayor of the city in 1937, whose large size and weight produced derogatory and possibly

libellous comments from local Fascists. Reynall Bellamy described him thus:

The very sight of this middle aged pompous man with his many quivering chins and rolls of fat beneath his neck, was sufficient to make a Fascist beast such as myself think longingly of a regime of plain fare, early reveille, physical exercise, as a suitable corrective to self indulgent humbug.¹

Local taxi drivers who were members of the B.U.F. reported back to the local Fascist headquarters any incident involving O'Toole as a passenger in their vehicles. Those reports were suitably embellished and used in local propaganda drives² and reports in the Fascist press.³

On one occasion, when Mosley was due to make a speech in the North, Bellamy attempted to persuade Mosley to make use of material collected on local opponents in his speech, though without success.

I handed him some notes, genuine enough, that I had put together, concerning the unedifying past of a well known vociferous opponent, who was also a local councillor. What was not generally known, but we had uncovered, was that in another place this particular man had been in the hands of the police during the First World War, for absenting himself when called up for the Army. At another time this same enemy of ours had had to listen to some astringent remarks on his manner of conducting his business from the judge in a bankruptcy court. When I handed Mosley my notes, setting out these facts, he looked through them with some amusement, but

more detest. He passed the paper back remarking
 "No, I will not do it."⁴

Another indication of the strength of the populism of the movement in the North was the way Tommy Ackroyd's 'Fascist Fellowship' was promoted. A Christmas party was said to have been given for 'eleven hundred happy youngsters' in Platting, many of whom were said to have been provided with warm clothing.⁵ It is difficult to believe that so many children were present, but the fact is that the B.U.F. was emphasising this type of community action more and more, and this was far removed from the type of propaganda indulged in when the movement was first founded.

Yet another indication of the emphasis of populist rhetoric was the use of reports to the Fascist press of working conditions in businesses owned by Jews. Dinah Parkinson, a Manchester woman Fascist leader, contributed articles on local 'Jewish sweatshops' and 'chainstores' to Blackshirt, though none of the 'sweatshops' or stores were ever named.⁶ One article was based on an 'encounter' with a typist working in a Jewish office in Cheetham Hill.⁷ Another Manchester woman member, Barbara Bullivant, wrote on the 'inefficiency' of Manchester City Transport.⁸ On the other hand there were reports of good deeds performed by Manchester B.U.F. members. Even those who provided blood to the blood transfusion service were praised,⁹ while the woman Fascists in Blackburn were commended for providing a childrens coronation party in the local headquarters in 1937.¹⁰ Nellie Driver, the woman's district leader in the Nelson branch, contributed

Deutscher Fichte-Bund e.V.

(The Fichte-Association was founded in January 1914 in memory of the great German philosopher Fichte)

Union for World Veracity

Serves the cause of peace and understanding by giving free information about the New Germany, direct from the source
Go/G.



To protect human culture and civilization by disseminating facts about world Bolshevism, its authors and dangers

Headquarters March 3, 1938.

30 Jungfernstieg, Hamburg, Germany

Arthur Fawcette, Esq.
37, Rippleton Rd.
Wythenshaw
Manchester
England.

Dear Sir,

As I have learnt by our German friend Herr Mutschler that you are interested in our literature I take the liberty to supply you with some copies of our first hand reports.

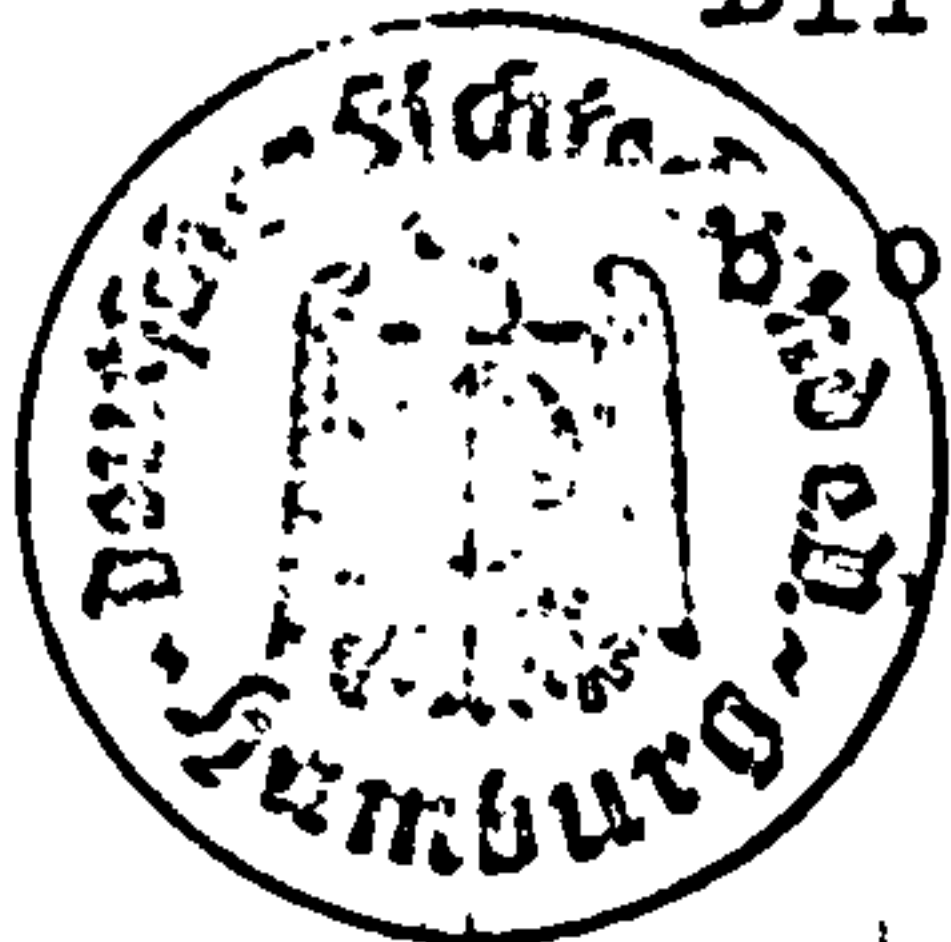
You certainly are aware of the fact that our association wants to do everything possible to promote friendship and understanding between our two respective nations. However, very much to our regret, there are too many false and instigating "news" about the new Germany in certain Jew-controlled papers abroad which never serve this cause. We therefore spread the truth about conditions over here by sending our leaflets to everybody who is interested in them. I am sure you will support us in our work by passing our leaflets on to your friends and acquaintances.

Our material is always at your disposal, free of charge, and I should be very pleased to hear from you again and to receive your further kind demands.

Thanking you in advance for your kind attention to our literature, I remain in Anglo-German Friendship,

Yours very truly,

Th. Kessemeier.
Director of Organization.



articles on Lancashire mill life. Unfortunately many of them were written in dialect, which the newspaper had to decipher before putting them into print.¹¹

One feature of the populism of the movement which provided a link with the depth ideology of Fascism, was the industrial action of local Fascists. Another was the series of cotton campaigns in the North. Both have been dealt with above.¹² One of the more direct manifestations of the depth ideology was the correspondence between a few members from the Manchester area and German propaganda organisations. An example of this was the interest shown in the Deutscher Fichte-Bund eV. which sent Nazi propaganda leaflets to Manchester, which were then distributed by some of the more zealous B.U.F. members. At least one Manchester member corresponded with the German organisation, which complained of the misrepresentation of the 'new' Germany in 'Jew-controlled' papers abroad.¹³ Indeed it is the support of Nazi Germany which highlights the depth ideology of the B.U.F. and which the populism of the movement sometimes camouflaged from the general public. There were occasions when the movement's sympathy for German Nazism was displayed in full public view; for example when the B.U.F. decided to adopt May 1st as National Socialist Day, and on which the Manchester members decided to parade through Cheetham Hill en route to celebrations in Heaton Park.¹⁴ The views expressed by some members of the B.U.F. on the role of German affairs are quite interesting.¹⁵ The apparently conflicting layers of Fascist ideology are perhaps best indicated by the following statement of one Manchester Fascist:

There was the question of the big International Jewish Financiers and there is no doubt about it you know, our policy would have hit them. It would also hit any Englishman who was doing the same type of work. But this, you know, the policy wasn't designed to hit the Jews, but they saw it as it was going to do, and I think it would do that of course. And they started the war.¹⁶

The members who remained in the movement would certainly require a belief in some aspects at least of the depth ideology of Fascism, since the changes in the organisation of the movement would have turned away all but the strong willed. In March 1937, two weeks after the L.C.C. elections which the B.U.F. fought in the East End of London, Mosley announced a drastic reduction in salaried staff at National headquarters. The numbers were reduced from 143 to 30, many of whom were clerical workers. Mosley claimed this was the result of financial problems. One immediate effect of this was the formation of the National Socialist League by William Joyce and John Beckett.¹⁷ Of interest to us here is the impact the cuts had on the movement in the North of England. It will be recalled that the Manchester headquarters had moved from premises in Northumberland Street, Higher Broughton, to Corporation Street in the city centre, from where the Northern Command Headquarters were controlled after the reorganisation of the movement into Northern and Southern zones in 1936. The Corporation Street premises had been opened for just one year when Mosley announced the cuts in staff at National Headquarters. It was claimed at the time that few of the Manchester staff would be affected, and that some of the chief executives

would return to London.¹⁸ In fact all the staff of Northern Command, with the exception of John Sant and Reynall Bellamy, were sacked. Sant was appointed National Inspector for Yorkshire, Derby, Lincolnshire and Durham, while Bellamy was appointed to a similar position for Lancashire, Chester, Westmorland and Cumberland.¹⁹ According to Bellamy "It caused widespread dismay among our members at the time, leaving me with no more than a few score active and dependable members for, say, the stewarding of a large indoor public meeting, where trouble could have been expected."²⁰

Even without the order from London to close the Northern Headquarters, the number of branches in the areas was declining. Early in 1937 the branches in Gorton and Higher Broughton were closed, and public meetings were drawing less and less support.²¹ The Jewish Vigilance Committee in Manchester reported to the Board of Deputies in July 1937 that Fascist activities had been confined to the holding of 'policy classes' amongst members.²²

Mosley continued to visit the area, though the audiences at his meetings were packed with Fascists from various parts of the North. In spite of this 'packing', Mosley could only draw a crowd of 300 when he spoke at Hulme Town Hall in April 1937,²³ and in December Mosley spoke at the Free Trade Hall which was only half full.²⁴ This latter meeting was held in support of the Manchester area prospective parliamentary candidates, who were chosen in November 1936. Originally five names had been announced, which were, as we have already noted, Parkyn (Hulme Division); Wright (Exchange); Griffith (Moss Side);

Bellamy (Blackley) and Davies (Gorton). A year after that announcement the list had been reduced to three candidates, and when Mosley spoke at the Free Trade Hall only Bellamy, Davies and Griffiths were presented to the audience.

Two months later, in February 1938, Mosley returned to Manchester to address a meeting at the Churnett St. Public Hall in Collyhurst. The hall was only two thirds full, and of the 300 people who made up the audience most were Fascists from all parts of the North West. The Jewish Chronicle reported that "In Collyhurst itself, the Fascists have signally failed to attract support. Quite a number of passers by were offered tickets free for reserved seats as an inducement to enter and swell the crowd."²⁶ The scene was typical of the B.U.F. in decline, with many other meetings poorly attended. The poor organisation of the movement in the North at this time can be gauged by the perfunctory campaigning in the 1938 local elections.

In 1938 the B.U.F. suffered yet another setback when Mosley introduced further financial cuts. The result was that in the North of England, John Sant lost his salaried post, leaving Reynall Bellamy as the sole salaried officer for the whole of the North of England and the Midlands.²⁷ Bellamy himself, of course, put a brave face on the situation:

More and more men of capability and experience were recruited into the movement, and as they proved their worth were appointed to those posts previously held by salaried Staff Officers. We now had our own unpaid County Inspectors, Speaker

Training School Instructors, and Accounts Inspectors. There was even something like the beginning of a British Union Press Corps in Manchester; I was informed that at one meeting of the Salford Borough Council the bulk of the newspaper reporters were observed to be wearing the 'flash and circle' badge of British Union, as the movement had now come to be known.²⁸

The decline continued, with members continuing to drift away. Those that remained in the movement carried on the campaign of anti-Semitism. Vandalism of Jewish property and the desecration of Jewish cemeterys were not uncommon.²⁹

However as the fear of approaching war with Germany increased, the B.U.F. found itself, in that regard, in a slightly more favourable position. Their continuing campaign to keep Britain out of the war with Germany found favour with many people who, while not supporting all that the B.U.F. stood for, nor necessarily agreeing with the catalogue of events in Germany in the recent past, nevertheless started to attend Mosley's meetings in the North and elsewhere. The B.U.F., either through a misinterpretation of the meaning of this support, or through clever propaganda, saw this as an indication of an upsurge in Fascist support. In December 1938, 800 people attended a meeting addressed by Mosley at Stretford Public Hall, though the Jewish Chronicle estimated that only 250 of those were supporters of Mosley.³⁰ Since this was an important meeting addressed by the leader it is reasonable to assume that those 250 supporters would have been drawn from all over the

North of England.

The following March, six months before the outbreak of the Second World War, Mosley again addressed a meeting in the North, this time at the Free Trade Hall, which was filled to capacity.³¹ Six months later Mosley spoke at the New Hippodrome in Manchester, listened to by an audience of 2000, three quarters of whom were estimated to be supporters.³² This upsurge in interest in the B.U.F.'s anti-war campaign has been commented on by Bellamy:

I can state truthfully that while active membership in the Manchester area dwindled to a few score following the financial scare and reorganisation of 1936 or 1937, it had risen to hundreds, many hundreds by early 1939, whilst our supporters (those willing to shout for us but not work for us) were in their tens of thousands. If it had not been for the war?³³

While there is no doubt that support for the B.U.F. was increasing at this time because of the campaign for peace in Europe, (a campaign directed, it must be noted, at a generation of people who easily remembered the horrors of the First World War, and would be most reluctant to see the country embark on the same road to destruction even if there was greater cause this time) it is most unlikely that the supporters could now be measured in their tens of thousands.

There was, however, one obstacle placed in the way of the B.U.F. at this time, and which has subsequently rendered difficult the task of

presenting a correct picture of the strength of the movement immediately prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. This was that newspaper editors were often most reluctant to give press coverage to Fascist meetings and often disregarded the contents of Mosley's speeches.

The B.U.F. itself was aware of this problem, to the point of seeing it as a grand Jewish conspiracy. Bellamy, in an unsolicited piece of correspondence, dealt with press censorship at length.

We called it the 'Campaign of Silence', which was in fact a boycott of Mosley and his movement by Press and Radio. Previously the media had used ridicule and slander, which weapons had proved ineffective; so, it was decided never to mention Mosley nor British Fascism, but in very exceptional circumstances such as a major riot for which the Blackshirts could be made to appear responsible, or some discreditable instance such as "Mosley man found guilty of smashing milk bottle in street." (This was an actual caption in a newspaper, the affair had nothing to do with the movement, except that it came out in court that the stupid lout had been a member!).

This boycott was launched in 1937, and was in fact the most effective weapon used against us. A quite typical example was Mosley's meeting in King George's Hall, Blackburn, on a sunny Sunday evening in May when he was loudly acclaimed by an audience of more than 2000, mostly unemployed cotton workers. I will quote from my own book:

"The Northern Daily Telegraph which is published in Blackburn, in its issue of 9th May 1938, the day following the impressive meeting, devoted six inches of column space to what Sir John Grey had said at the opening of the Liberal Spring Fair in Burnley, another six inches to the utterances of R.A. Cross, M.P., to a few dozen members of the Rossendale Junior Unionist Association, and forty eight lines to the verbal bashing that the Bishop of Blackburn had administered from his pulpit to Hitler and Mussolini. Mosley, whose audience would have outnumbered several times the combined listeners to the two politicians and the Bishop's congregation, was not granted one line of print. He and his two thousand acclaimers might never have existed. Such is the freedom of the press in the 1930's."³⁴

After reproducing further extracts from his unpublished autobiography, relating to questions raised in the House of Commons concerning press censorship, Bellamy continued with his own comments and thought the 'Campaign of Silence' was responsible for historians of British Fascism being 'misled' about the movements strength.

The Times, the Daily Telegraph, and the Manchester Guardian did actually report, although unobtrusively enough, the questions and observations of those two distinguished parliamentarians, (Lieut-Colonel Moore-Brabazon and Earl Winterton, both Conservative M.P.'s, who raised the question of censorship in the House of Commons) but refrained from offering any explanation or making a direct reply. The great popular newspapers on the other hand ignored the debate in the same way as they ignored the existence

of Oswald Mosley and his movement.

It must have been this press boycott that has been responsible for modern historians, Cross and Benewick in particular, who, finding no mention of Blackshirt activities in the current newspapers, jumped to the conclusions that there had been nothing to report and that the Movement was in decline. In other words they were misled and got their facts wrong; actually it was the period of the Movement's most significant and solid growth.³⁵

Bellamy is right to point to the increase in support in the months immediately prior to the outbreak of war. The lack of press coverage has probably led to an underestimation of the movement's revival at that time. Certainly from the evidence of the attendance at the Earls Court meeting in July 1939 - estimated at 30,000 by the B.U.F.; 20,000 by the press³⁶ - there was renewed interest in the B.U.F. because of its peace campaign. However there are other sources of information, other than the press, open to historians, for example the Trade Union and Labour movements and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which would have monitored any serious increase in Fascist activity. The fact is that no such evidence is available from those sources, because they, at least, were not perturbed by the increases in attendance at Fascist meetings. Bellamy's belief that "We were on the verge of very great things when the war broke out. On the very verge. I was feeling quite heavy with some success. Oh!"³⁷ is not borne out by the facts. The months immediately prior to the war witnessed an upsurge

of concern regarding the situation in Europe and the possible part that Britain might play in any future war. The B.U.F. was a temporary beneficiary of that concern, just as Chamberlain had been on his return from Munich. In the ensuing months both Chamberlain and British Fascism fell by the wayside.

The B.U.F. decided to test the strength of its support for the peace programme by going to the polls in 1940 at three by elections. The three constituencies; West Ham, North East Leeds and Middleton and Prestwich, correspond roughly to the areas of strongest support for the B.U.F. in previous years. Tommy Moran stood at the Silvertown Division of West Ham and Sydney Allen in North East Leeds. Moran received 151 votes and Allen received 722 votes.³⁸ The Fascists campaigned in both constituencies for immediate peace in Europe.

In Middleton and Prestwich the Fascist candidate was Frederick Haslam, a draughtsman aged 43 who had won the Military Medal in the First World War. He had been a member of the B.U.F. for four years. Haslam had no hope of winning the seat, which was safely held by the Conservatives. The election was a straight fight between the B.U.F. and the Conservatives after the I.L.P. decided to withdraw their nomination. The local B.U.F. organisation was considered to be fairly weak.

In this particular Lancashire constituency where there was a healthy and robust young district formation (wrote Bellamy), the movement's activities had been confined practically to one corner of the

parliamentary division. Prestwich, to all intents and purposes was a residential suburb of Manchester. In Middleton, at the further end of the constituency, which was an independant manufacturing town with a larger population than Prestwich and considerably further from Manchester, British Union had only a meagre handful of members and contacts.³⁹

Mosley spoke at two meetings in the constituency, at which he expounded the B.U.F. case for peace with Germany. At one of the meetings, in Chadderton, the crowd which had gathered to meet him stormed the platform.⁴⁰ Bellamy was one of the B.U.F. officials present:

At Chadderton stones were thrown and loudspeakers broken. Mosley, who was speaking on behalf of Haslam, his party's candidate, was struck by a stone. He leaped down from the platform to deal personally with the man he had seen throw it. A knot of hooligans immediately converged on him but got little satisfaction from the encounter.⁴¹

In entering candidates at parliamentary by elections, in spite of the electoral truce between the three main parties, the B.U.F. was no doubt seeking as much publicity as possible. More positively, however, there was the distinct possibility of picking up protest votes against the war. The I.L.P. had originally planned to contest the Middleton and Prestwich by election and the B.U.F. would have gained a substantial 'victory' if they had defeated the I.L.P. into third place. That was not to happen. The B.U.F., however, gained 418 votes against

the Conservatives 32,036. It is difficult to imagine that over 400 people in the constituency supported the B.U.F. and its candidate, especially given the weakness of the local branch. What seems much more likely is that people voted for the B.U.F. in protest against the war.⁴² Since there was no alternative candidate to vote for in such a protest, the B.U.F. benefited, though only by 1% of the vote. The B.U.F. forfeited their deposit of £150 and the party's intervention, which caused the election, resulted in an expenditure for the local authority of nearly £1,300.⁴³

The by election campaigns of 1940 were almost the last public utterances of the Fascist movement in Britain between the wars. The final stage in the eclipse of the B.U.F. came within a few days of the Middleton and Prestwich by election, when its leaders were imprisoned under the Emergency Powers Regulation 18b. Oswald Mosley was detained on 23 May 1940 and his wife on 29 June. Probably as many as 70 or 80 officials of the B.U.F. were arrested with Mosley.⁴⁴

Several B.U.F. members were arrested in Manchester. D.E. Donovan and C. Hammond, both members of the Blackley branch were arrested the day after Mosley's detention. Houses were searched in the area and the police siezed a quantity of documents.⁴⁵ A week later between 30 and 40 Manchester Fascists were arrested on the same day as police swooped on Fascist members all over the country.⁴⁶ A total of 747 B.U.F. members and sympathisers were arrested.⁴⁷ In Stockport the police detained James Battersby, the Stockport B.U.F. leader; Arthur Riley, who acted as Battersby's secretary, and Richard Jones, who had

been named as prospective parliamentary election candidate in the town.⁴⁸

A few Fascists managed to escape arrest. Mrs A.B., the woman's district leader of the Moss Side branch, was visited by the police when they were tipped off by a neighbour who saw that Mrs A.B. still kept a portrait of Mosley on the top of her piano. Mrs A.B. lied to the police and said she was not a member of the B.U.F.. It is not known whether this was sufficient to prevent her arrest. At any rate she was not taken into custody.

Another North West Fascist who escaped arrest was J.P. Sutherst, who was in charge of the Middleton branch. Although he was not detained, he claimed he was victimised for being a Fascist. Before the start of the war Sutherst had joined the Senior Division of the Officer Training Club at Manchester University, although he was not a student. He also joined the Officer Cadet Reserve, through which he was called up in the first weeks of the war. At the end of 1940 Sutherst was posted to a T.A. Battalion based in Salford which, according to Sutherst, "had at least half a dozen Jewish officers." He believed he was recognised and "whittled out of the Army on an adverse report."⁵⁰

I knew my rights of course, and that I was allowed to appeal higher against this, which I did. I went to see the Brigadier, who was a Jew. I took it as far then as the Divisional Commander, who was a Jew, and I went to see a member of the Army Council, that was the next move. So, of course, all the cards were

stacked against me...Bear in mind I had never mentioned my political beliefs or principles all the time I was in the Army. So the result was I was asked to resign my commission on the grounds of this...It doesn't surprise me all that much because I have heard from other people how they were dealt with during the war. You know how officialdom looked upon them. Even if they were not taken in by 18b there was still a lot of doubt about people.⁵¹

During the war Sutherst helped to organise the 18b Detainees Aid Fund, which collected money, books and clothing to send to their friends who were detained. One person helped by the fund was a friend of Sutherst's, Bob Charnley, who originated from Southport but was living in Hull, where he was in charge of the local B.U.F. branch at the time of his detention. Charnley and six other Hull members were arrested ten days after Mosley and they spent ten weeks in Walton Jail, Liverpool, before being moved to Ascot, then Huyton and finally on to the prison camp in the Isle of Man. While in custody on the Isle of Man Charnley plotted an escape from the camp with a few I.R.A. detainees. They dug a tunnel to the perimeter fence and made their way to a beach where a motorboat was supposed to meet them. The boat had no engine however, and the men had to row with planks of wood. They were within a few miles of the Irish coast when they were spotted by a Sunderland flying boat and eventually arrested. The ringleaders of the escape attempt, including Charnley, were later sent to the mainland, where they spent the rest of the war detained in Walton Jail in Liverpool.⁵²

Not everyone experienced such high drama however, and the typical situation in the branches after the banning of the movement is summed up by Nellie Driver, who recounts the attitude of the authorities to local Fascism in Nelson, Lancashire.

The burden we had to bear in the branches became intolerable. No news, no instructions, no visiting officials came from National headquarters, because that place had been closed down and every member of the Staff were in Holloway or Brixton. As fast as they were replaced the arrests took place once more, so organisation was impossible. Our members left us, and those who dare not verbally resign pushed notes of resignation through our letter box.

Officials were arrested in Blackburn, Accrington and Bolton. I felt the wind blow like an icy blast when the Burnley officials were detained. Twice our headquarters' windows were smashed. The first time it was put in a few minutes after we had left the premises. The second time at two in the morning, and the police came to wake us up, and we had to accompany them to the building to see if anything was missing.

The week before British Union was banned a member had paid his monthly shilling subscription, but as I had already made up the balance sheet, I dated his card a month ahead - and forgot in the stress of the weeks ahead. The taking of such subscriptions became illegal just after, and the member went into a Colne club one evening and drank more than was good for him. An argument followed and a bit of a scrap, and the police were called. They took him home and searched his

pockets, unfortunately finding his B.U. membership card. Of course they spotted the date on the stamp and came to search our house right away. Four detectives rolled up in a car, and they turned our house upside down. They removed all my books, leaflets, badges, banners and even a bound copy of the New Popular Educator. They also took a copy of Bruce Graeme's Blackshirt Again. I felt amused to think that these so-called clever detectives had never heard of this romantic, fictitious crook, who had not the remotest connection with any Fascist Movement.

A few of our members also received a similar visitation. They tipped out the contents of our District Leader's dustbin in his backyard, and confiscated a copy of Mein Kampf from our milkman's house. Then they visited a perfectly innocent man who lived in the same town, because he had leaded his front windows in the pattern of a flash and circle. Evidently he had at one time received one of our leaflets through his letter box and taken to the emblem!

Shortly after I was summoned to appear in the Colne police court to answer to the charge of receiving a shilling subscription after the receipt of such a subscription was declared illegal. I defended my own case, and was bound over for twelve months. But the case had brought my existence to the notice of the Home Office.

For the next three months I lay low. Police cars trailed round after both mother and I if we ventured forth. Men watched the house and listened under our

windows to the radio to discover which were our favourite stations. The man next door told us that the police had tried to persuade him to allow them to take a few bricks out of his wall so they could listen in on our conversation. Although he once had been in the hands of the police on a serious charge, he refused to permit it.

I stared at the ruins of my hopes, and grimly faced the future. One morning in late October, 1940, just as dawn was breaking, two detectives came in a car and told me I was in detention by order of the Home Office. I was given ten minutes in which to prepare for what was to be a two year exile.⁵³

This, then, was the end of the British Fascist movement which has been the focus of attention in this thesis. The rumblings continued throughout the war over Mosley's detention and release and many of the detainees returned home to a difficult life in their local communities. When the war ended in 1945, attempts were made to restart the B.U.F. But there never could be a return to the pre war movement. Events during the war and the revelation of what Nazism meant to the Jews and others, ensured that public opinion would not tolerate the resumption of activities in this country by the B.U.F. Mosley's post war party, the Union Movement, remained a peculiar anachronism in the Britain of the 1950's and 1960's. It was left to others, particularly the National Front, to carry the flag of Fascism, albeit under another guise, in this country, untainted by a pre war history.

Part Two of this thesis has been concerned with an almost chronological analysis of the B.U.F. in one locality. The individuals who created the movement in the North of England have only emerged at times in this study when attention has been paid to their contribution to Fascism. We need now to consider the members of the B.U.F. in more detail. Part Three of this thesis considers how Fascists were seen by themselves and others, before exploring the general characteristics of the members of the B.U.F. in the North of England.

PART THREE

THE FASCISTS

CHAPTER EIGHTIDEAS AND OPINIONS*

An interesting feature of the historiography of British Fascism is the complete lack of interest shown by historians in the ordinary membership of the B.U.F. Perhaps the main reason for this is the tendency, for reasons of an ideological nature, for research on the rank and file membership of political movements to be undertaken by historians with, at the very least, a sympathetic understanding of the lives of ordinary people. At the same time such historians are usually preoccupied with analysing various features of the Labour movement or working class communities. The field is thus left open to historians whose desire to produce 'objective' accounts of Fascism has led to history written 'from the top down'. Hence the available analysis of the membership of the B.U.F. for example, centres on the national leadership and the various interpretations of the ideology of the movement contain no references to what the ordinary membership was thinking and doing.

The reluctance to resort to an empirical investigation of such matters as membership has led to a dependence on contemporary views expressed

* Extracts from Part Three of this thesis have appeared in; Stuart Rawnsley. 'The membership of the British Union of Fascists', British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain. Lunn and Thurlow, eds. Croom Helm, London 1980. pp 150-165.

by the leadership of the B.U.F. itself and also by intelligent observers desiring to explain the phenomenon of Fascism in Britain. However, in spite of, or indeed because of, contemporary opinion having an immediacy which may appeal to the historian, such a variety of views are available that the exercise is rendered useless. The leadership of the B.U.F. itself did not express an homologous view as to the type of people the movement attracted. At times the B.U.F. claimed to be 'classless' - and the uniform was said to emphasise this point. More frequently an appeal was made to what the leadership termed 'decent Englishmen'. W.E.D. Allen, chief propagandist of the B.U.F. was a little more explicit:

Fascism appeals alike to those elements among the younger minded middle class who are conservative by temperament and strongly nationalist in spirit, and to those rarer and more dynamic individuals who, naturally revolutionary in their outlook, have been disappointed and exasperated by the failure of all leadership from the left to approach any fulfilment of their aspiration.¹

This view is at variance with that expressed by the leader himself. Referring back to the 1924 election campaign in Birmingham, Mosley had this to say:

Our own organisation (Labour) had a paying membership of 200, but when we started the canvass only 3 elderly women and two young men would accompany us. They were fine people, typical of the English workers, and closely resembled the other

pioneers later attached to our Movement before and after the Second World War. They were all manual workers...²

Referring to the political uniform, Mosley said "A shirt is the easiest and cheapest garment for the purpose of recognition, and the shirts had to be paid for by the men themselves, most of whom were on the dole."³

J. A. McNab, at one time editor of Fascist Quarterly wrote that:

Although Fascism draws its support from patriots of every class, it can succeed only as a national mass movement, and on that account the bulk of our membership is and always has been drawn from that section which has been constantly betrayed by every party - the British Working Class.⁴

If the B.U.F. itself could not present a common view of those who supported Fascism, neither could its opponents. Harold Laski, writing in 1935, thought that the majority of the members of the B.U.F. were working class.⁵ Not so for George Lansbury, who wrote "...Sir Oswald Mosley is recruiting a number of men, mainly of the middle class, drilling men, and preparing them for the time when he considers he can use them."⁶

The chief propogandists of the Communist Party interpretation of Fascism were R. Palme Dutt and John Strachey, who in turn were influenced by the ideas originating at the executive meeting of the

Communist International in Moscow in 1923, where Clara Zetkin delivered a paper on Fascism,⁷ and at the Third Congress of the Italian Communist Party in 1926. Dutt and Strachey drew heavily from these sources. Briefly, Fascism was seen as a product of the capitalist economic system, and the 'reformist Social Democrats' played their part in the arrival of Fascism by hoodwinking the proletariat and depriving it of its revolutionary energies. Slotted into this theory was the idea that, in the vanguard of the formation of the Fascist state would be such powerful groups as 'big business' and 'the industrial bourgeoisie', followed, in their wake, by the 'petty bourgeoisie'. Writing in 1934, Dutt attempted to show that there was a strong basis for the development of Fascism in this country.

In the first place, there is a very large proportion of intermediate strata of the population, of petty-bourgeois elements with very narrow and easily controlled political interests, and of a parasitic proletariat closely allied to their masters and virtually unorganisable to the working class movement. This proportion is larger in Britain than in other countries. The 1921 census showed ten million of the population engaged in direct productive industries and transport, and seven million in 'services' of varying degrees of productive value, often of no productive value, but parasitic in character and tied up with the process of exploitation. Of these seven million over four millions are classified under Commerce, Finance, and Personal Service. This classification, however, is to some extent misleading without further analysis. More important is the proportion of salaried workers to wage workers. In 1924, according to Bowley and Stamp

(The National Income 1924, published in 1927), the number of salaried workers was 2.8 millions against 15.4 millions wage earners, or 15 per cent of the employed population.

Further, of the wage workers, some two thirds are unorganised; and these two thirds are not an outside margin on all industries, but mainly represent the workers outside the big productive industries.

At the same time, the Labour Party and trade union leadership, by their denial of the class struggle and preaching of the 'community above classes', by their alliance with the employees (Mondism) and capitalism, and by their ban on the United Front, disorganise the independent class action of the workers and pave the way for fascism.

An indication of the potential fascist force is provided by the monster circulations, approaching ten millions, of journals of the type of the Daily Mail circulating mainly among petty-bourgeois elements, and in its whole character since its inception a real forerunner of fascism more than twenty years before the name existed (since 1934 openly fascist).

If we turn to the policy and tactics of the bourgeoisie in Britain, it is obvious that these not only do not exclude Fascism, but are on the contrary most closely prepared and adapted for Fascism by all the developments of the imperialist period. On the one hand the State machine - with the famous 'unwritten Constitution' which can be turned in any

direction desired at a moment's notice to suit the emergency needs of the bourgeois dictatorship - is far more exactly fitted than in any democratic republic for all the purposes of intensified dictatorship and Fascism. On the other hand, the British bourgeoisie is trained for generations on the basis of its rule of India, Ireland and the colonial empire to methods of violence and despotic domination, at the same time as on the basis of parliamentary and electioneering humbug in Britain to the technique of mass deception - the two together constituting the perfect combination for Fascism.⁸

It was the capturing of the petty-bourgeois elements for Fascism which Dutt later referred to when he commented, in 1935, on the activities of the B.U.F. in Lancashire, by which time the North of England had proved to be the most important area of Fascist expansion:

Mosley-Fascism has so far met with scant success in its efforts to win a working class following in any part of the country. Mosleyism has been from the outset a movement based essentially on the West End and the suburban residential areas of the South.⁹

He did however see the future success of Fascism depending on working class support.

This theme was pursued with varying degrees of clarity by other writers. John Strachey adopted a similar analysis in a style which the general public found more readable,¹⁰ while W.A. Rudlin, in noticing that

recruitment to the B.U.F. would partly be from those people who were indifferent to the old parties, added that,

Here among the readers of the Mail, the Mirror, the Sketch, and the Express are thousands of potential recruits for fascism. Denied employment and the price of distraction, they will be, in their ignorance and irritation, easy prey for fascist propoganda with its skilful manipulation of emotions and its promise of better times... It will make its appeal not only to those of the working class who feel themselves both economically disinherited and politically uncared for; in a further period of decline there will also be many black-coated workers with a similar outlook. Already amongst the organised workers of this class, the civil servants, Post Office workers and teachers, dismay at the effects of the crisis goes hand in hand with disillusionment with the Labour Party... with the clerks and the shop assistants will go the small traders and shop keepers and craftsmen, and for similar reasons. Tied, in the industrial areas, to the fortunes of the working class, they have been ruined in large numbers by the depression. And whenever, outside the industrial areas, retail trading shows a profit they are attacked by the large concerns with their cheap mass produced goods...

Within that loose collection of intermediate social strata called the middle class there is a third group capable, in favourable circumstances, of producing good fascist material. The real middle class, the professional men, the managers and the technicians have, like the clerks and the small men, come to know

the meaning of economic insecurity.¹¹

One of the few attempts to provide a portrait of a Fascist stereotype came from a journalist, Frederick Mullally, writing with hindsight in 1946:

Peter Fletcher, seventeen years old son of a Roman Catholic civil servant, old boy of Clapham Academy, new employee of the Britannia Electric Works...There are millions of Peter Fletchers - ordinary 'decent' middle class people who had long represented the element of stability in society...(who) were to lend their energies, or passive goodwill, to the realisation of this evil project.¹²

Fletcher, it seems, had always been attracted by uniforms and the appeal of a 'gang' and was easily influenced by parents and friends:

...(his) father railed against the Jews and he had heard enough from his lower middle class friends to identify the 'Reds' with the common object of his parents' scorn.¹³

How typical of the membership of the B.U.F. was Peter Fletcher? How close to the mark were any of the accounts, Fascist, Communist or otherwise, of the typical Fascist in Britain? In this brief discussion of some of the contemporary accounts, emphasis has been placed on the differences between the views expressed. There were, however, two elements in common to all these accounts. The first was a belief that

the B.U.F. attracted one particular type of personality or a particular class of people,¹⁴ though the Communists saw the possibility of other classes of people being attracted at each successive stage in the development of Fascism. There was little agreement as to which particular class or personality was attracted to the movement but almost all the accounts emphasised the homogeneity of Fascist membership. Hence any contradictions observed within Fascism as an ideology were seen as a product of the contradictions within a particular class or personality.

The second element in common to all the contemporary accounts was the complete lack of empirical investigation. In the days before the development of mass surveys and sociological investigations of political movements, it is not too surprising that blanket descriptions were not supported by hard evidence.¹⁵ What is surprising is that historians of British Fascism have not shown themselves particularly eager to fill the empirical vacuum which exists in our knowledge of the B.U.F. Thus we are faced with vague generalisations and inspired guesswork.

In devoting the whole of two pages to the history of Fascism in this country, C.L. Mowat, in Britain Between the Wars declared that "The members of the B.U.F. came mainly from among young men of the middle class, and from the black coated workers - two groups whom the depression denied employment or importance."¹⁶ According to Colin Cross, the author of the first serious attempt to deal with the history of the B.U.F.,

The typical long-service Blackshirt was a man of the lower middle class, not particularly clever, but capable of sacrifice and loyalty. Fascism had an appeal because it attacked both the capitalism he resented and the socialism he feared. Without sacrificing his social rank, which was a grade above the manual worker, he could take part in a revolutionary movement...The Movement was unsuccessful with intellectualls, few of them remaining members for very long...The intellectuals who did stay within the Movement over a long period were not particularly bright and suffered catastrophically from a lack of a sense of humour.¹⁷

Robert Benewick, another historian of the movement, prefers not to speculate as to the composition of its ordinary membership, and dwells instead on the leadership. He refers his readers to the Advisory Committee on Persons Detained Under Defence Regulation 18b to the Home Secretary in 1940,¹⁸ which he describes as 'the most reliable report'. We are expected to glean from this report all that Benewick can offer relating to the membership of the B.U.F.,¹⁹ though he does qualify his reference to the report by noting that the people interviewed did not necessarily reflect the membership at large. All that Benewick will commit himself to is that "...given the small numbers recruited and the rapid turnover, it seems in order to assume (short of more substantial data) a high degree of social and economic marginality distinct from the middle class bias of the leadership."²⁰

The biographer of Sir Oswald Mosley is a little more forthcoming.

Robert Skidelsky's controversial portrait of Mosley does attempt to

reach some firm conclusions about the membership of the B.U.F.

Who joined? There were University graduates and ex-public schoolboys; unemployed pugilists and unemployable professional men with useless classical educations. The 'serious' ranged all the way from ex-communists to crackpot and obsessional anti-Semites. With the exception of the young of all classes, the early B.U.F. was heavily middle class. It picked up support in London and the southern coastal towns. Its headquarters in Chelsea seemed to symbolise its place in the political spectrum: The Morning Post dubbed the blackshirts 'Boiled Shirts'. This is perhaps not what Mosley wanted. But it is what he got.²¹

W.F. Mandle has produced an analysis of the leadership of the movement based on information contained in the B.U.F. press.²² The results, however, are inadequate and contain many omissions. A similarly inadequate contribution is that of John D. Brewer, who, in 1974, read a research paper to the Bergen Conference on Comparative European Nazism and Fascism, held at the University of Bergen Institute of Sociology.²³ Brewer had interviewed eight ex-B.U.F. members and the information collected from the interviews was used to test the generalisation, as Brewer saw it, that the members of the B.U.F. were middle class. Brewer also attempted to deal with the reasons put forward for joining the B.U.F. He emphasised the perception of a 'crisis' on the part of prospective members and stressed the importance of the phenomenological school of sociology, dealing with the individual and his meaning. In a paper more noted for its

air of self confidence than anything else - "The gauntlet has been thrown down, serious students of British fascism must take it up!"²⁴ - Brewer had to acknowledge that "the only firm conclusion is that of the complete and total lack of objective and substantial data on British Fascism." However our hopes were raised of a more important contribution being made once Brewer's research was complete. The results were again disappointing.²⁵ We still knew next to nothing about the membership of the largest Fascist movement Britain has so far experienced.

CHAPTER NINESPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES

It is not possible, in this brief analysis, to provide a comprehensive picture of the B.U.F. membership in all parts of the country. Such a task is rendered difficult not merely by lack of space but also by subject matter. The evidence is fragmentary even within the limits of the following study of parts of the North of England. B.U.F. branch membership lists are not available to the historian for inspection and, for obvious reasons, ex-members are not particularly eager to respond to requests for interviews. No attempt has been made to provide a quantitative analysis and the results are essentially impressionistic. Nevertheless some valuable insights may be obtained which have previously been lacking.

A distinct pattern emerged in the recruitment of people to the B.U.F. in the North. In the first place one can detect a large section of the early membership which could only be termed 'Fascist' in the sense that they were members of a Fascist movement. This group joined the B.U.F. for a variety of reasons; their friends were members, or they were attracted by sporting or social facilities, or they were lured by the chance to wear a uniform. There is no doubt that their understanding of the ideology was minimal and that they did little to improve their theoretical understanding once they were members. One must remember, of course, that this itself is a part of the populism of Fascism, and that Fascism, by its very nature, attracts all sorts

of people. There were others, however, who did join the B.U.F. for ideological reasons, and those people already held anti-Semitic beliefs or they strongly supported the idea of the Corporate State.

Throughout the history of the B.U.F. the local and regional leadership of the movement was drawn from both types of member. At the beginning, certainly in the North of England, the leadership was drawn from the first type of member, the ideologically uncommitted. Towards the end, in the late 1930's, the second type of member dominated the leadership. This change was partly related to class background and can be usefully compared to a study of the Italian Fascist Party by Lasswell and Sereno.¹ One has to make the important distinction that their study was of a Fascist party which had achieved power and hence leadership was much more important. Nevertheless the study can be usefully compared to that of the leadership of the B.U.F. in the North of England. Lasswell and Sereno discerned two types of Fascist who, mainly through the agencies with which they were associated - the cabinet, prefects, or the Senate, Chamber etc. - were 'rising' or 'declining'. The rising Fascists, those who were successful in their political career, came predominantly from a lesser bourgeois background, though leaders of proletarian origin were sporadically found. The declining Fascists were those who generally came from proletarian backgrounds. Lasswell and Sereno found some evidence of a slight recovery of the aristocracy under Fascism. The study pointed to some less readily defined skills which were the basis of successful careers in the Fascist state. Chief among these was the skill of the 'fixer' - a negotiator who enhanced his private income by exercising governmental or party influence. This

applied particularly to politicians of the second and third rank. In the case of the B.U.F. the 'rising' Fascists were those who took over the local and regional leadership after the upheavals of 1935 and 1936. They had the administrative skills and knowledge required of such people. The 'declining' Fascists were those who, generally speaking, were placed in positions of authority because no one else was available in the early days of the movement. They were replaced by the 'rising' Fascists. If the early Fascists were to hold on to their position then a basic requirement was that of intrigue, fostered by Mosley's belief in the survival of the fittest. We will see that many attempted to become participants in the game of intrigue - comparable to the role of the 'fixer' in Lasswell and Sereno's analysis - but very few succeeded. One who did succeed was Tommy Ackroyd, who will be looked at later.

The early membership of the B.U.F. in the North of England was generally unstable and produced a high turnover of numbers. This undoubtedly presented problems for the leadership in later years. Reynall Bellamy, a full time official in the North from 1936 to 1940 was one of those left to pick up the pieces.

There were places in Lancashire which, despite the appalling economic conditions as an incentive, British Union made no impact in 1937 or 1938. Enquiries showed that these were towns where, in 1933 and 1934, particularly during Lord Rothermere's boost, the B.U.F. had taken hold like wildfire and had drawn to itself almost every unstable person and adventurer of either sex that the town possessed. Genuine people who had been attracted by the programme

and policy, felt that they could not afford to be associated with the types that congregated at District Headquarters, and either refrained from enrolling or, having joined, soon faded out. In those spots nothing remained but a bad odour, still lingering there three or four years later.²

Nellie Driver, the Womens' District Leader in Nelson, details this problem in her own branch in 1935:

Some of our sympathisers were well known Tory businessmen and Nelson would have been astonished if they had known who they were. Our members were a mixed crowd, and when I looked at some of them I almost regretted my enterprise. They had brought home to me the old saying, "There's nowt as funny as fowk." For every good, normal member, we got several who were cranks - and worse.³

Driver refers to several problem members, including drunks, and an elderly couple who were 'violently Orange' and adds:

We had several other cranks and faddists with waste paper basket ideas. We seemed to attract them somehow, and two meetings ended in such chaos that London officials came up to straighten out the mess.

How could we possibly get on with the Cause when Mormon clashed with Pacifist, Catholic with ex-Communist, Methodist with C of E, and anti-vivisectionist with Christadelphian? It was almost like a comic opera. One side would demand more street meetings, and still

another side would like to include rules of their own, till my head hummed and I tried in vain to restore order. The District Leader also was at his wit's end. We could not get our members to salute us publicly or privately, and they were frightened to death of selling papers at Nelson Centre, or of taking part in most of the activities that National Headquarters insisted on.⁴

are
There are other accounts which add to this picture of a transient uncommitted membership during these years. Tom Pickles, a member of the Manchester branch in 1933, was in and out of the movement within three months. He was working class, a shop steward in his factory and branch secretary of his union, and also took part, with many other ramblers, in the 'Mass Trespass' on Kinder Scout in 1932. He joined the B.U.F. because of the influence of some of his friends and the lure of the sporting facilities in the B.U.F. gym.⁵

Another member, who stayed in the movement rather longer, was Mrs Agnes Barlow. She joined the Moss Side branch in Manchester in 1934 because she lived next door to the local headquarters and took a fancy to one of the Fascists in his smart uniform. The two became engaged and her fiancé was appointed Section Leader of the Branch while she led the Womens Section. When they married, Mrs Barlow ceased to be actively involved in the movement, though she remained a member until 1940. She described her branch as having a cosmopolitan membership, several of whom were roughs.⁶

Another Manchester member, Authur Fawcett, joined the New Party in

February 1931 and stayed in the movement until his marriage in 1937. He was appointed Unit Leader shortly after the formation of the B.U.F. Fawcett was born into a working class family in Salford. His father worked in the local engineering industry and voted Labour. When Fawcett left school he got a job as a warehouse lad. Not all the members of his B.U.F. branch were of a similar background however:

They were different sorts of chaps. There was a fellow called Quinn who was a chauffer who was in the B.U.F. and his son was in it. And then there was Joe Cooper who had been at public school. His father was a manager at Woolworths. And there was Joe Sheen, a Welsh boy, who came from the Rhondda Valley in the Depression years, to work and live in lodgings in Stretford. They are the sort of lads... They were decent types you know. And we had ragamuffins, you know, who were attracted to the organisation, who were a bit on the rough side.⁷

John Charnley had joined in 1933 and was a member of the Southport branch of the B.U.F. from 1933 to 1935. By 1940 he had become Senior Propagandist for North East England, District Inspector for East Yorkshire and District Leader of Hull, where he remained in the B.U.F. until his imprisonment under Defence Regulation 18b in 1940. He joined because he had seen the impact of the Depression on people through his charity work with the Catholic Church. He says he recalled Mosley's resignation speech of 1931 and knew that the B.U.F. was the party for him. In Southport, Charnley remembers, about ten percent of the 140 members in 1934 were unemployed, although he was not one of them, having come from a lower middle class background. When Charnley moved

to Hull in 1935, where he was quickly promoted to District Leader, he counted the unemployed working class as high as forty per cent of the total of 283 members in 1936. He described the local membership as "Thirty per cent disenchanted; fifty to fifty five per cent politically motivated; ten to fifteen per cent who approved of O.M. philosophically."⁸

The account of the changes in local leadership in the North of England in Chapter five and six reinforces this view of a generally heterogeneous and somewhat transient membership of the B.U.F. in its early years. In most areas, branch leadership was very much a matter of who was available at the time. If there was a rapid rise in membership, the Northern Headquarters would appoint anyone who made their presence felt, or, if there was only one member in a particular area then that person would more than likely be named District Leader as a matter of course. In Halifax, where there was eventually a total membership of ten, the leader was appointed for this reason. The Women's District leader in Nelson, Nellie Driver, was appointed because she started the local branch. Although she was not allowed to become District Leader, since that was a male preserve, she was a very determined woman, and the man appointed to that position "was clay in the hands of the Woman's District Leader."⁹ Both were weavers in the local textile mills and Driver soon built up a branch with about 100 members.

The leadership in Halifax and Nelson was in fact exceptionally stable. The same could be said for Blackburn, where the leadership was described by Bellamy:

Bill Sumner, the District Leader...was a tough, broken nosed ex-trooper who was trying to raise a numerous family on the meagre allowance of the Public Assistance Board. His Woman District leader at that time was the daughter of a well known Lancashire mill owning family. She was a young girl straight from the schoolroom and had joined British Union under the compulsion of a strong social conscience. The District Treasurer was a fresh faced upstanding young trade unionist, a carpenter of the name of Jack Birtwhistle.¹⁰

However, as in many other areas, the leadership in the North went through several changes. These were the result of internal disputes and intrigues fostered by the system of competitiveness favoured by Mosley. Manchester, as we have seen, provided good examples in this respect.

Some branches attracted a more homogeneous membership than those of Manchester or Hull. In Harrogate, for example, the local Fascists were said to adopt different tactics to those applied in industrial towns. The local Labour Party reported that the Fascists "appear to confine their attention to younger members of the Tory party, particularly those interested in sports - rugby and golf players (the boisterous kind of 'young bloods')." ¹¹ The Harrogate Trades Council confirmed this picture and reported that "their membership is being recruited very largely from the young people of the 'well to do' class, of which there are a considerable number in Harrogate."¹² In Halifax there was a similar pattern of recruitment. The leader was the son of a well to do wholesale food merchant and the ten members of the branch included an assistant bank manager and a son of the owner of a big textile firm.¹³

Apart from the problem of fluctuating numbers, the salient feature of the membership of the B.U.F. in the North, i.e. its heterogeneity both within branches and between districts, changed very little since its formation in 1932 until 1935. The introduction of a new administrative system for the North in January 1936 proved to be more significant than a mere change of personnel. It marked the arrival of a new type of recruit to the movement.

By 1935 the membership of the B.U.F. had been drastically reduced from the high level achieved in the spring of 1934.¹⁴ The more violence and anti-Semitism were seen as central features of the movement, the more people drifted away. It was, of course, due to the heterogeneous and transitory nature of the early membership that people left in such large numbers. This was certainly the case in the North where a new leadership was imposed from outside when Mosley introduced reforms which included the division of the movement into Northern and Southern administrative areas.

The new members were the 'genuine people' referred to by Bellamy.¹⁵ The new recruits who joined after 1935 were, generally, much more ideologically committed to the movement than their earlier counterparts. They tended to remain in the movement longer, many of them being detained under Defence Regulation 18b during the war.

The new recruits were led by a very different group of Fascists than had previously controlled the Northern area. The new full time officers, Hone; Sant; Bellamy and Shore, were appointed from outside the area.

Only Ackroyd, the new Senior Political Organiser, was promoted from within the Manchester branch.

The dedication and professionalism of the new leadership was reflected in the new type of member recruited to the movement following the fall in membership in 1934 and 1935. The members who had not drifted away in that period displayed similar characteristics. They generally worked hard for the movement and were steeped in Fascist ideology.

One such member was G.P. Sutherst, who joined the movement in 1936 at the age of 19 in response to the movement's 'Stand by the King' campaign. Sutherst had been to grammar school before starting work as an office boy in a cotton mill in Middleton. He joined the Middleton branch of the B.U.F. and was soon asked to become branch leader. Sutherst became involved in the movement's campaign to recruit cotton workers and managed to push the membership of his branch from a couple of dozen in 1936 to over 200 in 1939. How many of these were just 'sympathisers' is difficult to say. Sutherst was rewarded with the silver award for service to the movement. Although he managed to avoid being detained during the war he was active in the 18b Detainees Aid Fund and was instrumental in starting the post war Union Movement branch in Manchester.¹⁶ It was Sutherst, it will be recalled, who considered that it was the Jews who caused the Second World War.¹⁷

Another dedicated member of the B.U.F. was William Eaton, who joined the Lancaster branch in 1932 and remained active in the movement until his detention in 1940. He came from a respectable middle class family

and spent three years in the sixth form at Lancaster Grammar School, with the intention of reading for a history scholarship at Oxford. However, he considered the unemployment situation to be so critical that he did not sit the examination and instead found a job with a firm of book publishers in Glasgow and then with a safe-making firm in London. While in London, Eaton attended a lecture given by William Joyce, was suitably impressed, joined the B.U.F. and was attached to the Headquarters in London for a while before moving back North. Eaton received the gold badge of distinction for services to the movement, one of only four ever issued. By the time war broke out Eaton had been appointed District Inspector for an area covering Carlisle, Lancaster, Cumberland, Westmorland and North Fylde. He was on the national list of speakers, specialising in agricultural subjects, and was the movement's parliamentary candidate for Burnley.¹⁸

Yet another such member was Bob Row, born into a lower working class family, who joined the Preston branch in 1934 in response to the Daily Mail campaign in support of the movement. Row remained an active Fascist until his detention during the war and is now a member of the Directorate of the Union Movement.

There are several reasons why the people who joined the B.U.F. after 1936 or who had joined earlier, yet had remained in the movement throughout its periods of crisis, would require different qualities ~~than~~ those who left in the mass exodus of 1934 and 1935. One explanation of the early rapid rise in membership was the movement's uniform. The attraction of the blackshirt and, later, the various

embellishments of badges, breeches, cap and belt, worn according to rank, were no longer available after the passing of the Public Order Act on January 1st 1937. For many of the earlier recruits the uniform had been a significant factor in their becoming Fascists.

Thomas Pickles, who was in the movement for three months, was not allowed to have a uniform by his mother, but he earnestly desired one, because all his friends in the movement had one. "Like the lads today wear all this 'ear silly gear and I suppose I was the same."²⁰ Bob Row, speaking of the members in Lancaster, was able to elaborate on this point:

There was no doubt the uniform had that big advantage and it had that big disadvantage, They weren't politically minded types, it was just a good, healthy, vigorous male. In some cases females. Some of the girls were quite pretty, that was another drawing point. It was just a movement. And that, I am afraid, is one of the great disadvantages of the Blackshirt movement. Looking back I can see that many joined purely for the uniform, though it was a very good atmosphere while it lasted you know.²¹

For the members who remained in the B.U.F. after the passing of the Public Order Act, the uniform was obviously not as important as other aspects of the movement. Nellie Driver was initially attracted into the movement, among other things, by the uniform. "...It (the movement) had plenty of romance in the form of the drum corps, salutes, standards, emblems, uniforms and impressive demonstrations, which made a strong appeal to me."²² However she later came to see the uniform as a mistake:

Partly, yes, they should have never gone in for that silly uniform that they ended up in. One of our members that was my friend's husband, got on a bus and the people were giving him money. They thought he was the bus conductor. It was an immense uniform.²³

It is perhaps significant that one of the interviewees, John Sutherst, who remained in the movement until the war and who may be classified as one of the more serious and determined members who responded to and helped create the depth ideology of the movement, joined the B.U.F. just as the uniform was being banned. "I think I went to one meeting in uniform and then it was banned in fact."²⁴ The uniform was obviously of no great importance to him since he knew, before he joined the movement, that the blackshirt was likely to be banned in the near future.

The ban on political uniforms helped, in a sense, to distinguish between the serious Fascist like Sutherst and the less serious, of whom Tom Pickles and Mrs Agnes Barlow could be said to be typical.²⁵ The former would not be deterred from their commitment to the movement, while the latter had lost one of the main attractions of Fascism.

The serious Fascist, for whom the depth ideology was so important, had to disregard several other factors which would have turned the less serious Fascist away from the movement. For example, British Fascism was, by the mid 1930's, synonymous in the public mind with violence and anti-Semitism. The B.U.F. meeting at Olympia in June 1934 brought howls of protest from many sections of the community against the

treatment of interrupters by Fascist stewards.²⁶ The 'Battle of Cable Street' in October 1936 brought similar denunciations of the movement. The news media focused its attention on these two events which subsequently became part of the patchwork of the popular history of the period. Anyone who remained in the movement, or, more significantly, actually joined the movement for the first time after Cable Street, would have had to be much more hardened and serious in his reasoning than would have been the case for the Fascist recruit in 1932 or 1933.

This was particularly the case after 1936 because, firstly, of the rise of Fascism in Europe and the linking in the public mind of events in Germany and Italy with Fascism in this country, and, secondly, because the tide of public opinion was flowing very much against Fascism. The outbreak of war in Spain in 1936 led, as we have seen, to a massive support in this country for the Republican cause. This was not just measured by the number of people who joined the International Brigade, but, more significantly, by the vast numbers of people who contributed to the humanitarian aid for beleaguered Spain.²⁷ The 'cause' of Spain became embodied in the public mind as a measure of the strength of democracy. It was an anti-Fascist cause which brought in its wake a more intense campaign against the B.U.F.

Although Olympia and Cable Street have achieved a perhaps deserved significance in the history of the B.U.F. there were many other occasions on which the violence and anti-Semitism had become apparent to local communities. It is in fact on the level of local affairs and personal relationships that a new recruit to the movement would encounter

most difficulty. If, for example, as was the case in Manchester, the local Jewish community was under siege from a systematic campaign of anti-Semitism, sometimes of a violent nature, then any local person who joined the B.U.F. would be singled out by opposition groups. He or she would be known by neighbours and friends as a Fascist, and would be seen to embody all the features of the Fascist movement, including violence and anti-Semitism, whether this was warranted or not. It would take a particularly strong willed person to overcome such opposition. In the first place, by 1934, anti-Fascist groups were keeping individual Fascists under surveillance. The Communist Party, for example, monitored the activities of local Fascists who became blacklegs in a factory on strike in Manchester.²⁸ The Labour Party kept a watch on local B.U.F. premises, particularly the ones in Platting, Moston and Crumpsall.²⁹ These groups, together with the Manchester Anti-Fascist Co-ordinating Committee and others, knew the names of many local Fascists and made sure that as many other people as possible knew them too. In the second place the Fascist could well meet opposition in his or her own family. Tom Pickles' mother would not let him wear a uniform and he left the movement inside three months. On the other hand Arthur Fawcett disregarded his own family opposition:

My father was an engineer...he was a Labour man.
 My mother was Labour too, a Labour family we were.
 I have got two brothers and one sister. I have got
 one sister who votes Labour yet. I have got a
 brother who voted Labour and said he wouldn't be
 found dead in the same company with me.³⁰

It is interesting that Tom Pickles now (1980) has no interest in Fascism and considers himself non political, while Arthur Fawcett, although he left the B.U.F. in 1936, says he is still intensely patriotic and would prefer a Fascist government to a Communist one. Every year, on the Queen's birthday and on St. George's day, he raises the Union Jack on a tall flag pole in his garden, much to the embarrassment of his neighbours on the estate of bungalows.

The ability to overcome family and local opposition, and indeed public opinion at large, may have been a significant characteristic of the more serious member of the B.U.F. who would respond more readily to the depth ideology of the movement.

A further factor which could have influenced people who might have otherwise flirted with Fascism was that the B.U.F. had experienced a drastic decline in membership, for reasons which have already been outlined, and was also in financial difficulties which, in turn, led to retrenchment and administrative changes. Many local branches were amalgamated because of falling numbers, and others were purged in an attempt to eradicate the 'social club' atmosphere which had developed in many areas. Once again, only those people who were more seriously committed than their earlier counterparts would remain in, or join, a movement on the decline and with a real danger of sinking completely.

If one turns to the class affiliation of members of the B.U.F. one has to be very careful indeed. Extrapolating findings on the class designation of a small group of interviewees to the membership as a

whole is not feasible if we wish to achieve a degree of accuracy.

All one can do is provide a general picture which points to a class mixture amongst old B.U.F. members. It has already been indicated that the most striking feature of the membership of the B.U.F. is its heterogeneity, a feature which is not amenable to statistical interpretation.

Class affiliation is of course related to income and employment, and it is through a brief investigation of the latter that we may add to what we have already discovered about class affiliation. It appears that a significant proportion of the early membership of the B.U.F. in the North was recruited through a fear of unemployment or a sense of despair in being unemployed. This was usually coupled with a lack of faith in the ability of the established political parties to deal with unemployment. This was particularly the case in South East Lancashire where the B.U.F. launched their special cotton campaigns to attract cotton workers. There is some evidence that many cotton workers did respond to the B.U.F. in this direction. In Middleton the leader thought there were working class members, mainly cotton workers, and considered this to be true of the B.U.F. membership in East Lancashire generally.³¹ In Nelson the Womens District Leader, her mother, who was also a member, and the District Leader, were weavers and many of the 100 members worked in the local cotton mills.³² In Blackburn, "the District members were mainly mill workers and mechanics, most of whom were jobless, also a sprinkling of small shopkeepers and business people."³³

The District Leader in Hull has estimated that as much as 40% of the local membership was working class and unemployed and thought the membership in Bolton, where his brother was District Leader, to be the same.³⁴ The leader in Lancaster considered that there were large numbers of working class people in the movement generally and that Lancaster was no exception to this pattern. Some of the local members worked on the railway and several were process workers at a large chemical plant in Lancaster. The leader knew of a 'fair number' of the total of 60 members who were unemployed.³⁵ In North Leeds the situation was similar, with the local leader recollecting that "many of them had menial jobs or were unemployed."³⁶

There is little evidence to suggest that such members, unemployed or not, were recruited from the organised sections of the working classes. Very little headway was made in recruiting members from the highly unionised engineering industry or from coalmining for example. The working class recruit was typically one who had not been educated into the labour movement by trade union or Labour Party membership. Even here, however, there were exceptions. The case of Tom Pickles has already been mentioned but there were others. The whole of the Communist Party branch in Accrington was said to have joined the B.U.F.³⁷ and in Salford three Labour League of Youth members joined the local B.U.F. branch though all left within twelve months.³⁸ Those members of the labour movement who joined the B.U.F. seem on the whole to have flirted with Fascism rather than to have experienced a deeper commitment, and so contributed to the high rate of turnover of membership.

It was not only sections of the working class who experienced fears of unemployment or protection of their trade. Various occupational groups responded to the Fascist appeal in the North. The self employed were particularly vulnerable in this respect. The response from this type of worker cut across class lines and included working class people who attempted to start one man painting and decorating businesses or window cleaning rounds, owners of small shops and garages, and also taxi drivers. The B.U.F. organised special meetings for such groups and at one meeting, in June 1938, 400 taxi drivers turned up to hear Mosley promise his backing in a campaign to stop price cutting by private car hire firms. The Fascist leader in Middleton knew many members who were taxi drivers and he used to be one himself at one time. Reynall Bellamy also noted that many members were similarly employed in Manchester. The Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews reported in 1938 that they had managed to deal successfully with an outbreak of anti-Semitism amongst taxi drivers in Manchester.³⁹

There were many small businessmen and shopkeepers who were members in the North, In Hull the leader was a confectioner and is now an area official of the National Chamber of Trade. He attends national meetings in such capacity, where, he says, "It is sometimes like going to a B.U.F. reunion."⁴⁰

One factor that probably helps to explain the high percentage of B.U.F. members who were employed as taxi drivers and in other occupations such as the furniture trade, is that these were occupations to which Jews were attracted. Hence anti-Semitism among the non-Jews may have

been one of the determining factors. There is little more to add here to the impression of class heterogeneity amongst B.U.F. members, except to mention the small minority of Fascists or Fascist sympathisers who could be said to represent the upper classes in the North. A.V. Roe of Manchester, for example, was a well known Fascist sympathiser, who lent his name on occasion to the Fascist cause. Another was Lord Tollemache, a Cheshire landowner.⁴¹ There were also a few owners of cotton mills who lent their name and their money to the Fascist cotton campaigns.⁴² These people were very few in number and insignificant, not only numerically but also in what they brought to the movement in ideas or, indeed, finance.

A much more important feature of the membership of the B.U.F. was that of religious affiliation. The Catholic support for the B.U.F. has already been referred to in the context of the 1938 Manchester municipal elections.⁴³ The relationship between Catholicism and the B.U.F. can be highlighted further however by a brief look at the membership in the North. There is enough evidence to suggest that the percentage of Catholics was much higher in the B.U.F. than in the population as a whole. The leaders in Hull, Blackburn and Bolton were Catholics, as was the leader in North Leeds. Several of the local leaders in Manchester were Catholics and the leader of the Arnside branch and the founder member of the Nelson branch were both converts to Catholicism. The latter, Nellie Driver, has written that "Catholics we had in large numbers, besides many Church of England laity, because they supported our stand against atheistic Communism mostly."⁴⁴ There were so many Catholic members in the Leeds area that Mosley's nick-name

there was 'The Pope'.⁴⁵ Most of the members in Lancaster and Preston were Catholics. In fact, Protestants were said to be reluctant to join the movement in Preston because of the high number of Catholic members and in Liverpool there were even 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' branches.⁴⁶ The high number of Catholics in senior posts in the North caused some concern amongst non-Catholics, with allegations that one's religion was important in determining one's chances of promotion.⁴⁷

There are several reasons why Catholics were attracted to the B.U.F. As far as the Irish Catholics were concerned, it was commonly thought that Mosley supported Home Rule for Ireland. Certainly the 'Irish Connection' seems to loom large in the anatomy of the B.U.F. Mosley underwent part of his First World War military training near Dublin, and in 1920, as M.P. for Harrow, he adopted a critical attitude towards the governments handling of the Irish situation. Mosley's criticisms of the activities of the Black and Tans helped to make his reputation in the House of Commons as a first rate speaker. In November 1920 he became secretary of the Peace with Ireland Council, which was organised by the Labour Party to bring an end to the government's policy of reprisals in Ireland. His attacks were aimed more at the Lloyd George government and its methods of dealing with the Irish problem than the Black and Tans themselves. Mosley gained much support for his stand on Ireland. Not only Catholics were drawn into the B.U.F. because of this, but also some people who were on the other side - members of the Black and Tans, Reynall Bellamy being a good example. At various stages in Mosley's chequered political career, the Irish have provided a substantial proportion of his total support.

In the 1959 General Election, Mosley stood as a Union Movement candidate in North Kensington. His policy on race in that election does not concern us here. However, the support that Mosley gained for that policy does. Mosley's record as a campaigner for the rights of Irish people was dusted off and embellished with an appeal for civil rights for Catholics. The result was that the substantial Irish population in the constituency tended to be attracted towards the Union Movement - and all its policies, including that of repatriations of the West Indians.

An important aspect of Catholic membership of the B.U.F. was the similarity of ideas expressed by the Catholic church and the Fascist movement. Skidelsky has already drawn attention to this interesting parallel, but it can be illustrated a little further.⁴⁸ For example, members of the church itself expressed an interest in the B.U.F. William Eaton, one of the Northern officials, described a journey he made by train to London for the Fascist meeting at Olympia in 1934. He met a Catholic priest on the train, who was also going to the Olympia meeting to find out for himself how far the B.U.F. policy coincided with the teachings of the church. The attitude of certain Catholic newspapers towards Fascism has been noted by Skidelsky and he points to the sympathy expressed by the Catholic Herald towards the B.U.F. and the similarity the paper noted between B.U.F. policy and the social views embodied in the encyclicals.⁴⁹ The correspondence columns of the Catholic press were also creating some problems. In a report presented to the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 1938, concern was expressed about the anti-Semitic bias shown by the Catholic Times.

and its readers, at a time when anti-Semitism in Europe was escalating rapidly. A meeting was arranged with the Private Secretary to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and the complaint was dealt with by the Archbishop himself.⁵⁰

The B.U.F. presented a type of structure and organisation similar to that of the Catholic church. In the words of the B.U.F. leader in Hull, "Catholics would see a relationship between the dogmatism of their religion and Oswald Mosley's idea of a job to govern."⁵¹ The Hull leader himself was a Catholic. Two of his brothers who had also joined the B.U.F., all three independently of each other, and belonging to a strong Catholic family, apparently saw the same connection between their church and the B.U.F. The structure of the B.U.F. with all decisions emanating from Mosley himself, suited the minds of many Catholics, whose church was organised in a similar authoritarian manner. This, coupled with many of the ideas of the B.U.F. - its policy on Ireland; widespread ownership of private property, and its anti-Semitism - provided a convenient outlet for many people experiencing the frustration and despair of economic disorder and political bankruptcy, and who would have preferred all that the B.U.F. offered rather than the ideals of Communism.

Fascism in this country found its greatest Catholic support, not from the organised church and its officials, but from the ranks of ordinary working class Irish Catholics. The B.U.F. seized the opportunity of gaining support from a disaffected group of people ignored by other political parties. It is not as though the Irish Catholics were

unwilling to listen to what Mosley had to say, since many of the movement's ideas struck a chord with them. However, one cannot escape the feeling that the Irish were used, to a certain degree, by the movement to boost its membership. The same may be said of that episode in Mosley's later career when, as leader of the Union Movement in the 1950's, he gained the support of many Teddy Boys, who were prominent in the Union Movement's campaign against coloured immigration. In both instances we may learn a great deal about Mosley's campaigning methods and also about the bankruptcy of his appeal. Mosley had to rely on the following of such groups of people because he could not gain the type of support which might have brought him to power. No politician can ride to power on the backs of small disaffected groups in society, and the fact that Mosley, in part, tried to tells us a great deal about the man and his methods.

PART FOUR

RESPONSES TO FASCISM: THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

CHAPTER TENBRITISH JEWRY AND THE RISE OF FASCISM

The campaign within the Jewish community to do something, anything, about the B.U.F. began to break out into the Jewish press in the autumn of 1933. The early manifestation of this took the form of correspondence to the Jewish Chronicle.

In fact it is this early correspondence which first sets the scene for the bitter conflict which was to take place among the leaders of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, whose position was that the Jews should not become involved in 'political problems' and should leave the Fascists well alone, except to speak out against anti-Semitism. On the other hand there was the position of other Jews who saw themselves as 'political animals' and who felt it necessary, not only to attack anti-Semitism but also the wider problem of Fascism as a political creed. We have here to remove ourselves from the immediate problems facing the Jewish community in Manchester in order to set the scene on a national basis. We will see that the leadership of the Jewish community in Manchester followed fairly precisely the argument formulated by the Board of Deputies in London, and it is to the Jews who were in conflict with the Board we must now turn before dealing with the Board's response and the mirroring of that response in Manchester.

One early, and much quoted, letter in the Jewish Chronicle which

called for action against the B.U.F. was from John Brown, of Ruskin College, Oxford.

From my experience in the North of England, in Oxford and in London, I am completely convinced that the only way to combat the menace is to organise effective and disciplined opposition. It is not enough to pass pious resolutions and to make deploring speeches, because the mentality of anti-Semitic fascism is unmoved by anything except direct action.¹

A week later a reply to Brown's letter came from the President of the Oxford University Jewish Society, which noted the anti-Semitic campaign being waged by the Imperial Fascists. The writer, Mr A. Herman, went on to note that the Jews were being attacked by the B.U.F., but this was because they were Communists. The letter ended with the much quoted words "At the present time, our greatest supporters in the fight against the Imperial Fascists are the Mosley-Fascists themselves."²

In reply to Herman's letter, John Brown supplemented his earlier remarks by saying:

I can say definitely that Mosley's and other Fascist organisations are dangers to the whole of the British working class and to the Jewish community, and that it is a duty of all right-thinking people to help exterminate these organisations immediately.³

Herman's letter is in fact a very early statement of the position taken up by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, while Brown's letter presents the argument put forward by the opponents, within the Jewish community, of the community leaders.

It is at this point that we must turn our attention to the leadership of the Jewish community in this country, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and to its attitude towards Jewish defence, which was to undergo a remarkable change in the 1930's.

'The London Committee of Deputies of British Jews', later to become known as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, was formed in the 18th Century by Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. The aim of the two groups of Jews was to consult together and take common action, when needed, in the everyday relationship with the larger Gentile community. However it was not until the beginning of the 19th Century that regular meetings of the Board of Deputies took place.

Twenty two representatives, or Deputies, were on the Board, from Bevin Marks the Great, the Hambro, and the New Synagogue, all in London, and one synagogue in Liverpool (the only community outside London to be represented). In 1835 the Board adopted a formal constitution and in the following year was named in an Act of Parliament as the official Jewish body which could certify the marriage secretaries of synagogues, thus enabling them to conduct marriage ceremonies. The Board took an active part in achieving full political emancipation in this country, though mainly through the

efforts of particular individual members.

Throughout the 19th Century the Board was increasingly seen to be representative of the more prosperous and well-to-do members of the Jewish community, and took on a more charitable function for poorer Jews. The reputation of the Board was firmly established in the eyes of the Jewish community throughout the world in 1840, when it successfully defended a group of Jews in Damascus against an accusation of ritual murder.

In the latter half of the 19th Century, and especially after 1871, when it joined with the newly formed Anglo-Jewish Association in a Joint-Foreign Committee, the Board represented all manner of Jewish affairs abroad.

While the work of the Board expanded, reflecting the expansion of the Jewish community in Britain, the membership grew from the original twenty two to over four hundred by the time of the Second World War. This increased membership represented not only synagogues but also other institutions within the Jewish community.

By the 1930's the social composition of the Board of Deputies had become established. The prominent members of the Board were often not only leaders of the Jewish community but also prominent in the business world and the professions, many members being solicitors, doctors, academics or businessmen. In 1938 the President of the Board was Neville J. Laski, a K.C. and a member of the prominent

Manchester family of that name. Of the two Vice-Presidents in 1938 one, Lionel L. Cohen, was also a K.C. and the other, Sir Robert Waley Cohen K.B.E., was a director of Shell Transport and Trading Co. and also a director of Baldwins Ltd.

Business links were also to be important amongst the participants in the campaign against anti-Semitism. For example, when an appeal for funds for the Co-ordinating Committee Against Anti-Semitism was made in September 1936, the West End gown trade contributed £2373, with a promise of a further £5000. The Manchester Furniture Trade raised £4000.⁴

The Board of Deputies was also able to extend its influence and voice its opinion through its links with the media,⁵ in ways which were inaccessible to ordinary Jews, indeed the majority of people in this country. The social composition of the leadership of the Board of Deputies is noted here because it is important to make the point that the leaders were not only Jewish but were also representative of the middle and upper middle class groups in society. The Board could not be said to be representative of Jews in general. For example, the majority of Jews did not belong to synagogues, yet all the Deputies in the 1930's were selected by synagogues.

The Jewish community in this country had long since ceased to be a homogeneous group, politically, religiously, culturally or economically. However, the Board had shown itself to be capable of adapting to some changing circumstances in the past. For example,

after the First World War there was a large influx of East European immigrant Jews. This group of Jews very quickly achieved representation on the Board.

One large section of the Jewish community was not represented effectively on the Board of Deputies. This was the large number of working-class Jews, which included a large number of poor traders. Perhaps the least represented of all were the young working class Jews who did not become involved in Jewish affairs and were neither nationalistic nor religious. They had however recently become aware of their Jewish origins, as Jews as a whole had become subject to the attacks of anti-Semites, both in Europe and, more recently, in this country. It was this group of Jews in fact, that suffered most directly from the anti-Semitism of the B.U.F.

It will be argued that the Board of Deputies, when it finally took action to deal with threats to Jews from Fascists, thought only in terms of dealing with anti-Semitism. Fascism, as an ideology, was never seen as the root of the problem and so was ignored.

Groups which reacted against the B.U.F. can be classified as follows: Those which attacked Fascism as a political creed; those which were said to be 'defenders of democracy' against dictatorship; and those groups which saw the problem as being only one of anti-Semitism, and who did not take into account political considerations.

We shall see that the Board of Deputies came into the latter

category. Only when war with Germany was considered to be a distinct possibility in 1939, did the leadership of the Jewish community think of taking up the second position, that of defending democracy in the face of dictatorship. There were several reasons for this hesitancy on the part of the Board. The reason that it was only in the summer of 1936 that action was taken by the Board, by which time the B.U.F. had been in existence for four and a half years, was that the Board had to face a great deal of criticism from other sections of the Jewish community and feared that the initiative might be taken out of their hands.

The members of the Board of Deputies, because of their social background, were very unlikely to experience the physical and verbal attacks and intimidation against Jews which occurred in working class areas. The leaders of British Jewry were undoubtedly disturbed by these events, but they were only personally experienced in an indirect way. They were more likely to read about anti-Semitism than experience it themselves. For the working class Jew it was the reverse.

A major reason why the Board did not attack Fascism as a political creed was that to do so would mean that it might be identified with other groups and organisations which attacked Fascism. By their very nature these groups tended to be of a left wing variety. Trade Unions, the Communist Party, the Independent Labour Party, and the Labour Party itself, all opposed Fascism rather than just anti-Semitism. The Board of Deputies could not really be described as having left wing tendencies.

The groups on the left which attacked Fascism would also be attacking the bourgeoisie which, of course, in the eyes of the left, particularly the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party, would include the leadership of the Jewish community. It is difficult to imagine the Board of Deputies attaching itself, in however small a way, to groups which attacked the values which the Board implicitly upheld, almost as strongly as they attacked Fascism.

A report to the Board of Deputies in October 1936 originally stated that

Any course of action on the part of Jews which might have the effect, quite openly aimed at the Fascists, of associating or identifying the Jewish community as a whole in the public mind with extreme political parties which, equally with the Fascists, are condemned by the mass of the well balanced opinion in this country as public nuisances.⁶

This was a clear reference to the Communist Party and some members of the Board took strong exception to the sentence, which was deleted and replaced by the following:

The Board, as the representative body of the Jewish community has, can have, no political interest or affiliation, and that its defensive action is directed solely against anti-Semitism as such, no matter from what political party or group the incitement may come...It is for this

reason that the Board strongly deprecates any attempt to identify the Jewish community with any political party.⁷

The standard interpretation of Fascism, which dominated Marxist thinking in the 1930's is well known.⁸ Fascism was seen as an inevitable result of the laws governing the capitalist economic system. Such groups as 'big business' or the 'industrial bourgeoisie', or even the 'agrarian capitalists' were in the vanguard of the formation of the Fascist state. The revolutionary energies of the proletariat were supposed to be dissipated by the betrayal of the 'reformist Social Democrats' and this would lead to the predictable victory of Fascism. The petty bourgeoisie was considered to be attracted towards Fascism. What hope then for the business and professional people who happened to be the leaders of the Jewish community? Clearly the Board could not be associated with such ideas.

Thus the Board of Deputies did not defend the Jewish community against Fascism as a political ideology and only belatedly joined the defence against anti-Semitic attacks, which happened to come from a Fascist organisation. It is in this light that we must look at the response of Jewish leaders and officials to the anti-Semitism of the British Union of Fascists.

It was the policy of the leaders of the Jewish community to advise Jews to ignore the B.U.F. This policy was specified in individual statements by members of the Board of Deputies and other leading

Jewish public figures.

In November 1934 at a meeting of the Jewish ex-servicemen in the Albert Hall, London, Lord Melchett gave the following advice and warning to Jews.

I want you who are responsible members of the Jewish community to go back and persuade your wives and sons and cousins to leave the Blackshirts alone, when they are rowdy the police will deal with them. Do not indulge in fisticuffs or catcalls. What we stand upon is the enrichment we can bring to the life of the nation. We have always been an orderly people, let us realise that the energy and ability and decency of our people will win through in the end.⁹

At the same meeting, Neville Laski, President of the Board of Deputies, said:

I would like to use all the influence in my possession to urge young Jewish people, whatever their feelings or resentments, to absent themselves from Sir Oswald Mosley's meetings and to give him no cause to refer to any part that Jews play in the feelings of the British working mass against his party. I hope my words will percolate wherever there are Jewish communities: let Fascist meetings alone.¹⁰

A week later, Neville Laski addressed a meeting of branches of the League of Jewish Youth at Woburn House, London, where he appealed to Jews "to see that no ammunition of any kind was provided by them for the speeches of Sir Oswald Mosley." and ended by warning Jews to keep away from Fascist meetings.¹¹

This, then, was the advice given to the Jews - keep away and do nothing. However it was soon obvious that many Jews and, indeed, many people who were not Jews, did not accept this position. Many other people not only wanted action, but their interpretation of the significance of the B.U.F. was also different from that of the Board of Deputies.

We have already seen that there had been a call in the correspondence columns of the Jewish Chronicle for 'effective and disciplined opposition' followed by a claim that the B.U.F. was a danger 'to the whole of the British working class and to the Jewish community.'¹² This call was repeated by the Communist Party in 1934. Harry Pollitt, speaking at the Old Boys Club, said that "Mere inaction and stopping quietly at home had never saved Jews from a pogrom" and that Jews ignored the ideology of Fascism and only concerned themselves with its anti-Semitic aspects.¹³

By the summer of 1935 criticism was being voiced by the more influential sections of the Jewish community. The Jewish Chronicle, in an article signed by 'Watchman' produced the following:

It is a remarkable thing that, at the moment, the most decisive act of our leaders has been the resolve to do nothing. An influential legal committee has recommended that nothing be attempted in the matter of what is called community libel. This line of action, or inaction, is tactical in motive. The failure to publish the committee's report was also tactical ...there is a great deal that could be done to protect the community against defamation.

We cannot, no doubt, follow up every act of incitement...but there are some things we can do. We could follow up every major anti-Jewish meeting by another in the same town and procure for the speeches the same publicity in the press that the hostile addresses obtained. We might at least consider the advisability of having at our command a corps of instructed speakers, self-controlled, courteous and tactful, to answer the soap box orators at street corners, and we might arm them with short, terse, leaflets distributed to the audience where this could be done without risk of disturbance. Sensible men will be needed for this purpose...the constructive, or preventive work of enlightenment should be undertaken on a large scale.

...Our community must set its own house in order... we have the duty, religious as well as civic, to be as a community, as chaste and pure as humanity can hope to make itself, or at any rate, to offer as few 'horrible' examples' as possible for enemy use. We have, if necessary, to ostracise the law breaker, who deserves to be held at arm's length

and to be treated as a pariah and Hitler's most potent ally. We have to support Jewish youth movements with redoubled vigour. It is questionable even whether solid blocks of Jews congregated in particular districts are desirable, in as much as they are liable to lead to excessive clanishness...¹⁴

It was this article which seemed to open the floodgates of criticism and countercriticism. Or perhaps it was the policy towards publishing such criticism that had changed. At any rate critical views were now being aired.

A fortnight later for example, there was a call from a reader for action to unify all the existing anti-Fascist groups. The same reader went on to remark that "the so-called leaders of Jewry by their inertia or over cautious tactics have contributed directly to the Fascist menace against the Jews...a clear lead would meet with a widespread response." Another reader suggested that a 'defence organisation' be formed which, apparently, could act as a publishing house for anti-Fascist pamphlets, and organise speakers to assist at anti-Fascist meetings.

The Secretary of the University of Wales Jewish Students Association wrote of the "growing impatience on the part of us younger people with the impotent attitude adopted by the leaders of British Jewry towards the menace of Fascism in this country" and ended with a call for Jewish youth and student organisations to organise collective action.

There was a suggestion that all Jews should join their respective political parties and become guardians of Jewish rights, since "protests to the Home Office from Conservative bodies might carry a little more weight than those of Friendly Societies." This letter ended with a quote from Hillel: "If we are not for ourselves, who will be for us? And if not now, when? Leaders of Jewry, answer, when?"

It was not only the pages of the Jewish Chronicle that presented a note of impatience in the Jewish community with the Board of Deputies. Anti-Fascist campaigns were being organised in Jewish districts which, by their very nature, amounted to a criticism of the Jewish leadership.

In Manchester for example, in June 1936, 3,500 citizens in Cheetham Hill, the centre of the Jewish community in the city, signed a petition to the Lord Mayor of Manchester, protesting against the letting of the local public hall to the B.U.F.¹⁶ The petition in Manchester was organised by the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, which contained many Jews. In other areas of the country pressure groups were being formed to deal with the continuing 'anti-Jewish manifestations'.

The Jewish leadership, both in Manchester and nationwide, could not fail to be aware of the significance of local communities taking action on their own behalf.

At this point it is important to refer again to the way in which groups and organisations reacting against the B.U.F. were classified. For, while the purpose of this chapter is to deal specifically with the defence against the B.U.F. from within the Jewish community, comparison must be made between the Board of Deputies and other 'defence' groups, in order to highlight the very isolated position of the Board of Deputies.

In the first category then, we have those groups and organisations that attacked Fascism as a political creed. This was essentially an ideological standpoint and followed from the analysis and interpretation of Fascism put forward by various Marxists and neo-Marxists in the inter war years. Anti-Semitism was seen as a product of Fascist ideology and was to be fought as such. This interpretation has already been commented upon and all that remains to be added here is a brief list of the sorts of groups and organisations that came into this category. We have, first of all, the Communist Party of Great Britain, which, through its chief polemicists, R. Palme Dutt and John Strachey, contributed to much of the Marxist interpretation of Fascism. The Independent Labour Party also came into this first category, as did sections of the Labour Party. Some individual trade unions also attacked Fascism as a political creed, while many individual trade councils followed a similar line. Organisations which included many trade unions and Labour Party branches as affiliated members also came into this category. Two such organisations which are of concern here were the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, and the Jewish Peoples

Council. Both these groups will be studied in this chapter.

In the second category, that of groups and organisations which professed a general commitment to a 'democratic' way of life, supporting in effect, though often implicitly, 'parliamentary democratic institutions,' we find some groups which were in a different category from other groups within the same organisation. Some trade union branches, for example, adopted a much lower political profile than other branches. Many supported 'democracy' while some adopted the 'left' interpretation of Fascism of the first category. Trade Councils followed a similar pattern. However there were many groups which fell solely into this second category. These included the Stepney Council for Peace and Democracy, which was formed in the East End of London to try to bring an end to Fascist activity in the area. Anti-war councils and the Anti-Fascist Union also came into this category, as did the League of Blue and White Shirts, which perhaps deserves a little attention.

The League of Blue and White Shirts was formed in July 1936 in the East of London, and was predominantly a Jewish organisation, although its President, Mr W. Bateman, was a Gentile. Blackshirts referred to its members as the 'storm troops of Jewry'. The Legion was described as being 'concerned with combating Fascism, not only in its anti-Semitic aspects, but in general'.¹⁷ However, its purpose was made more explicit in February 1937, when it said that the movement would not unite with any other 'platform' advocating party politics or using the present anti-Semitic agitation for their own personal

aims. The members of the movement wore blue and white shirts, in the hope that if sufficient organisations wore shirts, then the Home Secretary would have to ban all political uniforms. The main policy of the Legion was to hold meetings on street corners in the East End of London. Often there was a conflict with the B.U.F. over who had the right to which 'pitch'. Audiences of between 500 and 600 were claimed, and by February 1937 over 500 meetings had been held.

In December 1936, the premises of the Legion, in Whitehouse Lane, Stepney, were attacked by a group of Blackshirts, who drove up in cars and caused over £100 worth of damages.¹⁸ The organisation struggled on, in spite of lack of funds, and managed to publish leaflets defending Jewry. At the height of the movement's success, in November 1936, hopes of opening social clubs 'all over London and England' were expressed. However by April 1937 reorganisation took place and a new executive body was appointed. The following month the Legion was amalgamated with the British Union of Democrats, the British Democratic Association and the Anti-Fascist Union, under the name of 'The Legion of Democrats'.

Amongst the trade unions which supported 'democracy' in the face of anti-Semitism was the Houndsditch and Whitechapel branch of the Shop Assistants Union, which was predominantly Jewish. In response to the article in the Jewish Chronicle of June 5 1936, which has been quoted above, the Union unanimously resolved to convey the following resolution to the newspaper.

That, while recognising the absolute necessity of a well organised Trade Union movement for combating fascism and anti-semitism in all its forms, we welcome the statement in so far as the absolute unity of Jewry is essential to taking an active and rigorous stand to combat this menace. We trust that the former passive attitude of the leaders of British Jewry will give no place to the methods and policy outlined in the article and so far as we are concerned, representing as we do thousands of young distributive workers in East London, can promise our assistance in every way.¹⁹

The passive attitude of the Board of Deputies which was attacked by the Shop Assistants Union branch, followed from the fact that the Board of Deputies came into the third category of opposition groups which looked upon anti-Semitism as the sole problem, without any reference to Fascism as a political creed. It is here that we can see clearly the isolated position of the Board of Deputies. It is they alone, among large campaigning bodies, that occupy this third category. Various other organisations, for example the Blue and White Shirts, claimed initially to be 'non-political' and to be only concerned with fighting anti-Semitism, but in actual fact these bodies did speak out in support of 'democracy'.

There were in fact rather less important groups formed which might also be said to have presented a non-political stance, and thus be included in the third category. In June 1936 a 'Jewish Truth Society' was formed in Portsmouth, whose aim was 'to combat anti-Semitism of

every type and to disseminate knowledge, historical, economic and religious, of our people'. This was to be achieved by giving lectures, distributing leaflets and taking legal action, whenever possible, against anti-Semites.²⁰

In March 1935, a United Jewry Fellowship had been formed to combat anti-Semitism and over a year later, in June 1936, it was still possible, because of the inactivity of the Board of Deputies, for a suggestion to be made for a 'Jewish Defence League' with central headquarters in London and branches in the provinces.²¹ In July 1936 a 'Jewish Enlightenment Platform' was formed in the East End of London. In describing its aims, the secretary stated that "The platform (is) to be non-political and (to) only concern itself with rebutting defamatory statements against Jews..."²²

However most such 'non-political' organisations which did exist were on the periphery of affairs, both in terms of their size and influence and in their geographical location. It was the Board of Deputies alone, among large organisations with an ability to campaign, that occupied this third category. The Board, as we shall see, was eventually forced by what it referred to as 'pressure of events' to identify itself with the cause of democracy, but this was not until March 1939, when events in Europe were becoming too painful for even the Board of Deputies to stand aside and refuse to see the wider causes of anti-Semitism.²³

Both inside and outside the Jewish community then, organisations,

groups and parties were taking action. Whether this meant publishing leaflets and pamphlets, holding meetings, or merely writing letters to newspapers etc. Sometimes the action taken was of a more active form and led to open conflict between the B.U.F. and anti-Fascists.

In the face of this sort of pressure, the Board of Deputies could not ignore the relationship between anti-Semitism and Fascism, as embodied in the B.U.F., completely.

At the beginning of June 1936 the honorary officers of the Board had sent out a letter of appeal for £10,000. This was known as the Press Committee Appeal, the Press and Information Committee being the body mandated by the Board to deal with anti-Jewish defamation. The President of the Board, Mr Neville Laski, said that this would provide the necessary funds enabling the situation to be dealt with. Nothing more would be necessary.²⁴

In June 1936, Sir Robert Waley Cohen, one of the Vice Presidents of The Board of Deputies, wrote to the Jewish Chronicle acknowledging the criticism appearing in the columns of the paper. He advocated further restraint and promised that

The leaders of the community will not allow these calumnies to go by default, but will establish without more delay adequate means of defending not merely Jews against these calumnies, but civilisation against these, her traitors...the leaders of Anglo-Jewry are fully alive to the

poisonous seriousness of the attacks and are determined to concert measures which will leave no stone unturned in the wise and effective organisation of defence.²⁵

Cohen was writing immediately after a meeting of the Board, at which decisions regarding anti-Fascist propaganda were taken. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that his reference to 'adequate means' of defence related to the decisions taken at that meeting.

The Board of Deputies met on June 15 1936. Attention was drawn, and approval given, to the letter of appeal for £10,000 which had been sent to all members of the Board of Deputies, its constituent bodies and the press. The aim of the appeal was to place the Press Committee in an independent position. Attention was drawn to the growing problem of anti-Semitism. The money received from the appeal was to be used to pay the expenses of a full time expert assistant in the production of publications.

Emphasis on concerted action, rather than attempts by individual groups, was voiced by some members of the Board, and there was a suggestion that "the function and duties of combating anti-Jewish action and propaganda in this country should be handed over to an ad hoc committee." Under the pressure of questioning by some Deputies, Nathan Laski, the President, defended the work of the Board and its committees:

It was easy for an honourable Deputy to say

"why don't you do this?" or "what have you done about that?" Their lips were sealed because it would be a dereliction of duty on their part if they opened their mouths. But if they came to their office they would receive the fullest information on these matters.²⁶

All criticism was brushed aside.

The 'adequate' means, then, which Sir Waley Cohen referred to, consisted of the publication and distribution of pamphlets, with the help of expert assistance, to counteract the attacks of the British Union of Fascists.²⁷

Just where this expert assistance was to be drawn from was not quite clear. Even though one of the main purposes of the Press Committee was to provide links between the press and the Board of Deputies, the committee consistently refused offers of help from prominent Jewish journalists, Mark Goulden, managing editor of the Sunday Referee, and A.L. Easterman, literary editor of the Daily Herald, were both ignored when they approached the committee. In fact the actual membership of the committee did not include anyone with journalistic experience. A.L. Easterman, a Deputy for eighteen months, had offered his services to the committee and had been turned down. However, the Board of Deputies itself had a Press Officer. In August 1936, Mr S. Solomon, formerly Chief Sub-editor in the London office of the Yorkshire Post was appointed to the post.*

* In July 1936 the Press Committee of the Board of Deputies consisted

A call for the recruitment of men with technical knowledge and ability on the Press Committee was made by the Jewish Chronicle.²⁸

The paper also gave its support to a motion to be put by Mr Turner-Samuels at the next meeting of the Board of Deputies, on July 19 1936, which called for the formation of an ad hoc defence committee.

This latest meeting of the Board was to prove most significant. The President, Nathan Laski, announced at the start of the meeting that it had been decided to form a co-ordinating committee to unify and direct the defence activities of the Board. The membership was to consist of the President, together with six other Deputies. It was envisaged that sub-committees would be appointed.

This was the first action of any significance taken by the Board to deal with the anti-Semitism of the B.U.F. which had been in existence for four and a half years. Another point of significance at this meeting concerned the Turner-Samual motion, calling for the formation of an ad hoc body. This motion was eventually withdrawn since the Board had formed the Co-ordinating Committee, but only after a rather acrimonious debate, in which suspicions and jealousies were aroused, as the total lack of initiative on the part of the Board

of Percy Cohen, C.B.E. (Chairman); Dr J.L. Blonstein; Lionel L. Cohen K.C.; Sir Robert Waley Cohen; P.D.J. Druiff; Philip Guedalla; L.J. Hydleman; Julius Jung; Neville Laski K.C.; N Lazarus; Ernest Lesser; M. Gordon Liverman; Sir Philip Magnus, Bart; The Rev M.L. Perizureig; Harry Samuials; George J. Webber.

was finally being aired.

The President left the chair at one point, because he took an attack on the Board to be a personal attack on himself. Attempts were made to stifle the debate, which were partially successful. Sir Robert Waley Cohen, for example, said he had always felt that on the question of defence, the less said the better.* However, the meeting ended on a note of unity, as the Board of Deputies closed ranks to heal the self-inflicted wound of inactivity and to remove it from the gaze of the outside world.

An example of the way in which the initiative was taken away from the

* This was indeed the case. In July 1936, Mr J Mendelowitch, a representative of the Great Synagogue on the Council of the United Synagogue, put forward the following motion for inclusion on the agenda at the Council meeting which was to be held on July 21. 'That this Council strongly recommends its representatives upon the Jewish Board of Deputies to stress the urgent necessity of prompt measures being taken in order to strengthen the Jewish defence against the continuous growth of anti-Semitism in this country'. Philip Goldberg, the Joint Secretary of the United Synagogue replied, "I duly received your letter on the 5th inst. which I have placed before Sir Robert Waley Cohen. He asked me to tell you that, in his opinion, it would not be in order to discuss a matter of that kind at a meeting of the Council of the United Synagogue."²⁹

Board of Deputies, if, indeed, it had ever held the initiative, is shown by the work carried out by the Jewish Labour Council.

The Labour Council was formed in 1934 at a conference of Jewish working class organisations, mainly trade unions, with the aim of fighting both Fascism and anti-Semitism. It was supported by the T.U.C. and also the London Trades Council, since the work of the Labour Council was centred in the East End of London.

Meetings were held regularly in the East End of London and a leaflet 'Mosley and the Jews' was printed and 50,000 copies distributed amongst groups of trade unionists, with the co-operation of the T.U.C. In January 1937, a mass meeting was organised by the Council on 'Trade Unionism and anti-Semitism'. However one of the earliest major events organised by the Labour Council occurred on July 26 1936, when a meeting was convened in the East End of London.

A total of 179 delegates took part in the meeting, representing 86 organisations, grouped into Workers Circle branches, Trade Unions, political organisation, Friendly Societies, Benefit Societies, Synagogues, Zionist bodies, youth organisations and ex-Servicemen's organisations. It was at this meeting, held only a week after the Board of Deputies had finally produced a plan of action, that the divergence of views relating to the B.U.F. between the Board and the Labour Council were made public. The chairman of the meeting referred to the recent action of the Board. He went on to warn the 'Jewish masses as represented by the delegates' that:

There may be some delegates amongst you who might say that now that the Board of Deputies have taken the matter in hand there is no need for further conferences and action against Fascism and anti-Semitism by other bodies, but we say in reply, firstly, that the Board of Deputies, constituted as it still is, on an absolute and often farcical basis of representation, does not represent the widest elements of the Jewish people in this country. Secondly, the mass of the Jewish people are not at all yet convinced that a complete and sincere change of heart and mind has taken place in the leadership of the Board. There must, therefore, be in existence a strong and virile popular Jewish body to act as a driving force in our fight against the dangers confronting us. We shall welcome and co-operate in all efforts undertaken by the Board in that direction.³⁰

The actual policy of the Labour Council may best be summed up by referring to a resolution passed at the above meeting.

This conference demands that collective action be taken by the Jews in this country on the basis of the following:

- 1) Co-operation with all forces in this country combating Fascism.
- 2) Legal action against anti-Jewish libels (Protocols of Zion etc.).
- 3) This conference considers it necessary to constitute an all-in body from the organisations represented here today and any further organisations wishing to participate in the campaign, together with the Jewish Labour Council. This body should appoint:

- a) Organisation sub-committee.
- b) Propaganda sub-committee.
- c) Finance sub-committee.
- d) Press sub-committee.
- 4) Mass meetings of protest against Blackshirt propaganda and violence.
- 5) Intensification of boycott.
- 6) In view of the recent decision of the Board of Deputies to organise a special campaign against the anti-Semitic propaganda in this country, the Conference considers it necessary to ensure co-ordination and co-operation of the two bodies in this direction.
- 7) Appeal to Parliament for the prohibition of
 - a) wearing uniforms, the carrying of weapons, military and quasi-military formations by political organisations and the establishment by them of barracks for special detachments.
 - b) any organisation using racial and religious discrimination and incitement.
- 8) Setting up of local and district committees to ensure financial support for the campaign.³¹

The policy pursued by the Jewish Labour Council was very similar to that of the Jewish People's Council, which was formed in August 1936 and initially represented twenty six Friendly Society lodges; six trade union branches, four synagogues, fourteen youth organisations and fifteen groups of the Workers Circle movement. Clearly this represented a greater cross section of the Jewish community than the Board of Deputies. The work of the two councils largely overlapped and the various organisations which were represented by the delegates to the two bodies were largely the same. Friendly Societies and trade

unions, as well as youth organisations were well represented and the chief formal link between the Labour Council and the People's Council appears to have been the London Trades Council. It is not surprising that the Board of Deputies reacted in a similar way to both groups. However, it is the dispute between the Board of Deputies and the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism (to provide it with its full title) that illuminates most clearly the conflict within the Jewish community.

The aims of the Jewish People's Council were -

The provision of material and speakers to non-Jewish organisations, explaining how and why Fascism was Jew-baiting, and the provision of speakers with the necessary material relating to a) the social composition of Jews in Britain (percentage of Jews in trade and commerce, students, workers, unemployed etc.); b) Fascist violence. c) Police court proceedings, and d) answers to statements having a specifically Jewish character made by Fascists.³²

In a statement of policy the Council declared that,

Anti-Semitism in Britain cannot be separated from its political necessity to the Fascist movement. Anti-Semitism is being made both a rallying cry and a smoke screen, thus hiding from the British people the true purpose of Fascism. The struggle against anti-Semitism

is therefore as much a task for the British people as a whole as for the Jews, and the struggle against Fascism and for the defence of democratic rights is as much a task for the Jews as for the British people as a whole. Convinced then that it is impossible to fight anti-Semitism by concentrating only on the defamation of the Jews, and convinced further that it must be a struggle by Jews and non-Jews alike against Fascism, the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism has been formed to give a clear and authoritative lead to Jewry on the question of anti-Semitism and Fascism, and to unite all Jewish anti-Fascist bodies. We appeal therefore for support from Jew and non-Jew alike without distinction of political belief, for the common defence of democratic rights and liberties, and for personal freedom.³³

The Council did not see itself as a rival to the Board of Deputies. Instead, said Mr Jack Pearce, the Secretary, in a speech at Shoreditch Town Hall, the hope was that the Council would really be a people's council "an organisation which would always be at the service of the Jewish workers."³⁴

When the British Union of Fascists proposed to march through the East End of London on October 4 1936, the Council sprang into action very quickly and organised a petition, containing nearly 100,000 signatures, from people living in the East End. This was presented to the Home Office.³⁵

On November 15 the Jewish People's Council held a meeting in the Kings Hall in the East End, at which 169 representatives of 91 organisations, which included synagogues, Friendly Societies, Trade Unions, Zionist societies, Workers Circles, cultural and youth organisations and branches of the Jewish People's Council were present. At this meeting the secretary of the Council, Mr J.W. Pearce, gave a report on its activities over the two previous months. He referred to the petition to the Home Office and also the provision of legal assistance and defence for anti-Fascists, as well as the contribution made to the agitation against political uniforms. He spoke of the large public meetings of protest which had been held and also referred to the distribution of hundreds of thousands of leaflets.³⁶

Clearly the campaign waged by the Jewish People's Council was on a large scale and involved many Jewish organisations. It was felt that an approach to the Board of Deputies, to encourage co-operation in the Jewish community, would enhance the work of the Council. However, the offer was turned down by the Board of Deputies.

From the very beginning the People's Council was met with nothing but hostility from the Board of Deputies. For example, the Council was specifically excluded from discussions concerning the establishment of a local defence committee in the East End of London.³⁷ At the beginning of November 1936, the Council issued a press statement in which it was stated that -

A body such as the Jewish People's Council,

speaking on behalf of Jewry, is essentially non-political. But when such a party as the B.U.F. attacks Jews without the slightest discrimination, then it becomes the duty of Jews as a whole to counter attack such a political organisation...³⁸

This was clearly an appeal to the Board of Deputies to unite with other groups, like the People's Council, to defeat Fascism. In reply the Board sent out a letter to the press stating that the "Board's unique position as the representative body of British Jewry."³⁹ An appeal for solidarity with the Board was circulated at the end of November, in reply to which almost every congregation emphasised their loyalty. A week later the whole problem of the relationship between the two sides was neatly stated by the President of the Board when he said that

The Jewish Peoples Council was dangerous because it was opposed to Fascism and not anti-Semitism per se, had allied itself to Communist and left wing organisations and was acting as though the Anglo-Jewish community were an imperium in imperio. Its conduct, especially with regard to the Public Order Act, could not improve the Board's position vis-a-vis the Home Office.⁴⁰

In the same month the Board of Deputies went to the extent of bringing pressure to bear on the B.B.C. and The Times newspaper for reporting a meeting of the Jewish People's Council, which had occurred on November 15.⁴¹

The Jewish People's Council was not to let the matter rest there. At a meeting early in November in the East End of London, at which representatives of the People's Council, the Independent Labour Party, the National Council of Civil Liberties, the Labour Party, the Communist Party and other bodies were present, the chairman, who was General President of the Workers Circle Friendly Society, said "The Jewish Board of Deputies were prepared to fight anti-Semitism, but they refused to recognise that anti-Semitism would only be fought effectively by fighting Fascism."⁴²

At the meeting of November 15, in Kings Hall, which has already been referred to, the following emergency resolution was moved and carried with only five votes against.

This resolution views with concern the attitude adopted by the Board of Deputies on the question of Fascism, and resents the attacks on the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, which can only have the effect of splitting the ranks of Jewry and placing it in jeopardy.

It strongly urged the Board to concentrate on fighting Fascism and declared that "the co-ordination of all forces within Jewry is the paramount need of the moment."⁴³

Pearce, the Secretary of the Council, analysed the problem of the relationship with the Board of Deputies in a letter to the Jewish Chronicle. A note was made of the lack of representation of important

sections of the Jewish population on the Board, and the fact that the Board had spoken out against the various groups which were organised to resist the anti-Semitic attacks of the B.U.F. After accounting for the work of the Council, Pearce spoke of "the repeated efforts to co-operate with the Deputies in the campaign against Fascism and anti-Semitism (which) have been rejected..."⁴⁴

In the same month, November, three Jewish societies in Cambridge, the Schechter; the Zionist; and the Anglo-Jewish, convened a meeting at which the following resolution was passed:

That this meeting views with alarm the attitude of the Board of Deputies to such organisations as the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism; and believing that 1) that the distinction between Fascism and anti-Semitism is artificial and dangerous and 2) that anti-Semitism, having become a political issue, cannot adequately be met by a policy of non-political isolation, it therefore behoves all Jews to co-operate whole-heartedly with every organisation effectively engaged in the defence of all democratic rights against Fascism.⁴⁵

The attitude of the Board of Deputies towards the People's Council almost reached the level of paranoia. It was felt that the Council was a body dominated by Communists, that it was a 'Communist Front' which used the problem of anti-Semitism in the East End for its own political ends.⁴⁶ That there were members of the People's Council who were Communists is beyond doubt. That there were some affiliated

bodies, e.g. trade unions, which represented the thinking of the Communist Party is also beyond doubt. However the fact that some members of the organisation were Communists does not necessarily mean that its whole concept was inspired by the ideology of the Communist Party. We have already seen that when the Council was formed in August 1936, there were more Friendly Societies amongst the affiliated bodies than any other type of organisation, and the Council as a whole was more representative of the Jewish community than the Board of Deputies had ever been.

A further indication of the diverse political nature of the People's Council and the strength of its support is to be found in a letter sent to the Board of Deputies by Mr Bernal, representing the Friendly Societies of the London Area Council of the Board of Deputies. The letter was a reply to conditions laid down by the Board of Deputies concerning the conduct of the open air speaking campaign organised by the Friendly Societies.

My executive also requests me to inform you that it is their considered opinion that if there is a definite cleavage between the Board and the Friendly Societies movement in relation to the Defence Campaign, it will result in a number of lodges and Societies identifying themselves with the Jewish People's Council.

...You will recall that certain Lodges and members withdrew from the People's Council out of loyalty to the Association in its active participation in the campaign. When the question

of loyalty to the Association no longer obtains we feel we shall be unable to restrain them from giving the Jewish People's Council unqualified support...⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the work of the Jewish People's Council continued. A delegation visited the Parliamentary Labour Party in December 1936 to discuss the Public Order Bill. Local committees continued to be formed, and a large meeting was organised for the beginning of January 1937 on 'Trade Unionism and Anti-Semitism'. The Council worked closely with the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party, as well as trade unions.

The Council was re-organised in January 1937 and the executive committee and all sub-committees were expanded to include an even more representative cross-section of Jewish opinion. A special campaign was launched in 1937 to coincide with the L.C.C. elections. The aim of the campaign was to persuade people to vote against the Fascist candidates. Dozens of indoor and outdoor meetings were held and special anti-Fascist leaflets distributed.

The Council decided that the Public Order Act, which came into force on January 1 1937, was failing to deal with anti-Semitism, and in March 1937 decided to campaign for a bill which would deal specifically with racial incitement. In September 1937, the Council made representations to the Commissioner of Police to try to bring about a ban on the proposed Fascist march through the East End on October 3.⁴⁸

The informal relationship with the National Council of Civil Liberties became more explicit in April 1937, when the two organisations convened the All London Delegate Conference on Fascism and Anti-Semitism, at which the nucleus of a British Committee of the World Congress against Racialism and Anti-Semitism was formed. The close links between the Council and trade unions developed and members of the Council continued to address trade union meetings.

A notable point was reached in March 1938, when the Jewish People's Council met a representative of the London Area Council of the Board of Deputies, in a debate. The topic was one that touched upon the basic reasons for the differences of opinion that existed between various sections of the Jewish community - should the Jews unite as a body to combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, or should they conduct a campaign against defamation by anti-Semites alone? At least the two sides were now meeting, and the Board of Deputies felt able to discuss the problems which had led to the dispute over tactics.

This lowering of the temperature between the two sides was the result of two developments. The first point concerns the increased prestige of the Council. By 1938 the support of the Council was such that the Board of Deputies could no longer continue pretending that it was of no significance. In spite of the pressures put on the B.B.C. and The Times to remove references to the Council from broadcasts and reports, and in spite of the appeals for loyalty to the Jewish Community, the Council continued to thrive. The support on which it thrived came increasingly from the more respected sections of the Jewish community, the Friendly Societies and the synagogues. Prominent

people were increasingly lending their names to the organisation. The Dean of St Pauls was one of the speakers at the All London Delegate Conference in April 1937. The work of the Council had proved successful and had brought a great deal of publicity to the problems posed by the B.U.F.

The second development concerned the Board of Deputies itself. Faced with the success and the wide support of the People's Council, it had been difficult for the Board to continue its policy of aloofness. The Board could no longer claim that the methods employed by the Council and other such bodies were detrimental to the cause of Anglo-Jewry. After all, two years had passed since the dispute between the two sections of the community, only one of which was represented on the Board, had broken out into the open. Also, the Board had always been anxious to present a 'Jewish United Front'. Differences between sections of the community had always been played down by the Board and concealed from public view, yet the Board was increasingly being seen as the main cause of the division between itself and the Council. As a result of these factors, together with the increasingly alarming situation developing in Nazi Germany, the Board was beginning to shift its position, from that of a 'non-political' body only concerned with anti-Semitism, to a position alongside other campaigning bodies which considered themselves to be 'defenders of democracy', that is, a movement from the third category to the second category of groups mentioned earlier. It was thus that much easier for the Board to make contact with groups in the first category, the 'political' groups, such as the Jewish People's Council, fighting

not just anti-Semitism, but Fascism as well.

Following the debate which brought the two sides together for the first time, the secretary of the People's Council wrote to the Board of Deputies suggesting a meeting of the two organisations to discuss a common policy in the work against Fascism and anti-Semitism. The London Area Council proposed, in reply, to appoint three representatives of its own, together with the secretaries of the Co-ordinating Committee and the London Area Council, to meet three representatives of the People's Council in what it emphasised was to be an informal conference. The Co-ordinating Committee approved the meeting, which was heavily weighted in favour of the Board, but at the same time it did not offer its wholehearted co-operation to a body which it still described as primarily a 'political organisation'.⁴⁹ In the secretary's report of May 1938 it was wondered 'if any useful purpose (could) be served by continuing these discussions'.

At a conference between the two bodies in April 1938, the following understanding was reached: 1) It was accepted that the Jewish People's Council was in no way affiliated to any political body. 2) That one organisation was desirable. 3) That the object of this organisation should be to combat anti-Semitism according to British traditions and ideals. 4) That the title of such an organisation should clearly set out these objectives. 5) That the organisation should function under the Board of Deputies.

The Board of Deputies was under pressure from various Jewish

groups to meet the People's Council. This pressure was summed up in a resolution to the Co-ordinating Committee from Cardiff.

We, the Cardiff branch of the Workers Circle Friendly Society, at our General Meeting held at the Central Hotel, Cardiff, on April 3 1938, decided to support the proposal of a common United Front of Jewry against Fascism and anti-Semitism and we strongly urge you to meet with the Jewish Peoples Council to plan an extensive campaign. In view of recent tragic events in Austria which has brought home to us bitterly the spread of anti-Jewish persecution by Fascism, we are therefore convinced that the time is long past when Jewry could afford to be divided. We believe that the best interests of the Jewish People will be served and achieved if a United Jewish body will strengthen the struggle of our people against those who seek to defame and destroy them.⁵⁰

However the Board was determined to meet the Peoples Council only on its own terms, and these amounted to the complete domination of the Board over the Peoples Council. This is in fact what happened, The Peoples Council was to be liquidated.⁵¹

The Peoples Council expressed anxiety during the negotiations since there was no guarantee that its point of view would be put forward, and instead proposed an interim period of six months in which they would work in conjunction with the Area Council.⁵² In fact the two bodies had worked together, interchanging speakers, for some time.

The Board of Deputies seemed to have a tough fight on its hands. In January 1939 it was reported to the Jewish Defence Committee (the new name for the Co-ordinating Committee. The change had occurred in November 1938.) that

Since the commencement of these negotiations as a result of the impression created in the public mind, the Jewish Peoples Council had received sustained financial support and he (Mr Horowitz, reporting to the committee) considered that while these funds lasted the negotiations would not mature.⁵³

Of course, what was meant by this observation was that negotiations favourable to the Board of Deputies would not mature. While the Peoples Council had money, they had the strength to resist the domination of the Board. All the Board had to do, though, was to wait until the money ran out and then it could continue negotiations on its own terms.

While negotiations were in abeyance, the Board restated its policy towards the Peoples Council, but in doing so it produced a major modification in its stand against anti-Semitism. The final shift to a 'fight for democracy' had occurred.

The general line of the policy which has been followed is that anti-Semitism is to be attacked in whatever shape or form and from whatever source it comes, quite apart from any other ideology with

which it may be tied up...pressure of events has made certain modifications necessary, (mainly) in the assertion of the proposition that the resistance to and fight against anti-Semitism is identified and co-extensive with the fight for democracy.⁵⁴

One is here reminded of a term used by Harold Laski to define the socialist attitude towards Liberalism in the nineteenth century. It was, he thought, "one more particular of history masquerading as a universal."⁵⁵

Perhaps the same could be said of the leadership of Anglo-Jewry. And perhaps this could be said also, that as its appeal to the particular became more apparent, so, then, did its masquerade as a universal become more strident. The Board of Deputies was increasingly seen as representing its own interests, those of a particular class in society. As this feature became more apparent, in the final year of peace in Europe, so its appeal widened in an attempt to save face and restore its prestige. Perhaps even 'democracy' had to be saved.

The campaign to resist the provocative anti-Semitism of the B.U.F. had been organised by the people of the East End of London, and in a like manner, by the people of Cheetham Hill in Manchester, as we shall see. Of the two organisations described above, only the Board of Deputies existed at the end of 1939, to see the beginning of war against Fascism and to witness the slaughter of six million

Jews in Europe.

* * * * *

The position of the Board of Deputies was mirrored by the Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews, the equivalent body for the area, and, as in the East End of London, it was not the local Jewish leadership but the community that had to organise the defence against anti-Semitism, often in the face of the very body of people, the community leaders, who should have been in the vanguard of such action.

There was quite a strong link between the Board of Deputies in London and the leadership of the Jewish community in Manchester. Neville Laski, the President of the Board of Deputies, came from Manchester, where the local Laski family was prominent in local Jewish affairs, and he was able to exert some influence in the city. For example, the warnings Laski gave to the Jews, to stay away from B.U.F. meetings, which were said in his capacity as President of the Board of Deputies, were repeated by him for local consumption in Manchester.

In March 1935, Nathan Laski, this time in his capacity as Hon. President of the Zionist Central Council, provided the opening speech at a conference of Zionist Workers in Manchester and Salford. He wanted young people to take note of what was happening in England, he said, but did not wish for a moment that they should participate

in Mosley's meetings. Mosley should, instead, be confronted by arguments.⁵⁶ It was at this meeting that Laski threw down a challenge to Mosley to name the 'International Jews' who were measuring everything against the good interests of the country. A month later Nathan Laski issued a statement in reply to Mosley's attacks on Jews in Manchester and other parts of the North of England. Speaking as a 'leader of Jewry in Manchester' he appealed to Jews to treat Mosley "With the disregard he deserves" the next time he appeared in Manchester.⁵⁷

The same warning came from Nathan Laski in May 1936, when he again spoke on behalf of Jewish leaders in Manchester:

We, the Council of Manchester and Salford Jews, deprecate strongly any Jewish young men going to Blackshirt meetings and creating a disturbance. We admit that, so long as the Jewish community is not attacked by the Fascists, they have a right to express their opinions, as has every body of people, and so long as they keep within that boundary the Jewish people have nothing to complain of.⁵⁸

There were at the same time however, signs of differences of opinion amongst Jewry in Manchester. Frank Allaun, later to become a Labour Party M.P. for the city, wrote to the Jewish Chronicle concerning what he felt to be an opinion increasingly held among Jews.

That is to the effect that we should rally ourselves with the other opponents of Mosley who will also suffer if this rapidly growing menace develops further. We can co-operate with these on the issue of civil liberties.⁵⁹

This, of course, was anathema to the leadership of the Jewish community in Manchester, since by 'other opponents' Allaun was clearly referring to the United Front and the I.L.P. and the C.P.G.B. as well as the National Council of Civil Liberties.

In fact the position of the leadership of the Jewish community in Manchester had reflected that taken by the Board of Deputies right from the beginning, when the B.U.F. began to make its presence felt in the city. In 1933, at a Communal Council meeting of Manchester and Salford Jews, the body which assumed the leadership of the Jewish community in Manchester, Laski accused individual Jews who rushed into print of showing Jewry in a bad light and breeding anti-Semitism. The chairman of the meeting said it was time for the Council to prevent anyone writing on a 'Communal matter' (i.e. anti-Semitism in the community or proposals for dealing with such manifestations) without consulting the Council, which, he claimed, was the only representative body of Manchester and Salford Jews. The meeting decided to form a Press Committee to check on statements to the Press.⁶⁰

The Council became so defensive over the issue of anti-Semitism that in May 1934, when a member proposed the formation of a sub-committee "to ascertain the extent of anti-Semitism in this area and to formulate means to combat it", the chairman, Mr Herbert Nathan, asked

the proposer not to press the matter, which was then withdrawn.⁶¹ When the Communal Council received a deputation from the executive committee of the British Union of Democrats, which requested joint action with the Communal Council to organise a meeting to coincide with a visit of Mosley to the city, the Council declined to participate. Instead it was agreed to send an official shorthand writer to attend Mosley's meeting and report back to the Council. No further action was taken.⁶²

In spite of the physical attacks and intimidations of Jews in the city, Nathan Laski asked Jewish people not to be alarmed at the activities of the Fascists, "The Fascist question was not a Jewish question" he said, and he asked people to place their faith in the hands of the police "who would use their best endeavour to see there was no breach of the peace."⁶³

In Manchester the fight against anti-Semitism and Fascism was very much in the hands of ordinary Jews and members of political parties and trade unionists, who felt they had little in common with the Communal Council. As early as October 1933 trade union delegates from the North of England met in Manchester to discuss problems of Fascism. Their main concern was the position of trade unionists in Austria, but they went on to discuss the best ways of combating the growth of Fascism in this country.⁶⁴ However it was another eight months before trade unionists considered taking action against the Fascists in Manchester. The Manchester and Salford Trades Council was approached in June 1934 by the Manchester Federation of the I.L.P.

and the Manchester C.P. with the suggestion that there should be a joint conference to determine future action.⁶⁵ Discussions between the Manchester Borough Labour Party, Manchester and Salford Trades Council and the Communist Party then took place, with the immediate aim of forming a joint counter demonstration to the proposed B.U.F. rally at Belle Vue on September 29th.⁶⁶ However, the Trades Council and the Labour Party were advised by the National Joint Labour Council that meetings with the Communist Party ought not to proceed and so the discussions came to an abrupt halt. The Communists and the I.L.P. however, went ahead with their own plans for a demonstration.⁶⁷

The Trades Council continued to adhere to the advice of the National Joint Labour Council, and, when a motion calling for a trade union anti-Fascist demonstration at the B.U.F. rally was put to the quarterly meeting of the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Trades Councils, it was opposed by A. Purcell, Secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, who secured the defeat of the motion.⁶⁸

In spite of these setbacks there was by now a measure of disagreement amongst the trades council delegates against the leadership on this issue. There was a stormy meeting in September 1934 at which many delegates spoke in favour of taking part in an anti-Fascist demonstration. A motion which called for such a demonstration was narrowly defeated. The leadership conceded however, that an indoor anti-Fascist rally of Labour and trade union members could take place, well away from any Fascist meeting.⁶⁹ The rally, organised by the Joint Council of Manchester Borough Labour Party and Manchester

and Salford Trades Council, was held on October 21st. Both organisations marched under the banner 'United Against Fascism'.⁷⁰

By this time the Communist Party and the I.L.P. in the city had formed a Manchester Anti-Fascist Campaign Committee, which was to hold a meeting three days before the B.U.F. rally in order to plan the details of a counter demonstration.⁷¹ When the meeting was held the following motion was passed:

This meeting of representatives of Manchester working class organisations emphatically protests against the attempts of the police to prohibit the march of contingents of Manchester workers to Ardwick Green on Saturday next. We absolutely deny the right of the police to prohibit the citizens of Manchester from peacefully marching in procession through the streets. We must assert this long established right of the British workers, which in no circumstances can be allowed to lapse.⁷²

We have already seen that anti-Fascists defied the police ban and rallied together on September 29th.⁷³ It was not only the Communist Party that attended the rally. Representatives of the Manchester Anti-War Council were present, as were those of the Youth Movement against War and Fascism.*

* One interesting sideline to the main anti-Fascist groups in the city was an organisation known as the 'Antidote to Fascism' which was formed in June 1934 by Dr Percy McDougall, a Manchester doctor,

The B.U.F. rally in September 1934 appeared to have jolted the Manchester and Salford Trades Council into action. Immediately after the rally the Trades Council applied for permission to hold an anti-Fascist demonstration at Platt Fields on October 21st.⁷⁵

By the spring of 1935 the leadership of the Trades Council had agreed to take part in discussions leading to the formation of a united anti-Fascist committee. A Manchester conference, attended by representatives from political, religious and other organisations, formed a provisional committee. During the meeting, fears were expressed of a further ban by the National Joint Labour Council, but it was stated that the desire was to create a wide anti-Fascist body which would be really representative of the mass of the people.⁷⁶

who had previously stood as an Independent candidate for the Rusholme ward in the city. McDougal claimed that 700 people had enrolled from all parts of the country. By all accounts the organisation seemed to fit into the second category of anti-Fascist groups, those whose motivating force was a defence of 'democracy'. "My aim", said McDougal, "is to form a body of people who are prepared to face Fascism and act, if it should be necessary, as a second line of police or special constables. I do not want anybody to fight or to interfere with the meetings." His literature stated that there is "no uniform except British nerve and muscle."⁷⁴ Nothing more was heard of the 'Antidote to Fascism' and the main anti-Fascist campaign continued to be carried out by the Labour movement in the city.

The Labour Party did not object to the formation of a joint anti-Fascist committee and three months later a joint conference against war and Fascism was held in Caxton Hall, Salford, attended by delegates of the Labour Party, trade unions and other organisations in Lancashire.⁷⁷

Since it was the Jewish area of Cheetham Hill in North Manchester that bore the brunt of Fascist activity, the trade union and Labour Party groups decided to organise their own anti-Fascist group in the area. This group became known as the North Manchester Co-ordinating Group Against Fascism, whose aim was to unite trade union, Labour, Liberal and Jewish organisations in opposition to the activities of the B.U.F. It was apparent, however, that members of the Communist Party were connected with the Co-ordinating Committee and took an active part in its work.⁷⁸ One of the first meetings organised by the Committee was held in Cheetham Town Hall on March 8th 1936, where the crowded meeting backed a demand for an official enquiry into the reasons for allowing the B.U.F. to hold a meeting in the same hall. A resolution was passed which demanded that all future Fascist applications for meetings in Municipal halls should be placed before the full city council and not be decided by the Town Hall Committee alone.⁷⁹

As well as anti-Fascist groups being organised within Manchester, there was also a move to establish an anti-Fascist movement covering a wider area of the North West. In May 1936 delegates of Labour parties, trade councils, co-operative societies and branches of the League of

Nations Union, from various parts of Lancashire, attended a conference called by the Exchange Division Labour Party in Manchester.⁸⁰ The conference decided to form a Northern Council Against Fascism, whose main purpose would be to co-ordinate the many different groups. A provisional committee was elected and the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee became an area committee of the Northern Council. The links between the two bodies were solidified by the election of Mr Carl Ross, secretary of the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee as treasurer of the Northern Council.⁸¹

The North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee held a meeting at Cheetham Public Hall shortly after the formation of the Northern Council, at which it was again pointed out that the Fascists had been allowed to use the same hall for another of their meetings. A resolution was passed protesting at the Corporations' action in once more letting the hall, in spite of the Committee's previous representation to the city authorities and 'knowing full well that the meeting must result in a provocation of the residents of the area.'⁸² The meeting also decided to supplement the protest by organising a petition for the residents of the area to sign. A month later the signatures of 3,500 local residents were attached to the following petition sent to the Lord Mayor of Manchester:

That in view of the fact that the Fascists have again been given permission to hold a meeting in the Cheetham area in spite of a tremendous protest aroused by their last visit, we, the general public of the North Manchester area,

strongly protest to the city authorities against their action in again letting a public building to the said organisation, knowing full well that the meeting must result in the provocation of the residents of that area, and therefore we request that permission for the meeting be withdrawn.⁸³

The deputation which took the petition to the Lord Mayor consisted of the chairman and treasurer of the Northern Council; the secretary of the North Manchester Committee and delegates from the Taylors and Garments Workers Union; the Manchester No2 branch of the A.U.U.; the Workers Circle, and the Waterproof and Garment Workers Union.⁸⁴

The petition was to no avail however, since the Town Hall Committee, by a unanimous vote, decided to take no action in regard to the protest.⁸⁵

The Northern Council, using the precedent of the ban on Fascist uniforms in a public park imposed by the Manchester City Council,⁸⁶ attempted to obtain a similar ban on uniforms worn at a B.U.F. meeting at the Free Trade Hall in November. The Northern Council sent a petition to such effect to the Lord Mayor, which was signed by, among others, Professor J.L. Stocks, newly elected Vice Chancellor of Liverpool University, his wife, and many members of the city council and Manchester University staff.⁸⁷ However the petition was handed in too late for any action to be taken by the City Council.

The Northern Council, in its first report in September 1936, detailed the work which had been carried out since its inception in May. Lancashire was chosen out of the whole of the North of England, the report said, as the venue for most of the meetings and demonstrations, because of the Fascist concentration in the county.⁸⁸ Two months later the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee issued its first report. As a constituent part of the Northern Council, it had organised meetings both in and outside of Manchester and had co-operated with political organisations in Blackpool, Birkenhead and Bury in getting Blackshirt meetings banned. The Committee had also started to issue a newsheet called Mosley Exposed.⁸⁹ Circulars protesting against local Fascist meetings were issued regularly and local instances of anti-Semitism were publicised and reported to the authorities. It was reported that 30 different organisations were affiliated to the Committee, of which eight were trade unions and nine were Friendly Societies. Through the affiliated bodies, the Committee claimed to represent between 15,000 and 16,000 people.⁹⁰

In February 1937 the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee organised a meeting in Cheetham Town Hall to consider ways and means of 'resisting further Fascist provocation'.⁹¹ An invitation was sent to the Jewish Peoples Council in London to provide a speaker for the meeting and the Council decided to send their secretary, Mr Pearce.⁹² Other speakers at the meeting were Alderman George Titt, an ex-Lord Mayor of the city and Mr C Ross of the Co-ordinating Committee.

The main purpose of the meeting was to organise all the various organisations in North Manchester into one central committee. There was a call for local Jewry to definitely associate itself with the work of the Northern Council. The meeting had in mind, particularly, the Communal Council, which had consistently refused to associate itself with the Committee's work. In one sense the meeting was a failure, in that no decision was taken regarding the formation of a central committee. However, a resolution was passed calling on the local civic authorities to ban the use of public halls for Fascist meetings.⁹³ The meeting was significant in that it clearly revealed the division between the official leadership of the Jewish community, the Communal Council, and large sections of the community itself, who gave their support to the activities of the Committee. Mr Pearce, of the Jewish Peoples Council said, on his return to London, that he was particularly gratified to see the number of Jewish organisations present at the meeting and the realisation by the delegates of the necessity for the Jewish people to undertake their own defence against Fascism.⁹⁴

The divisions between the official Jewish leadership in Manchester and the Jewish community at large were aired yet again when the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee organised a meeting in July 1937 in Cheetham Public Hall, at which Professor H. Levy of London University gave a talk on 'Should the Jews Fight Fascism'. He called those Jews who said "keep quiet - do nothing about Fascism" traitors to their race who were aiding and abetting the destruction of the

Jewish population in this country. He said that the only way for Anglo-Jewry was to unite and to accept the hand of any and every section of the non-Jewish population which was ready to fight against Fascism and anti-Semitism.⁹⁵

In September 1937 yet another appeal to the local Jewish leadership was made. This time it was even more direct. An audience of 400 people in Cheetham Park heard Councillor A.G. Pollitt, representing the National League of Young Liberals, and Mr Ben Ainly, representing the Communist Party in Manchester, catalogue the most recent examples of anti-Semitism in the area. The meeting, held under the auspices of the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee, passed a resolution "calling upon the Council of Manchester and Salford Jews to co-operate with the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee in the work they are doing to combat Fascism."⁹⁶

The appeal was read out to the monthly meeting of the Council of Manchester and Salford Jews, which decided not to take any action, save that of resolving to adhere to the same policy as before.⁹⁷

The Jewish Council had, however, been acting on its own to combat anti-Semitism. In September 1936, two months after the formation of the Board of Deputies Co-ordinating Committee, the Communal Council decided to form a local committee for Jewish defence.⁹⁸ A meeting was held at Frankenburg House, Cheetham Hill Road, in the month and was attended by Jewish Friendly Society representatives who were asked for their advice and co-operation in meeting the

threats to Jewry. After a long discussion the following motion was passed:

That this representative body will welcome the energetic co-operation of all sections of the Community with the Council of Manchester and Salford Jews in the work of the Co-ordinating Committee for Jewish Defence in Manchester and district, for defending Jewish honour and combating attacks against it.⁹⁹

The meeting in Frankenburg House was the prelude to a much larger meeting held one month later at the Great Synagogue in Cheetham Hill Road, and attended by representatives of Synagogues, Friendly Societies, Zionist bodies and 'Jewish organisations of every kind.'¹⁰⁰ The opening address was given by Neville Laski, the President of the Board of Deputies, who outlined the work of the various committees and sub-committees of the Board of Deputies and the steps taken to counter anti-Jewish statements and writings by the holding of public meetings, the publication of pamphlets and replying to attacks in the Press. Laski also spoke of the work carried out by the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies. He ended his address with an appeal to the Jewish community for discipline and cohesion and urged the support of the Defence Fund.¹⁰¹

Discipline and cohesion within the Jewish community on the matter of defence were two quite separate problems however. While the Communal Council attempted to impose its own discipline by adhering

strictly to its policy of non interference with Fascists, this did lend itself particularly well to a cohesiveness and unity with other Jewish groups, since the Communal Council was becoming increasingly isolated from ordinary Jewish opinion in the local community.

The leaders of Jewry in Manchester on occasion did in fact refuse to take even the very limited steps of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies. In the same month that the 'Battle of Cable Street' occurred in the East End of London and the B.U.F. street corner meetings were increasing in Cheetham Hill, the executive committee of the Communal Council resolved to suspend all propaganda meetings under the auspices of the London Co-ordinating Committee. The reason for this seemingly absurd decision was that the Public Order Bill had been introduced into parliament and it was felt that, on the advice of the Chief Constable of Manchester, whom Nathan Laski had talked to before the meeting, action of any kind might undermine the due process of the bill through parliament.¹⁰² Local defence work, it seemed, would now concentrate on the distribution of leaflets. Further work of some description was envisaged, since the meeting agreed to request a sum of £100 for defence work from the London Co-ordinating Committee, which had agreed to bear such expenses, while the expenditure to date of the Communal Council amounted to just £30. Any envisaged defence work would not however imply any weakening of the disciplined approach, since the same meeting resolved not to co-operate with the Manchester Council Against Fascism. The very same week in which this meeting was held an actual pig's head had been found tied to one of the doors of the High Crumpsall

Synagogue in the city. Fascist leaflets were found strewn about the paths nearby. The Communal Council decided however, to keep the news of the incident out of the press.¹⁰³

In the face of increased Fascist provocation in the Jewish districts of Manchester in the Autumn of 1936, and the resulting action by organised anti-Fascist groups, the Communal Council issued a major appeal for a unified and centralised effort in combating anti-Semitism.

The Council stated that:

Mere isolation and fractional action will only weaken and discredit us; unity and centralised leadership, on the other hand, will strengthen us and bring us success. The Council therefore calls upon you, collectively and individually, not only for your loyal support, but also to give united adherence to its leadership.

If you wish to combat and finally defeat anti-Semitism, you must unswervingly follow the Councils' direction and its direction alone.¹⁰⁴

The message ended with an appeal to Jewish people to inform the Communal Council of any experiences of anti-Semitism.

In November 1936 the Communal Council appointed a Mr David Rowland to the post of secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee. Two months later he presented a report on the recent work of the committee. There was a reference to the memorandum on anti-Semitism in Manchester and

district which had been submitted to the President of the Board of Deputies, and the report also referred to a protest meeting against anti-Semitism which had been held at Blackley Institute in Manchester, before the ban on protest meetings. Mr Rowland also reported on the arrangements for the further distribution of literature on a house to house basis in certain districts of Manchester.¹⁰⁵ Within a short time it was apparent that the work of the Co-ordinating Committee was such that it was felt that a salaried organiser should be appointed. The question was raised at the monthly executive meeting in February 1937, at which it was decided to appoint someone at a weekly salary of £2.¹⁰⁶ Rowland himself took up the position and became secretary and organiser of the Co-ordinating Committee.

Throughout 1937 the policy of the Communal Council remained consistent. Leaflets continued to be distributed, representations were made to local authorities concerning anti-Semitic slogans which appeared from time to time, and the Committee had set up a Speakers Class for training Jewish speakers. The policy of non co-operation with anti-Fascist groups was re-affirmed when a request for co-operation from the North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee Against Fascism was flatly turned down in September 1937.¹⁰⁷

At this time, however, one can detect a slight shift of emphasis which paralleled that within the Board of Deputies itself. The Manchester Co-ordinating Committee began to recruit contacts, Jewish and non-Jewish, in the areas of Manchester affected by the B.U.F.'s campaign, who agreed to act as 'observers' on behalf of the Committee.

The contacts would report any Fascist meetings or the distribution of anti-Semitic literature. Although in the main the contacts were made by introductions and recommendations, observers from 'political bodies' were also used.¹⁰⁸ This was the first reference to any association with political bodies of any sort. Since only the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party had continuously kept a watchful eye on the development of the B.U.F. in the area, it is reasonable to assume that the Labour Party, at the very least, was used in this way.

Added to this was the fact that members of the Manchester Co-ordinating Committee now attended Fascist meetings. Whereas attendance, even if only to observe meetings, had previously been condemned, this activity was now openly encouraged. Reports of the meetings were sent to the Co-ordinating Committee in London.¹⁰⁹

The long process of moving from a position whereby anti-Semitism was removed from any political context to that of recognising that somehow, 'democracy' was endangered by the presence of a Fascist party and that anti-Semitism was a part of that danger, had begun. The shift in emphasis can be clearly discerned if one notes the actions of Nathan Laski in March 1936, when he successfully prevented Mr Houston, a B.U.F. member noted for his particularly virulent anti-Semitism, from speaking at a Fascist meeting in the middle of the Jewish area in Cheetham Hill. The meeting itself went ahead as planned and it was of no concern to Nathan Laski or anyone else on the Communal Council that it did take place, as long as Houston

was replaced by another speaker, which he was, through the help of Jewish members of the city council.¹¹⁰ Compare this with the successful attempt by the Co-ordinating Committee to prevent a Fascist meeting in Withington in July 1938. The meeting, which was to be held in a public house, was cancelled by the Wilson Brewery Co. after an appeal was made to them by the Committee.¹¹¹ By July 1938, in the eyes of the Communal Council, anti-Semitism was synonymous with Fascism.

In the annual report of 1938/9 it was acknowledged that the secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee and other helpers had attended every Fascist meeting of importance in the city. Defence literature had been distributed at the meetings. The Committee had by now even gone further than this and had begun to organise immediate meetings to counter B.U.F. meetings in Stevanson Square. where literature was also distributed.¹¹²

Such activity had, as we have seen, already been organised by anti-Fascist groups in the city. Their continual overtures to the Communal Council had been spurned and their activities condemned. Now, on the eve of the Second World War, the Council was beginning to recognise, implicitly, the strength of the anti-Fascist case.

CHAPTER ELEVENFASCISM IN A PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

We have dealt in some detail with the history of the B.U.F. in the North of England and the opposition it aroused. It is now time to consider how the State, in both a central and a local sense, viewed Fascism in the 1930's. The State's major response to Fascism was, of course, the Public Order Act, and it is the legal background to that Act, the passing of it by parliament, and its use by the local authorities in Manchester to which we now turn.

The Public Order Act came into force on January 1st 1937. Most parliamentarians were in no doubt that it was designed specifically to deal with the British Union of Fascists and the problems created by their wearing of uniforms and the meetings they held.¹

Pressure on the government to deal with the problem of public order had in fact started to build up as early as 1934. In January of that year the Home Secretary was asked to take steps to ban the wearing of uniforms by political bodies.² He was questioned on various other occasions as to what action he proposed to take and the full cabinet considered the problem of public order arising out of the activities of the B.U.F. at the Olympia meeting in June 1934.³ The previous month the Home Office had instructed the Special Branch to provide a detailed weekly report on the activities of several movements which made use of uniforms. Of all these 'shirt' movements, special

attention was paid to the B.U.F.⁴ In June of 1934, after the riot at the Olympia meeting the Home Secretary was asked if the government was prepared to take steps to maintain free speech, and also if he was prepared to extend the Firearms Act to cover the carrying of lethal weapons such as knuckledusters, loaded sticks and mounted razor blades.⁵

It was not just M.P.'s who were bringing pressure to bear on the government. As the preservation of public order became a more urgent matter, the government was forced to react in response to specific events. For example, it was in response to the events at Olympia that the Home Secretary suggested, in a statement to the House of Commons, that new legislation might be necessary for the purpose of preserving public order.⁶ Whether the reaction took the form of statements to the House of Commons or meetings with Opposition party leaders, the government was finding itself pressurised into doing something, even if it was not really sure what could be done.⁷

Another source of pressure on the government was that produced by organisations and groups outside parliament. Many anti-Fascist groups were formed all over the country, though, while the lobbying of M.P.'s formed part of their campaign, and, indeed, some M.P.'s were members of those groups, they did not, because of their left wing nature, have the legitimacy or respectability of the towns and cities which sent deputations to London to petition the Home Secretary.⁸

The government, however, was very reluctant to take any sort of initiative in dealing with the growing number of incidents of violence and intimidation at B.U.F. meetings, whether caused by the B.U.F. or their opponents, or to legislate against the wearing of political uniforms.

It can be shown that, through an analysis of existing case law and statute law, the authorities had no need of the Public Order Act. It can also be demonstrated that many people realised that existing legislation was adequate and that Manchester in particular showed the rest of the country that before the passing of the Act, the activities of the British Union of Fascists could be contained by the use of that existing legislation, together with a certain amount of local initiative. If this was the case, one must answer the question, why was the Public Order Act passed? To answer that question an attempt will be made to demonstrate that the passing of the Act does in fact tell us something about the nature of parliamentary democracy and its use of, and recourse to, law; that the strengthening of the executive arm of government in such a way was not merely a by-product of the passing of the Act, but rather of central importance in any analysis of British parliamentary democracy in the inter-war years.

Statute law laid down in the nineteenth century, firstly as a result of civil unrest caused by rapid industrial and social change, and secondly as a result of the growing importance of various towns and cities outside London, provide a starting point for this discussion.

It was a result of fears of unrest that in 1819 parliament passed the Unlawful Drilling Act.⁹ This act prohibited unauthorised meetings for the purpose of military training or exercise. The punishment for assisting such activities was transportation for up to seven years or imprisonment for two years. People attending such meetings only had to face the latter punishment. Justices of the Peace, or constables, could disperse meetings covered by this act. In the case of Redford v Birley and Others,¹⁰ which amounted to an appeal against conviction under the Illegal Drilling Act by people present at the infamous 'Peterloo' meeting in Manchester in 1819, it was decided that 'military training and exercise' could include the formation of ranks. In the summing up of that case it was stated concerning the meeting at St. Peter's Field that

When we consider that these country people came marching in this way, through the town of Manchester, bearing flags and banners inscribed with mottoes, not merely containing high sounding words...but inscriptions of 'No Corn Laws'; 'Better die like freemen than be sold like slaves' and other various expressions of defiance, it is manifest, that there was an avowed intention to insult those who were intrusted with the administration of justice and the laws.¹¹

In 1934, it was quite evident that Mosley was organising the British Union of Fascists along military lines. Training and Drilling, reveille and inspection, were regular features of life at Black House, the B.U.F. headquarters in Chelsea. The 'National Defence Force' and the

formation of a Fascist 'motor corps' and 'air force' (however incapable they were of being used in any real military sense) aroused the suspicions of many people. Anti-Fascist groups found it very easy to attack the B.U.F. military organisation.

It was in response to a question in the House of Commons regarding the ownership of armoured cars by the B.U.F. that the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour, pointed out the existence of the Unlawful Drilling Act of 1819. He ended his reply by saying "I have no reason to suppose that appropriate action would not be taken under that Act should occasion arise."¹²

Yet in June 1934, five months after Gilmour's statement, Mr Adams, M.P. speaking in a Commons Supply Debate on the B.U.F. said

...I say deliberately that a prosecution could certainly be sustained against him (Mosley), and against the Press which nourishes him in his various activities. I think it is pertinent to ask whether, if the Communists behaved in precisely the same way, they would have precisely the same measure of toleration. I think that that is a fair question. What would have happened supposing that the Communists had got special cars, which have been described, I believe, as armoured cars? What would have happened if Communists had drilled in the same manner? What has become of the Illegal Drilling Act? I do not think that the conscience of this country is going to allow Sir Oswald Mosley indefinitely to get away with the slogan

'Britain First' as though that is the sum total of all political wisdom and the excuse for every kind of social disorder.¹³

As far as actual public processions were concerned, it is 19th Century legislation that one must turn to again. In 1847 the Town Police Clauses Act was passed,¹⁴ which initially only applied to towns where it was incorporated in a local act. However, the sections which are of relevance here, (ss 21-29) were applied to all boroughs and urban districts by the Public Health Act of 1875. It is useful to quote the relevant passage here.

Section 21. (relating to powers to make orders for preventing obstruction in the streets during public processions etc.) The commissioners may from time to time make orders for the route to be observed by all carts, carriages, horses and persons and for preventing obstruction of the streets, within the limits of the special Act, in all times of public processions, rejoicings or illuminations, and in any case where the streets are thronged or liable to be obstructed, and may also give directions to the constables for keeping order and preventing any obstruction of the streets in the neighbourhood of theatres and other places of public resort, and every wilful breach of any such order shall be deemed a separate offence against this Act, and every person committing any such offence shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding forty shillings.

Section 28. Every person who publicly offers for sale or distribution, or exhibits to public view

any profane, indecent, or obscene book, paper, print, drawing or representation or sings any profane or obscene song or ballad, or uses any profane or obscene language...¹⁵

It was certainly not unusual for this act to be invoked for public processions. Usually processions of a religious nature were involved. What we do know for certain is that this act was not used, when it might properly have been, against the B.U.F. For example, the B.U.F. in Manchester deliberately marched through the poorer Jewish area of Cheetham Hill in a provocative manner. i.e. wearing uniforms and acting in a hostile manner towards the local community. The words underlined here are important, for it was deliberate provocation that was the central issue in the case of Beatty v Gillbanks.¹⁶

In 1881 William Beatty, a Captain and leader of the Salvation Army, marched some of his followers in formation, headed by a band together with flags and banners, through the streets of Weston-super-Mare. The Salvation Army was often opposed by an organised band of people called 'The Skeleton Army' and sometimes fights broke out. In one particular incident a 'disorderly and riotous mob' of over 2000 people had gathered and fighting and stone throwing broke out. The police were overpowered, but after reinforcements arrived the crowd was dispersed. None of the members of the Salvation Army, including Beatty, were seen to commit any overt act of violence. A notice was served on Beatty and copies of the notice posted in the town, to the effect that no assemblies of people were to be held that could lead to a

disturbance of the peace. The Salvation Army ignored this notice and held another procession, which also provoked opposition. The police then intervened, though they acknowledged that the Salvation Army had not committed any overt act of violence. Beatty, together with others, were bound over to keep the peace for twelve months. Beatty appealed against this decision and won. In awarding judgement for the appellants however, Justice Field said:

I entirely concede that everyone must be taken to intend the natural consequences of his own acts, and it is clear to me that if this disturbance of the peace was the natural consequence of acts of the appellants they would be liable, and the justices of the peace would have been right in binding them over...a man may be convicted for doing a lawful act if he knows that his doing it may cause another to do an unlawful act.¹⁷

The case of Beatty v Gillbanks is important here because it relates to the case of Wise v Dunning of 1902,¹⁸ an appeal against a decision in which a Protestant lecturer and Pastor in Liverpool was bound over to be of good behaviour after holding meetings in Catholic areas in Liverpool, and making speeches which were found to be offensive to the large numbers of Catholics in the city. Lord Alverston, one of the appeal judges, in deciding that the magistrates had acted correctly, quoted from Justice Fields remark in the case of Beatty v Gillbanks. Lord Alverston also quoted from Reg. v Justices of Cork.¹⁹ and Reg. v Justices of Londonderry.²⁰ in order to make the point

that in different cases, before different judges, the 'essential condition' had been stated, "That there must be an act of the defendant, the natural consequences of which, if his act n^ot be unlawful in itself, would be to produce an unlawful act by other persons."

Another case, which the judge did not refer to, was that of McAva v Magistrates of Edinburgh (1913) S.C. 1073, the result of which has been put very succinctly by Joseph Baker.

There are certain districts in certain Cities in which a large majority of the population belong to a certain race, or hold a certain creed or faith, and if a person holding other views, goes there to promulgate his opinions as regards that race, creed or faith, although he has a perfect right to hold those opinions, and although in a proper place he has a right to express them, his doing so in that particular neighbourhood would certainly lead to a breach of the peace. In such a case, if a man took up his stand and began to discourse on such lines, the police would be entitled at once to move him on.²¹

Although there was a local act in force in Liverpool, the Liverpool Improvement Act of 1842, which dealt with 'threatened, abusive, and insulting words and behaviour whereby a breach of the peace might be occasioned' this local act was not invoked or mentioned by the local magistrates, and the Appeal Judges in the Wise v Dunning case, although noting its existence, did not find good reason for the

appellant to be charged under the act.

In July 1936, Mr Dingle Foot, in another Commons Supply Debate, referred to the case of Wise v Dunning and drew a comparison between that case and problems arising from "...anti-Jewish speakers holding meetings in the East End of London, largely populated by Jews." He expressed the hope that the authorities would make full use of the powers which it clearly possessed in that type of provocation.²³ In the same debate, Mr Herbert, M.P., who was a qualified solicitor, referred to the 1839 judgement in the case of Regina v Vincent regarding unlawful assembly. Using references from Kenny's Outlines of Criminal Law he showed that the case covered public meetings, military style of formation and the possession of offensive weapons. Herbert was aware that Regina v Vincent might be referred to as a 'misleading case' but told the House that he was sure of his ground. In any case, he reminded the House, he had taken a First Class in the Honour School of Jurisprudence at Oxford.²³

Herbert went on to refer, obliquely, to the recent case at Oxford, where a B.U.F. meeting had been broken up and several people injured, and wondered

Whether there is not some way by which the existing law of the land can be applied, in proper and legitimate fashion, not to the subordinates of this leader (Mosley), but to the leader himself, so we know whether, by training these young men to do these things,

he has laid himself open to the charge of committing the indictable misdemeanour of causing an unlawful assembly or creating an illegal conspiracy.²⁴

Herbert ended by saying that the Debate was about the administration of justice and the proper enforcement of the law.

Another point raised in the same Debate concerned what had come to be known as the 'Trenchard Ban'. In 1931 the Commissioner of Police, Lord Trenchard, acting under the powers of the Metropolitan Police Act of 1839,²⁵ had banned public meetings outside Labour Exchanges. The Commissioner was able to give directions under the Act to police constables, without the direction being made public. Here was a clear example of the willingness of the authorities to use legislation (in this case against unemployed people) in order to preserve public order when they thought the circumstances required it.

Use was made of existing legislation to deal with disorder at public meetings in two important cases which came before the appeal judges in the 1930's. The first concerns the organising of public meetings by members of the Communist Party in Wales in 1934. The case went to appeal and in Thomas v Sawkins²⁶ it was decided that the police had the right to enter a public meeting, even if it was against the wishes of the organisers of the meeting. When the case went before the local magistrates court the justices decided that if the police were not present at the meeting in question (which was called to protest against the Incitement to Disaffection Bill and to demand the dismissal of the

Chief Constable of the County of Glamorgan) there would be seditious speeches and other incitements to violence, and breaches of the peace would occur. It was decided that the police were entitled to enter and remain in the hall for the meeting.

In dismissing the appeal, Chief Justice Lord Hewart, quoting from various previous judgements, said:

I think that there is quite sufficient ground for the proposition that it is part of the preventive power and therefore, part of the preventive duty, of the police in cases where there are such reasonable grounds of apprehension as the justices have found here, to enter and remain on private premises. It goes without saying that the powers and duties of the police are directed, not to the interests of the police, but to the protection and welfare of the public.²⁷

Sir Horace Edmund Avory, another of the appeal judges, commented that "In my opinion, no express statutory authority is necessary where the police have reasonable grounds to apprehend a breach of the peace..."²⁸

On March 12th 1933, as we have seen, the police entered a B.U.F. meeting at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, after disorder had broken out. The police ordered the Fascist Defence Force out of the hall and Mosley followed them.²⁹ Mosley prevented the police from entering any of his meetings in the hall for over a year after that incident.³⁰

One may only speculate why it was a case against Communists in which the law regarding the right of police to enter meetings was clearly defined, when Mosley had stopped police entering his meetings for some considerable time previous to the Thomas v Sawkins decision, meetings at which there were 'reasonable grounds of apprehension'. In any case, we have already seen that Mosley could keep within the bounds of law and yet still be prosecuted if it could be shown that he had reasonable grounds to assume that his lawful actions would cause others to commit unlawful acts. This certainly occurred at many of Mosley's meetings.

The second case which reached the appeal courts in the 1930's was that of Duncan v Jones.³¹ Mrs Katherine Duncan held a meeting near to the entrance of an unemployed training centre in May 1933. The meeting was apparently connected with the National Unemployed Workers Movement, and on the same day, after the meeting, there was a disturbance inside the centre. The superintendent of the centre linked the meeting with the disturbance and when Duncan tried to hold another meeting in the same place, she was stopped by the police. In the following year Duncan again held a meeting outside the centre, to defend the right of free speech and public meetings. When she refused to move to a site 175 yards away, the police arrested her.³²

Duncan appealed to the Quarter Sessions, where it was found that
 a) she must have known of the probable consequences of holding the meeting; b) the respondent reasonably apprehended a breach of the

peace; c) it became his duty to prevent the holding of the meeting; d) by attempting to hold the meeting, Duncan obstructed the respondent when in the execution of his duty.

It is perhaps interesting to note that Dingle Foot and D.N. Pritt acted for Duncan in her appeal, both of whom made repeated attempts in the House of Commons to draw to the attention of the Home Secretary the fact that existing legislation was being ignored in relation to the B.U.F.

Lord Hewart, dismissing the case in the Appeal Court, referred to the "somewhat unsatisfactory" case of Beatty v Gillbanks and that although Pritt and Foot tried to draw conclusions from the case, he considered it to be of no relevance, and that a causal connection was clearly indicated between the meeting of May 1933 and subsequent disturbances.

There were many occasions when the B.U.F. meetings held on street corners, or on waste ground or common land provoked general disorder. Some examples, particularly in the Manchester area, have already been provided. In no case was the ruling in the case of Duncan v Jones used against any member of the B.U.F.

Finally, mention must be made of the 1908 Public Meetings Act, which did not refer to the holding of public meetings as such, but rather disruptions caused at public meetings. The relevant passage from this Act states that:

Any person who at a lawful public meeting acts in a disorderly manner for the purpose of preventing the transaction of the business for which the meeting was called together shall be guilty of an offence...and shall, on summary conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding £5, or to imprisonment not exceeding one month. Any person who incites others to do so as to an offence shall be guilty of a like offence.³³

The Times newspaper, shortly after the disturbances at the Olympia meeting in June 1934, commented:

There is a widespread feeling that the police authorities in London are neglecting the powers of preserving the peace embodied in the Public Meetings Act of 1908, which, it is recalled, were effectively invoked by the Manchester authorities in circumstances similar to those prevailing at Olympia on Thursday evening.³⁴

However, this negligence on the part of the police authorities did not extend to the activities of anti-Fascist groups. In September 1934 the editors of the Daily Worker were summonsed under the 1908 Public Meetings Act, after an article appeared in the paper with the heading "Deliver the death-blow to Fascism in Britain: Communist Party's stirring call to action". The article referred to the proposed Fascist meeting in Hyde Park on September 9th and continued:

The whole force of the Communist Party in London

will be thrown...into the task of bringing the tens of thousands of London's working class out on to the streets and into Hyde Park in such numbers and with such determination that there shall be no room in Hyde Park for Mosley's blackshirted hooligans nor toleration for the Government's increasing drive towards Fascism.³⁵

The summonses were dismissed.

From this brief survey of statute and case law, the following points emerge. It was illegal to hold meetings for the purpose of military training and exercise. The police had the power to control the routes etc, of public processions and any obstructions caused by public processions could be dealt with. The use of profane or obscene language was illegal and such language could include making speeches that were calculated to offend people nearby. In breaches of the peace, everyone must be taken to intend the natural consequences of their own acts. A person could be charged if that person's action, even if lawful in itself, produced an unlawful act by other persons. In the Metropolitan area, the Commissioner of Police had the power to ban public meetings and in all areas the police had the right to enter any public meetings, even if it was against the wishes of the organisers of the meeting. Disruptions at public meetings, caused with the intention of halting the proceedings of the meeting were illegal, as were incitements to others to stop meetings. This survey does not include local authority acts which may have increased the powers of the police in local areas, though of course reference has been made to the Liverpool Improvement Act of 1882.

In any case, it was apparent that in practice, no statutory authority was necessary to allow the police, with reasonable grounds, to prevent breaches of the peace (Thomas v Sawkins). This point was emphasised by the Home Secretary in March 1935, when the police did intervene, not against the B.U.F. but against their opponents. Anti-Fascist marchers attempted to walk from Hyde Park Corner to the Albert Hall, where the B.U.F. was holding a large meeting. The Commissioner of Police, with the approval of the Home Secretary, stated that there was no statute under which the orders were given, rather it was a matter of judgement and common sense.³⁶

It would seem that the authorities were not only prepared to make use of existing legislation regarding public order when it suited them, as in the case of the 'Trenchard Ban' or the use of the 1908 Public Meetings Act against the Daily Worker, but were prepared to go one step further and rely on nothing more than 'judgement and common sense' when they thought that circumstances required it. Where, one may ask, was the judgement and commonsense of the authorities when it came to the provocative Fascist anti-Semitic campaigns in Jewish districts?

It was not merely the fact that M.P.'s were aware of the existence of adequate legislation. The government itself acknowledged that the authorities had enough power at their disposal to deal with some aspects at least of public unrest. In May 1936, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that further powers were not necessary to deal with the problem of Fascists from different parts of the country

grouping together for the purpose of a mass meeting, when there was a possibility of a breach of the peace occurring.³⁷ Such breaches of the peace did occur because of those very reasons, and by 1936 the authorities, whether town or city councils, or the police themselves, should have had enough experience of Fascists grouping together for large meetings. Yet no action was taken.

The Manchester Guardian was one of the leading campaigners against the introduction of new legislation. Following the 1934 Olympia meeting, the paper reminded B.U.F. members who attended the meeting that existing law provided full powers to deal with wilful disturbance at public meetings.³⁸ In August the same year the paper commented that:

Those of us who live in cities where the police carry out their duties with tact and tolerance have not noticed any particular need for increasing their power to ban meetings, to control processions, or to prevent centralised demonstrations...we do not want another Sedition Bill full of unknown terrors.³⁹

Even when the Public Order Bill was introduced into parliament, the Manchester Guardian was quick to point out that "...we must be careful not to make it too easy for the police to prohibit public meetings in advance...on the whole it would seem that the less drastic the Bill is the better. The Fascist menace is not so bad that we need to make fundamental changes in the law, although we

need to make it more quickly responsive."⁴⁰

A more strident criticism came from the anti-Fascists in Manchester. When the Northern Council Against Fascism met in conference at Caxton Hall, Salford, the following statement was issued:

The Northern Council Against Fascism has taken an active part in arousing public opinion, and the Watch Committee of the Manchester City Council was the first public body to send a deputation to the Home Office on this question. But the Bill so drafted cannot meet with the approval of the defenders of democracy, for though it makes provision for the banning of uniforms and private armies, it also contains provisions which carry still further the invasion of democratic rights and personal liberties already commenced in such acts as the Sedition Act. The law officers of a pre-Fascist government are provided for the first time with a legal excuse for abolishing all progressive political organisations and confiscating their funds. For the first time for 100 years a free hand is to be given to the political agent provocateurs! And at the same time the organisers of Fascist meetings are to be supplied by the police with the names and addresses of all those who may venture to express their dissent from the brutal tenets of Fascism. The only legislative need at the moment is for the prohibition of political uniforms. It is therefore necessary that most serious consideration be given to the Public Order Bill, and that a strong fight be organised against the increasing forces that are menacing the traditional liberty of the British subject.⁴¹

The National Council for Civil Liberties adopted a similar critical approach. Representatives of the Council were present at the meeting in Caxton Hall and supported the statement issued by the Northern Council.⁴²

Attention focuses on the North of England, and on Manchester in particular, as the centre of action between the B.U.F. and their opponents on the one hand, and the authorities - the police, the city council, the watch committee etc. - on the other. It was in Manchester that the B.U.F. first came up against decisions made by the various bodies which curtailed their activities in such a way that, if the same attitudes had been adopted in other parts of the country, notably the East End of London, much of the subsequent conflict could have been avoided.

The first incident, in which the police, in this case, took a tough line, was one of the first mass indoor meetings that Mosley held.

The venue was the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on March 12th 1933. On that occasion, as we have seen, violence broke out after a member of the audience attempted to ask a question. The police, under the direction of Police Inspector Garner, did not hesitate to enter the hall and move the Fascists up the centre gangway. The Fascist Defence Force was asked to leave. Inspector Garner told Mosley that the police and not the Defence Force would keep the Fascists safe. However, Mosley decided that he, too, would follow the Defence Force, saying:

The trouble here tonight (a voice "was pieces of rubber truncheons") - was a small highly organised gang of Communists (boos). The police have not removed the Communists, but the Fascists, who have preserved order at three or four hundred meetings (a voice "with rubber"). When my men are ordered to leave, I leave also, thank you."⁴³

Following this conflict, Mosley refused to have the police watch over B.U.F. meetings in the building for over a year afterwards.

One of the main problems the authorities were faced with in dealing with public disorder was that, in dealing with problems of public order connected with one particular faction, say the B.U.F., they might also find themselves limiting the freedom of movement or speech etc. etc. of other, more innocent, political factions. If the B.U.F. was to be banned from using public halls, was this ban to include other political groups? If marches were banned, was the ban to include groups other than those which the bans were originally intended to operate against? Usually commonsense prevailed in Manchester, as was the case in May 1934, when the Manchester Watch Committee refused an application by the B.U.F. to hold a procession in the city on the same day as the proposed annual Labour May Day demonstration. The Watch Committee authorised the Labour demonstration because it was an annual tradition. The same committee banned a B.U.F. march because it realised that a Fascist demonstration in the vicinity on the same day would give rise to a great deal of provocation.⁴⁴ However, when

a general ban on all marches or demonstrations was imposed, it could be the case that groups whose activities would not normally lead to public disorder were affected.

We have already referred in some detail to the case in which a ban was placed on all political processions in Manchester on Saturday September 30th 1934, on which date the B.U.F. had arranged a rally at Belle Vue, Manchester.⁴⁵ The B.U.F. rally itself was only allowed to be held because of the intervention of the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour. The Manchester Watch Committee had unanimously decided that the people who convened the meeting should pay for whatever police protection was required. Neither the B.U.F. nor the Belle Vue authorities were prepared to accept such conditions and it looked as though the rally would not be held. However, the Home Secretary decided that the bill for police protection should be borne by the public, i.e. the Manchester ratepayers.

It was at this point that the Chief Constable of Manchester decided to ban all political processions on the day of the B.U.F. rally. It was obvious that this would affect the anti-Fascists more than anyone else, since the B.U.F. had no plans for a procession.⁴⁶ Efforts were made to have the ban on political processions lifted and, as we have seen, various deputations were made to the Home Office.⁴⁷ It is useful to quote from the leader column of the Manchester Guardian to illustrate what contemporary opinion had to say regarding the march ban.

...it may be wondered why the police should object to a peaceful procession. There can only be one reasonable explanation, although one is left to guess it. It is that the fascists wished to march through the streets to Belle Vue and that, having put a prohibition on them, the Chief Constable thought it only fair to impose a similar prohibition on their opponents. There would be this difference between the two processions, however. One would be a military display, a provocation and an incitement to order. The other would be an ordinary procession, almost as innocuous as a Sunday-school 'walk'.

...If the Fascists are not to march in the streets, are they to be allowed to march and parade (under police protection) in the Belle Vue grounds? And if they are, will it be open to anti-fascists to pay their shillings and claim a right to perform (under the same police protection) similar evolutions?... Are the anti-fascists to be allowed to march to Platt Fields on October 21st? Or does it require only an intimation by the fascists that they also wish to demonstrate that day, to have both processions prohibited? Some elucidation of the legal position is also desirable. The Chief Constable is understood to be acting under his undoubted powers to prevent obstruction of the streets. If this is good enough ground in the present case, and, if it is, how many processions now held would pass the test?⁴⁸

As we have seen, the ban on processions was defied and various anti-Fascist groups went ahead with their planned march. The Belle Vue episode showed that the Watch Committee was willing to take action

in advance of meetings and demonstrations in order to prevent events escalating into displays of violence and intimidation. However, the police, in their belief that they were being even-handed in their treatment of Fascists and anti-Fascists, restricted the legitimate and unprovocative actions of other political groups. The police continued to adhere to their belief in impartiality without stopping to think about the basic cause of civil disruption, i.e. Fascist provocation. For example, one significant result of the disruptions at B.U.F. meetings was the police attendance at the meetings of other political groups and parties. As a result of the disturbances at Hulme Town Hall on June 27th 1936, described in Chapter five by Nellie Driver, the police kept surveillance on Labour Party meetings in the city. A complaint was made by a city councillor at the monthly meeting of the Manchester Borough Labour Party in July, who said that a policeman had been present at each of the usual open-air Labour meetings in the area and had asked the chairman and each of the speakers to give his name and address before speaking and had insisted on the meeting being closed by 9.30 pm.⁴⁹ The question of such police action was raised in Parliament by Mr Rhys Davies, one of the Manchester M.P.'s, who said that:

I am not as critical of the police, as some people are, but I want to make it perfectly clear that we shall be very apprehensive if the police pursue that course throughout the country, and I should regard it as an offence to our intelligence, and as a serious blow to our liberties, if the police throughout the country took the names and addresses

of everyone speaking at an open-air gathering, unless of course it were in a place where such gatherings were prohibited.⁵⁰

It will be shown later that when the Public Order Bill became law the police immediately contacted left wing political groups whom the police considered were making use of 'political uniforms', though in fact were not, and suggested that they cease forthwith. Many civic authorities - local councils and watch committees - could clearly discern the nature of Fascist violence and provocation and decided to deal with it not, as the police did, with blanket restrictions and surveillance, but quite simply by placing restrictions on the Fascists.*

We have seen that, as early as the end of 1934, the B.U.F. was being

* A case which seems to have escaped the attention of historians scrutinising the Metropolitan Police files for the period is of interest here. A resident of Hampstead, London, complained to the police about two B.U.F. members marching in military formation with what looked like rifles. (This was after the passing of the Public Order Act). The police suggested to the man who complained that the Fascists were probably 'skylarking'. The police did follow up the case - but not against the Fascists. The police inspector who interviewed the man said "I judged during my conversation with him that he holds strong anti-Fascist views", and the man was reported to the Special Branch with the suggestion that his address might be useful.⁵¹

affected by the refusal of some local authorities to allow public halls to be used for Fascist meetings. Very quickly this ploy was adopted by local authorities up and down the country, and by 1936 had developed into a steady flow of decisions against the B.U.F. In January 1936 the B.U.F. was refused permission to use the town hall in Birmingham⁵² and in the same month magistrates in Carlisle refused an application for an occasional licence to enable the B.U.F. to hold a meeting in a local theatre.⁵³ Mosley was to have spoken at both meetings. Macclesfield Finance Committee adopted a similar policy.⁵⁴ A month later Bridlington Town Council reaffirmed a previously taken decision not to allow the B.U.F. to use any public hall in the town.⁵⁵ At the same time pressure from the local Labour movement resulted in Oxford City Council refusing the Oxford University Fascist Association permission to use the Town Hall for a meeting to be addressed by Mosley.⁵⁶ A week later Rotherham Town Council adopted a similar policy.⁵⁷ Hull City Council did the same in April 1936 and instructed the Town Clerk to refuse all future applications from Fascists for the use of halls.⁵⁸

However it was to Manchester that other local authorities began to look for a lead in dealing with the B.U.F., since it was Manchester that had first taken the step of prohibiting Fascist political uniforms. Actually the first decision of this sort, already referred to in Chapter five, was taken by Swinton and Pendlebury Council in January 1935. It is possible that this decision of a neighbouring council had some influence on the later decision taken by Manchester

Watch Committee. At the beginning of July 1936 the Manchester Headquarters of the B.U.F. applied for permission to hold a meeting on Albert Croft, Queens Road. This application was successful but the Fascists were told that they would not be allowed to march in uniform. At the same meeting of the Watch Committee it was decided to send a deputation to meet the Home Secretary with the object of pressing for legislation prohibiting Uniformed political processions.⁵⁹ The local B.U.F., as was to be expected, had something to say on the matter:

It is stated in the press that the denial to our organisation of the right of procession to a meeting which accorded to other parties is based on the fact that we wear uniforms. In order to test whether the Watch Committee is animated by a genuine objection to political uniforms or by political prejudice against Fascism. (The B.U.F.) now make application for permission for a march of our members to the meeting in their everyday clothes. They will, of course, be accompanied by bands and banners, which have also been used by Socialist processions through Manchester and other cities.⁶⁰

However, the National Headquarters of the B.U.F. was also concerned at the ban, which prompted a press statement from Neil Francis-Hawkins:

The B.U.F. has decided to call the bluff of the Watch Committee. If they ban the march in plain clothes they are refusing the Fascists exactly the same rights that they have accorded to the

Socialists, and thereby will be clearly convicted of political prejudice.⁶¹

The Fascists did apply for permission to march in plain clothes and this request was granted at a special meeting of the Watch Committee held on July 16th. However, the ban on uniforms did little to reduce the temperature surrounding the march and subsequent meeting. Over 5,000 people, 'almost entirely hostile' gathered at Albert Croft to meet the marching Fascists.⁶² A week later Hull City Council followed Manchester's example and prohibited Fascists attending meetings in uniform.⁶³

The decision taken in July to ban political uniforms seemed to have been overshadowed by the similar decision taken in October of the same year. The reason why the latter decision, described as "a lead which would probably be followed by local authorities throughout the country"⁶⁴ was considered to be such a breakthrough was that it was reached at the same time as the Public Order Bill was being introduced into parliament. The political temperature was much greater than in the previous July. The October decision was reached after the B.U.F. had applied to hold an open-air meeting in St Georges' Park, Hulme.⁶⁵ The decision was said to have been reached "with acclamation" by all political parties on the city council.⁶⁶ The actual meeting passed off peacefully.⁶⁷

The reaction of other local authorities was overwhelmingly in favour of the action taken by Manchester. Although the chairman of Leeds

Watch Committee, Alderman Rowland Winn, thought that it should be left to the government to give a lead on the question of political uniforms - "It is not our intention to follow the example of Manchester, or to interfere with the Fascists unless we have reason to believe that they are deliberately creating a disturbance of the peace"⁶⁸ - Leeds did in fact ban political uniforms the following month.⁶⁹ Cardiff City Council voted the following week to ban Fascist uniforms, and it was clear to the Cardiff councillors that they were following Manchester's lead.⁷⁰ The same week the Proctors of Cambridge University banned the wearing of uniforms at the Cambridge University Fascist Society dinner,⁷¹ as did Pontrefact Corporation, for Fascist meetings in public halls,⁷² and a sub-committee of the London Education Committee stopped the B.U.F. from using Hoxton School in Shoreditch.⁷³

It has already been suggested that local authorities, in restricting the use of public halls for Fascist meetings, and preventing Fascists from wearing political uniforms, were acting in anticipation of the passing into law of the Public Order Bill. However the Public Order Bill was not yet law. The legal situation had not changed at all, yet local authorities were now dealing with the Fascists menace. More importantly, they were dealing with it in a way which was far more preferable to the way in which the Public Order Act would deal with public disorder. The local authorities were placing restrictions only on those people who were the basic cause of public unrest - the Fascists, whereas the Public Order Act imposed blanket restrictions on the Fascists and their opponents. Even before the Public Order Act

became law the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police wrote on December 24th 1936 to the organiser of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth, warning that the organisation could be prosecuted once the Act came into force.⁷⁴ Fenner Brockway, Secretary of the I.L.P., provided the only reply possible:

I have received your letter addressed to our organiser of the Independent Labour Party Guild of youth. I am conveying its contents to the branches of our party and of our Guild of Youth, but I wish to take this opportunity of informing you that the red shirts and red blouses which are worn by the members of our Guild are in no sense a military uniform. They are worn mostly on rambles, for sport purposes, and on week-end outings. The members of the Guild of Youth do not drill or carry through any physical exercises similar to those practiced by the Fascists. I am taking up this matter with the Home Secretary through Mr. James Maxton, M.P.⁷⁵

Similarly, as we have seen in Chapter three, the Italian school children in Manchester had to remove their 'political uniforms' and adopt a different style of jersey. The result of the Public Order Act was a general restriction on political activity, When marches were banned, the ban applied to everyone, not only to the people the ban was originally meant to affect. We have seen that the Public Order Act was not necessary in a strictly legal sense. There were already enough powers at the disposal of the state to cope with the public disorder created by the B.U.F. However the Act was

was necessary in the sense that if the state had used the full force of the available legislation against the B.U.F. it would have raised fundamental questions about the position of the state in relation to right wing groups which, of course, were and are seen as much less of a threat to the interests of the state than left wing political groups.

We return here to a theme developed in Chapter one, which is that Western democracy is attuned to many of the demands that Fascism makes. Mosley was too impatient and his methods were suspect. However when the state did act it brought in new legislation which only placed limitations on the public display of political beliefs. In this way a piece of 'blanket' legislation affected the left as well as the right. The state did not legislate against the specific details of B.U.F. propaganda which gave rise to public disorder on the streets of Britain, though it did concern itself, through surveillance of left wing groups, with specific policies of, say, the Communist Party, or the N.U.W.M. If the B.U.F. had been seen as a threat to the interests of the state then it would have received the same treatment as sections of the Labour movement. Existing law would have been ruthlessly applied and any new legislation would have dealt with the specific policies of the movement. The B.U.F. was a threat, but only in the sense that public order had to be preserved. The way to public order was to ban political uniforms and to control demonstrations. We have seen that these restrictions did not deal the death blow to the B.U.F. It was not Fascism that was being legislated against, but public disorder.

To conclude, it has been shown that the B.U.F. attracted the support of different sorts of people from different class backgrounds. The heterogeneous membership of the B.U.F. reflected the contradictions in capitalist society at large. Similarly the different layers of ideology of the B.U.F. also related to those contradictions. When the state finally legislated against the B.U.F. it did so in an ambiguous way which exposed the contradictory nature of law making agencies in the state. In all these aspects of Fascism in the 1930's the history of the B.U.F. in the North of England provides an insight which has escaped the attention of historians of British Fascism. Perhaps more detailed analysis of provincial right wing movements may now be undertaken by historians in order to further uncover the contradictions inherent in the conservative authoritarian state.

Notes to Chapter One

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19. Ibid p. 117.

20. Ibid p. 123.
21. Ibid p. 215. See also A. Marwick 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties.' English Historical Review. April 1964. P. 285.
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25. J. Stevenson and C. Cook op. cit. p. 157.
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27. Ibid. ch. 11.
28. Ibid.p. 215.
29. Ibid. p. 216.
30. Ibid. ch. 12
31. Ibid.p. 266.
32. A Howkins and J. Saville. 'The Nineteen Thirties: A Revisionist History' The Socialist Register 1979, R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds). (1979) p. 89.
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60. George Brown Enrolment Challenge (1937). W.C.M.L.
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64. Ibid.
65. See Chapter Ten.
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69. M. Bobker. Interview July 11 1978.

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71. Ibid.
72. G.D.H. Cole. British Trade Unionism Today. (1939). p. 525.
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77. M. Foot. op. cit. p. 290.
78. R. Miliband. The State in Capitalist Society. (1973). p. 50.
79. T. Bunyan. The Political Police in Britain. (1977). p. 69.
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Autumn 1978. p. 17.
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Review of Social History. Vol XV11. 1972. Part 3. pp. 625-644.
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Crisis in Britain in the Thirties. (1979). pp 241-256 and pp 257-
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Notes to Chapter Two

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5. The term 'ideology' is used here in the 'non-organic' sense by Gramsci, in that it is not the preserve of the 'fundamental classes' in society. This interpretation allows us to explore the popular thoughts and experiences of ordinary people, in this context, within the confines of a small Fascist movement. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (eds). Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. (1971). pp 376-377.
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 27. Ibid. p. 37
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 29. Ibid. p. 26.
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 32. O. Mosley. My Life op. cit. p. 332.
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 34. Ibid. p. 31.
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 42. The anti-feminist stance of the B.U.F., though ill defined, may be usefully compared to that of the Nazi regime in Germany. See T. Mason. 'Women in Nazi Germany 1925-1940. Family Welfare and Work', Part One. History Workshop Journal No. 1 Spring 1976.
 43. O. Mosley The Greater Britainpp. 28-29.
 44. O. Mosley Tomorrow We Live p. 6.
 45. O. Mosley The Greater Britain. p. 28
 46. O. Mosley Tomorrow We Live. p. 50.
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 48. Ibid. July 1 1933.
 49. Ibid. June 1 1934.
 50. Ibid. September 7 1934.
 51. Ibid. February 22. 1934.

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53. Ibid. July 8 1933.
54. Ibid. July 1 1933.
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57. Manchester Guardian April 4 1938.
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60. News Chronicle July 2 1934.
61. Daily Telegraph May 30 1934.
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63. Blackshirt April 6 1934.
64. For a full account of this dispute see J. D. Brewer, 'The British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley, and Birmingham', unpublished M Soc Sci thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975.
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66. Blackshirt March 13 1936.
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68. Blackshirt November 30 1936.
69. O. Mosley The Greater Britain p. 53.
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81. Sunday Express July 1 1932.
82. Jewish Chronicle August 26 1932.
83. Ibid October 7 1932

84. Ibid. October 7 1932.
85. Ibid., October 28 1932.
86. New Statesman November 1932.
87. Jewish Chronicle December 9 1932.
88. Ibid., January 6 1933.
89. See Chapter three.
90. Jewish Chronicle February 24 1933.
91. Ibid.
92. Jewish Chronicle October 13 1933.
93. Ibid. September 15 1933.
94. Ibid. February 24 1933.
95. Ibid May 13 1933.
96. Ibid.
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103. J. Charnley. Interview. December 22 1976.
104. Bill Woods. Interview December 5 1976.
105. J.P. Sutherst. Interview February 16 1977.
106. A. Earlow. Interview January 12 1977.
107. T. Pickles. Interview March 24 1977.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. A. Fawcett. Interview july 16 1978.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Jewish Chronicle September 8 1933.

Notes to Chapter Three

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Translated by Ms Cathy Crabb.
2. Ibid pp 63-64.
3. Ibid. p. 65.
4. Ibid. p. 68.
5. See for example the transcription of an interview with Mrs Mary Lester, carried out by Ms Melanie Tebbutt, July 1 1976. in the course of her research for an M.A. in social history at the University of Manchester. I am grateful to Ms Tebbutt for this reference.
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7. M. Lester. Interview. M. Tebbutt. op. cit.
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9. This was, and is, particularly the case in Manchester, a city with a great mixture of religious and cultural traditions.
10. A. Fawcett. Interview July 16 1978.
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12. Memorandum of Association, as registered May 17 1924. Quoted in R. Benewick. op. cit.
13. Manchester Guardian April 23 1931.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. April 23 1931.
16. A. Fawcett op. cit.
17. Ibid.
18. Blackshirt June 1 1934.
19. Sheffield Daily Independent June 29 1934.
20. Bob Row. Member of the Directorate of the Union Movement. Interview July 12 1977.
21. Manchester Guardian November 9 1935.
22. Public Record Office. MEPOL 2/3077 $\frac{1}{2}$
23. Manchester Guardian February 21 1933.
24. Ibid. March 13 1933.
25. Ibid. March 13 1933.

26. For a statement by Mosley concerning events at the meeting, see Manchester Guardian March 15 1933 and Blackshirt March 18 1933. For eyewitness accounts of the meeting, see Manchester Guardian March 16 1933.
27. The Times November 7 1934.
28. Manchester Guardian February 4 1936.
29. T. Pickles. Interview March 24 1977.
30. Rochdale Observer March 25 1933.
31. Manchester Evening News June 29 1933.
32. News Chronicle December 7 1932.
33. Jewish Chronicle. July 24 1936.
34. Manchester Guardian October 16 1933.
35. Ibid.
36. Manchester Guardian. October 20 1933.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Manchester Evening News September 9 1933.
2. T. Pickles Interview March 24 1977.
3. Manchester Evening News February 26 1934.
4. Manchester Guardian April 9 1934.
5. Blackshirt June 29 1934.
6. Manchester Evening News April 3 1934.
7. Manchester Guardian July 23 1934.
8. Blackshirt July 27 1934.
9. Manchester Evening News August 14 1934.
10. News Chronicle July 19 1934.
11. Manchester Evening News May 9 1935.
12. Blackshirt March 8 1935.
13. Manchester Evening News November 7 1934.
14. B. Row Interview June 12 1977.
15. Blackshirt March 16 1934.
16. Daily Mail May 7 1934.
17. Manchester Guardian April 16 1934.
18. Ibid July 23 1934.
19. R. Bellamy Interview November 21 1976.
20. Labour Monthly Vol 17 No 4. April 1935. p. 232.
21. N. Driver Interview December 13 1976.
22. Blackshirt September 14 1934.
23. G.P. Sutherst Interview February 16 1977.
24. Manchester Evening News September 13 1934.
25. Ibid September 14 1934.
26. Ibid September 27 1934.
27. See Chapter Ten.
28. Manchester Evening News September 28 1934.
29. See Chapter Ten.
30. Comment Communist Party Fortnightly Review August 26 1972.
31. Manchester Guardian October 1 1934.
32. Manchester Evening News September 28 1934.
33. Manchester Guardian August 14 1934.

34. Ibid October 1 1934. The actual ownership of such searchlights occupied the minds of previous writers on British Fascism, since it might prove whether their use was a tactic devised by the B.U.F. or not. Robert Skidelsky (Oswald Mosley op. cit p. 376 n.) argues that they were owned by cinema companies. This may indeed have been the case, but he ignores the point that no matter who owned the searchlights or arranged for them to be used, they were used to highlight disorderly groups in the audience. As such they were of use to the B.U.F. and the police force. This could not be said to be a common experience at other political meetings at this time. The use of searchlights was interpreted by anti-Fascists as a means of getting rid of trouble makers by the B.U.F. and also, of course, as a means of showing Fascist stewards which was the best place to launch into a fight. This was the effect of the of searchlights regardless of who controlled their use. The searchlights were considered to be provocative and Mosley did nothing to get them removed.
35. Blackshirt October 5 1934.
36. Jewish Chronicle October 5 1934.
37. Blackshirt October 19 1934.
38. Manchester Evening News November 7 1934.
39. Ibid November 16 1934.
40. Blackshirt November 30 1934.
41. Manchester City News December 1 1934.
42. Blackshirt December 14 1934.
43. Blackshirt October 9 1934. See also Blackshirt January 11 1935.
44. Labour Party Report and Replies to Fascist Questionnaire.
LP/FAS/34/1-266. Box 1. 1934.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. A. Barlow Interview January 12 1977.
49. Ibid.
50. B. Row Interview June 12 1977.
51. Jewish Chronicle October 5 1934.
52. Ibid. March 22 1935.

53. Jewish Chronicle March 1 1935. and Manchester Guardian February 25 1935.
54. For some of the more recent discussions of the events surrounding the Olympia meeting, see C. Cross The Fascists in Britain, ch8 p. 169; R. Skidelsky op. cit. ch 19 p. 365.
55. Hansard
56. Manchester Guardian January 19 1935.
57. Manchester Evening News November 16 1934.
58. Manchester Guardian January 15 1935.
59. Manchester Evening News November 16 1934.
60. See Chapter Eight.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Blackshirt January 18 1935.
2. See Chapter Six.
3. Blackshirt October 11 1935.
4. Ibid December 13 1935.
5. Manchester Guardian January 7 1935.
6. Blackshirt January 11 1935.
7. Ibid February 22 1935.
8. Ibid April 12 1935.
9. Ibid June 7 1935.
10. Ibid. Also see R. Bellamy Interview November 21. 1977.
11. Blackshirt June 21 1935.
12. Ibid June 28 1935.
13. Ibid July 12 1935.
14. Ibid July 5 1935.
15. Ibid October 11 1935.
16. Ibid March 8 1935.
17. Ibid October 25 1935.
18. Manchester Guardian November 7 1935.
19. Blackshirt June 21 1935.
20. Ibid November 22 1935.
21. Ibid May 10 1935.
22. News Chronicle July 19 1934.
23. Manchester Evening News May 9 1935.
24. Manchester Guardian September 2 1935.
25. Blackshirt October 4 1935.
26. R. Benewick, Political Violence and Public Order. (1969) p. 195.
27. Blackshirt January 10 1936. I am grateful to R. Bellamy, who provided much of the information on which the following account is based.
28. See Chapter 6 page 178, for further biographical details of R. Bellamy.
29. Action February 13 1937.
30. Blackshirt July 18 1934.
31. Ibid January 3 1936.

32. B. Row Interview July 12 1977.
33. Blackshirt May 16 1936.
34. Ibid May 23 1936.
35. Action January 16 1937.
36. R. Bellamy, correspondence January 10 1977.
37. Ibid.
38. Average earnings in 1935. From A.L. Bowley. Wages and Incomes in the United Kingdom since 1860. (1937).
39. R. Bellamy. correspondence January 10 1977.
40. R. Bellamy, Marching With Mosley. Unpublished MS n.d.
41. Manchester Guardian February 28 1936.
42. Ibid March 4 1936.
43. Ibid June 29 1936.
44. N. Driver, From the Shadows of Exile. Unpublished MS n.d.
45. B. Row op. cit.
46. R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (1975) p. 415.
47. Ibid. p. 415.
48. R. Bellamy Interview November 21 1976.
49. Ibid.
50. A. Barlow Interview January 12 1977.
51. B. Row op. cit.
52. J. Charnley Interview December 22 1976.
53. N. Driver Interview December 13 1976.
54. R. Bellamy, We Marched With Mosley Unpublished MS n.d.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. O. Mosley, My Life (1970) p. 284.
2. O. Mosley, The Greater Britain (1932) p. 149.
3. Ibid p. 157.
4. Blackshirt January 18 1935.
5. Ibid.
6. R. Benewick, The Fascist Movement in Britain (1969) p. 111.
7. Blackshirt November 21 1936.
8. Ibid.
9. See Chapter Two for more information on Wright.
10. R. Bellamy, Interview November 21 1976.
11. Didsbury is, and was in the 1930's, a large residential area in the South of the city, much populated by middle class Jews. Hence Bellamy's derogatory reference to 'Yidsbury'.
12. N. Driver, Interview December 13 1976.
13. See R. Benewick, op. cit; C. Cross The Fascists in Britain (1961) pp.166-167.
14. C. Cross, op. cit.pp. 166-167.
15. Ibid. p.167.
16. Ibid. p. 168. for comments.
17. Manchester Evening News April 2 1934.
18. Blackshirt June 21 1935.
19. Ibid. October 11 1935.
20. Ibid. December 13 1935.
21. R. Bellamy, Interview.
22. S. Marcus, Engels, Manchester and the Working Class.
23. F. Engels, The Conditions of the English Working Class (1845, introduction by E. Hobsbawm 1976). p. 122.
24. H.J. Dyos and M. Wolf (eds). The Victorian City. Images and Realities. 2 vols. (1973). Vol. 1. p. 13.
25. General Register Office, Census for England and Wales 1931. General Tables.
26. General Register Office, Census for England and Wales 1951. Birthplaces and Nationalities.

32. Jewish Chronicle October 27 1939.
 33. R. Bellamy, Correspondence.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid.
 36. News Chronicle July 17 1939.
 37. R. Bellamy, Interview.
 38. See Benewick, Political Violence and Public Order (1969) pp 291-292 for results and comments.
 39. R. Bellamy We Marched With Mosley.
 40. Daily Telegraph May 20 1940.
 41. R. Bellamy, We Marched With Mosley.
 42. R. Benewick, op. cit p. 291.
 43. Manchester Evening News May 23 1940.
 44. R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (1975). p. 449.
 45. Manchester Guardian May 25 1940.
 46. Ibid June 5 1940.
 47. R. Skidelsky, op. cit. p. 449.
 48. Manchester Guardian June 6 1940.
 49. A. Barlow, Interview January 12 1977.
 50. G.P. Sutherst Interview.
 51. Ibid.
 52. J. Charnley, Interview December 22 1976.
 53. N. Driver, From the Shadows of Exile. pp 98-99.
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27. Salford Diocese ALMANAC 1950, 1935, 1940
 28. Ibid
 29. Ibid
 30. See Appendix A. p. 381
 31. Ibid

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. R. Bellamy, We Marched With Mosley Unpublished MS n.d.
2. Ibid.
3. Blackshirt October 31 1936; January 9 1937; March 27 1937.
4. R. Bellamy, op. cit.
5. Blackshirt January 9 1937.
6. Ibid February 13 1937.
7. Ibid April 18 1936.
8. Ibid January 16 1937.
9. Ibid May 16 1936.
10. Ibid May 22 1937.
11. R. Bellamy, Interview November 21 1976.
12. See Chapter Three.
13. A. Fawcett, Interview July 16 1978.
14. Blackshirt May 8 1937.
15. See Chapter Two.
16. G.P. Sutherst, Interview February 16 1977. My emphasis.
17. See Chapter Two.
18. Jewish Chronicle March 26 1937.
19. R. Bellamy, Correspondence.
20. Ibid.
21. Jewish Chronicle March 26 1937.
22. Board of Deputies of British Jews. Report of Vigilance Committees, July 1 1937.
23. Jewish Chronicle April 9 1937.
24. Manchester Guardian December 6 1937; Jewish Chronicle December 10 1937.
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27. R. Bellamy, Correspondence.
28. Ibid.
29. See for example, Jewish Chronicle July 23 1938.
30. Jewish Chronicle December 16 1939.
31. Manchester Guardian March 6 1939.

27. Salford Diocese, Almanac.1930, 1935, 1940.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. See Appendix 1 for published manifesto's.
31. See letter in Appendix 1.
32. See Appendix 1.
33. Manchester Guardian April 23 1931.
34. Manchester Evening News April 23 1931.
35. Manchester Guardian April 28 1931.
36. Ibid.
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38. Ibid.
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2. O. Mosley, My Life. (1976).
3. Ibid.
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9. R. Palme Dutt. 'The Cotton Industry and the Fascist Offensive in Lancashire' Labour Monthly Vol 17. No. 4 April 1935.
10. J. Strachey, The Coming Struggle For Power (1931); The Menace of Fascism (1932).
11. W.A. Rudlin, The Growth of Fascism in Great Britain (1935).
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17. C. Cross, The Fascists in Britain (1961) pp. 70-71.
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22. W.F. Mandle, 'The Leadership of the British Union of Fascists' Australian Journal of Politics and History Vol. 12 (December 1966).
23. J.D. Brewer, A Prolegomenon on the membership of British fascism under Sir Oswald Mosley. delivered to the University of Bergen

Institute of Sociology. Bergen Conference on Comparative European Nazism and Fascism. June 19-21. 1974.

24. Ibid.

25. J.D. Brewer The British Union of Fascists. Sir Oswald Mosley and Birmingham. An analysis of the content and context of ideology. unpublished M Soc Sci thesis. University of Birmingham (1975).

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2. R. Bellamy, Marching With Mosley Unpublished MS n.d.
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5. T. Pickles, Interview March 24 1977.
6. A. Barlow, Interview January 12 1977.
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15. R. Bellamy, We Marched With Mosley,
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17. Ibid.
18. W. Eaton, Interview February 16 1977.
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20. T. Pickles, Interview.
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26. R. Skidelsky op. cit ch 19.
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28. M. Levine, Interview September 10 1977. Interviewed by D. Corkill and M. Crompton. Tape Transcript deposited in Manchester Studies Unit, Manchester Polytechnic.
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32. N. Driver, Interview.
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51. J. Charnley, Interview.

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2. Ibid. September 29 1933.
3. Ibid. October 13 1933.
4. Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Minutes. September 23 1936.
5. Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Secretary's Report. November 1936.
6. Law and Parliamentary Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Minutes. October 1938.
7. Ibid.
8. See, for example, R. Palme Dutt Fascism and Social Revolution (1934).
9. Manchester Guardian November 5 1934.
10. Ibid.
11. Jewish Chronicle November 9 1934.
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15. Ibid. June 19 1936.
16. Manchester Guardian June 15 1936.
17. Jewish Chronicle August 28 1936.
18. Daily Herald February 26 1937.
19. Jewish Chronicle June 26 1936.
20. Ibid. June 19 1936.
21. Ibid. June 26 1936.
22. Ibid July 31 1936.
23. Board of Deputies of British Jews. Memorandum to the Jewish People's Council on the policy of the Board of Deputies. March 13 1939.
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Jews in Public Life.

Jews in the Army.

Jewish Population.

Banking, National Finance, etc.

Science.

Education and Cultural Topics.

Art.

Literature.

Music.

Drama.

Sport.

Charity and support for the poor.

Jewish benefactions to the Nation.

Jews and the Press.

The Protocols.

Jewish domination in the Oil Industry, Multiple Stores. etc.

The B.B.C.

Russia and Communism.

Jews in Parliament.

The Talmud.

Jews and Nationalism.

Laws of Libel.

Jews and the Cinema.

Generally on Fascism.

Jewish domination in the Professions.

White Slave Traffic.

Jews in the U.S.A.

The Jews in Germany.

Jews in Poland.

Russia.

Roumania.

Relations of Christians to Jews.

Minutes of the Publications sub-committee of the Co-ordinating Committee.

June 28 1936.

28. Jewish Chronicle. July 17 1936.
29. Ibid. July 10 1936.
30. Ibid. July 31 1936.
31. Manchester Guardian July 27 1936.
32. Jewish Chronicle. October 2 1936.
33. Ibid. October 2 1936.
34. Ibid. October 16 1936.
35. The Times October 3 1936.
36. Ibid. November 16 1936.
37. Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Minutes. October 29 1936.
38. Jewish Chronicle. November 6 1936.
39. Meetings sub-committee of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Minutes. November 2 1936.
40. Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Minutes November 12 1936.
41. Co-ordinating Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews Secretary's Report. November 1936. Almost a year later, the Board applied more pressure on the B.B.C., with the result that the Secretary reported that "he has been officially informed that in future no Jewish broadcast will be given unless approved by the Board or by such gentlemen as it might nominate for this purpose". Minutes of the Co-ordinating Committee. Secretary's Report October 7 1937.
42. Mr B.A. Bagnani. Executive Member of the People's Council. Reported in Jewish Chronicle November 13 1936.
43. Jewish Chronicle November 20 1936.
44. Ibid. November 27 1936.
45. Ibid. November 27 1936.
46. R. Skidelsky's claim that the Jewish People's Council was a 'Communist Front' (Oswald Mosley p. 403.) is based on the flimsiest of evidence. He also cites the case of the Stepney Citizens Council "described (by the Special Branch) as 'Communist inspired' with close links with the N.C.C.L. There is no mention of the fact that the Board of Deputies also had links with the National Council for Civil Liberties, which helped to distribute the Board's literature.

- Board of Deputies. Distribution Sub-Committee. Minutes
October 21 1936.
47. Board of Deputies. Co-ordinating Committee. Meetings Organisation
Circular. June 1 1937.
48. The Times September 9 1937.
49. Board of Deputies. Co-ordinating Committee. Minutes March 29 1938.
50. Board of Deputies of British Jews. Letter to Secretary. April 6 1938.
51. Board of Deputies. Co-ordinating Committee. Negotiations with the
Jewish People's Council. Memorandum July 1938.
52. Board of Deputies. Jewish Defence Committee. Minutes January 3 1938.
53. Ibid. March 13 1939.
54. Board of Deputies. Memorandum to the Jewish People's Council on the
policy of the Board of Deputies. March 13 1939.
55. H. Laski, The Rise of European Liberalism (1936).
56. Jewish Chronicle April 12 1935.
57. Ibid. March 1 1935.
58. Ibid. May 22 1936.
59. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews Minutes June 28 1933.
60. Jewish Chronicle June 19 1935.
61. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Quarterly Meeting.
Minutes May 6 1934.
62. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Executive Committee.
Minutes July 15 1936.
63. Ibid. Quarterly meeting. Minutes July 7 1936.
64. Manchester Evening News October 30 1933.
65. Manchester Guardian June 27 1933.
66. Ibid. August 24 1934.
67. Ibid. August 24 1934.
68. Ibid. August 24 1934.
69. Manchester Guardian September 20 1934.
70. Ibid. September 28 1934.
71. Ibid. September 28 1934.
72. Ibid. September 27 1934.
73. See Chapter Four.
74. Manchester Evening News June 15 1934.

75. Ibid. October 4 1934.
76. Manchester Guardian April 1 1935.
77. Ibid. June 28 1935.
78. Jewish Chronicle September 10 1937.
79. Manchester Guardian March 9 1936.
80. Ibid. May 18 1936.
81. Manchester Evening News June 13 1936.
82. Manchester Guardian May 22 1936.
83. Manchester Evening News June 13 1936.
84. Ibid. June 13 1936.
85. Manchester Guardian June 17 1936.
86. City of Manchester. Epitome of Proceedings of Committees 1935-1936.
Vol 53. Watch Committee July 9 1936.
87. Jewish Chronicle November 13 1936.
88. Manchester Guardian September 8 1936.
89. Jewish Chronicle November 20 1936.
90. Ibid. February 19 1937.
91. Manchester Guardian January 29 1937.
92. Jewish Chronicle February 5 1937.
93. Ibid. February 19 1937.
94. Ibid. February 19 1937.
95. Ibid. July 9 1937.
96. Ibid. September 10 1937.
97. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Monthly meeting.
Minutes. September 29 1937.
98. Ibid. Executive meeting. Minutes September 7 1937.
99. Jewish Chronicle September 25 1936.
100. Ibid. October 9 1936.
101. Ibid. October 9 1936.
102. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Executive Committee
Minutes November 18 1936.
103. National Council for Civil Liberties 'Instances of Anti-Semitism
in Manchester and outlying districts' Memorandum from Communal
Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. November 24 1936.
104. Jewish Chronicle October 30 1936.

105. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Executive Committee. Minutes January 21 1937.
106. Ibid. February 24 1937.
107. Ibid. September 29 1937.
108. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Annual Report 1937/38.
109. Ibid.
110. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Executive Committee. Minutes. March 18 1936.
111. Ibid. July 20 1938.
112. Communal Council of Manchester and Salford Jews. Executive Committee. Annual Report 1938/39.

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1. Mr Lovett-Frazer: "We are here working in a concatenation of circumstances created by Sir Oswald Mosley...I hope that the action that we may take tonight may crush Sir Oswald Mosley's Movement." Parliamentary Debates Vol 317 cols. 1433-1434.
2. Parliamentary Debates Vol 285 col 360.
3. Memorandum from Home Secretary to the Cabinet May 25 1934. P.R.O. Cab 24/249.
4. Daily Herald April 12 1934.
5. Parliamentary Debates Vol 290 cols. 1694-1697.
6. Ibid. Vol 290 col. 1345.
7. In response to questioning by M.P.'s regarding the Manchester city council ban on uniforms in July 1936, Sir John Simon made it clear that he was not really sure of the powers of local authorities to act on their own initiative. in this way. Parliamentary Debates. Vol 315 col. 1095.
8. For an account of the nature and organisation of groups outside parliament, see Chapter Ten.
9. Unlawful Drilling Act 60 George 3 and George 4 AD 1819-20 as amended by 56 and 57 Vict c 61s 2 and 36 and 37 Vict c91 (S.L.R.)
10. English Law Reports Vol 171 p. 773.
11. Ibid. p. 787.
12. Parliamentary Debates Vol 285 col. 360.
13. Ibid. Vol 290 col 1998.
14. Town Police Clauses Act 1837 10 and 11 Vict. c89.
15. English Law Reports QBD Vol 9 1881-1882. p. 306.
16. Ibid. KBD 1902 Vol 1 p. 167.
17. Ibid.
18. Wise v Dunning. (1902).
19. Reg v Justices of Cork 1882 15 Cox C.C. 78 at p. 83.
20. Reg v Justices of Londonderry 1891 28. L.R. 1v 440.
21. J. Baker The Law of Political Uniforms, Public Meetings and Private Armies. (1937).

22. Parliamentary Debates Vol 314 col 1600.
23. Ibid. Vol 314 col 1608-1612.
24. Ibid. Vol 314 col 1611-1612.
25. Metropolitan Police Act 1839 (2 and 3 Vict c47) ss 64. "Constables may take into custody, without a warrant, all loose, idle and disorderly persons whom he shall have good cause to suspect of having committed or being about to committ any felony, misdemeanor, or breach of the peace..."
26. English Law Reports KBD Vol 2 p. 249.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Manchester Guardian March 13 1933.
30. R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (1975) p. 353.
31. English Law Reports K.B.D. 1936 vol 1 p. 218.
32. Under the Prevention of Crimes Act 1871 s. 12 as amended by the Prevention of Crimes Act 1885 s.2.
33. Public Meetings Act 1908 (8 Edw. 7 c.66)
34. The Times June 11 1934.
35. Ibid September 8 1934.
36. Parliamentary Debates Vol 299 cols. 2069-8.
37. Ibid. Vol 312 col 1086.
38. Manchester Guardian June 9 1934.
39. Ibid August 17 1934.
40. Ibid. November 5 1934.
41. Jewish Chronicle December 4 1936.
42. Manchester Guardian November 30 1936.
43. Ibid March 13 1933.
44. Ibid. April 27 1934.
45. See Chapter Four.
46. Manchester Evening News September 28 1934.
47. See Chapter Four.
48. Manchester Guardian September 28 1934.
49. Ibid. July 9 1936.
50. Parliamentary Debates Vol 309 col 1614.
51. P.R.O. MEPOL 2/3107.

52. Morning Post January 9 1936.
53. Manchester Guardian January 18 1936.
54. Manchester Evening News January 31 1936.
55. Catholic Herald February 21 1936.
56. Manchester Guardian February 21 1936.
57. Ibid. March 5 1936.
58. Ibid. April 28 1936.
59. Ibid. July 17 1936.
60. Ibid. July 17 1936.
61. Ibid. July 17 1936.
62. Ibid. July 20 1936.
63. Daily Herald July 29 1936.
64. Manchester Guardian October 8 1936.
65. Ibid. October 8 1936.
66. Ibid. October 8 1936.
67. Daily Express October 19 1936.
68. Daily Telegraph October 10 1936.
69. Manchester Guardian November 27 1936.
70. Daily Herald October 27 1936.
71. Ibid. October 29 1936.
72. Ibid. October 29 1936.
73. Manchester Guardian October 29 1936.
74. The Times December 31 1936.
75. Ibid. December 31 1936.

APPENDIX A

The Manchester Municipal Elections 1938

B.U.F. Candidates Election Addresses

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Manchester Central Reference Library).

BRITISH UNION

During the past three years the Labour Party have done their utmost to drag us into a war over quarrels which have been the concern of the workers of Britain.

First they shout **SAVE ABYSSINIA, CHINA, PALESTINE, SPAIN**, and now during the recent crisis, they make themselves hoarse, shouting, stand by **CZECHOSLOVAKIA**. They would have taken the risk of sacrificing millions of **BRITISH LIVES** to safeguard the **ALIEN FINANCIAL INTERESTS** in Czechoslovakia, yet during this period not one cry have we heard from the Labour Party, the so-called champions of the British Workers, to **SAVE LANCASHIRE or SAVE BRITAIN**.

BRITISH UNION policy is to use the Youth of Britain to carry out the pledge made to their relatives in 1918 by the government of that day, to make a **LAND FIT FOR HEROES TO LIVE IN**.

The governments that have followed have, unfortunately, forgotten that pledge, but the people of Britain, who made the sacrifices have not.

BRITISH UNION will fight to the last man against any nation, be they Fascist, Nazi, or Democrat, who attempt to attack any part of Britain or her Empire, but they are determined to see that not one drop of British Blood shall be spilled on foreign soil in an alien quarrel which is no concern of ours.

Show your disapproval of **LABOUR WARMONGERS** by giving your vote to the **BRITISH UNION CANDIDATE** in the Municipal Election on **NOVEMBER 1st**.



MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1938.

Collyhurst Ward

Polling Day:

November 1st

VOTE FOR FOWDEN

The "BRITISH UNION" Candidate

The "Man of Action"

who will fight

COMMUNISM

CANT and

CORRUPTION

Committee Room:

661, ROCHDALE ROAD, QUEEN'S PARK.

Once again the Council elections are here. Now is your opportunity to elect a real live man to your Council who will for a change put the interests of the people first. How many times have the people elected local Councils and Governments to carry out their will only to be betrayed again and again by political careerists?

How often at Election time have the little men of the old parties promised you programmes of action and when they have been elected they have gone back to office to put every interest in the world before your own? Have you ever got from these parties what you voted for at Election time?

Thousands of local people to-day never take the trouble to vote in these elections. They know they will never get what they vote for because politicians and councillors are far too busy campaigning for Spain, China and Abyssinia while Britons starve; busy looking after the interests of foreign causes while rates pile up in our own borough; building costly town halls with money that could be better spent on building homes for the people.

The Tories at Election time promise you nothing and see that you get it. The Labour party promise you everything and see that you don't get it. That is the only difference between them, and so long as you put your faith in them nothing will ever get done.

British Union now enters the field. Not a political party because we do not believe in politics. I, as a representative of British Union, come to you with a new creed and policy of Action summed up in the simple formula "Britain First."

If you will return me to the council I promise you that I shall not take part in their party dog-fights, but shall become the watchdog of the people in this borough. I believe that the great social services should be a National responsibility and not local.

I shall expose any attempt to cheat you of your rights as ratepayers. I shall expose the placing of the relatives and friends of councillors in snug jobs, and demand fair play to all applicants for employment. I shall demand that letting of flats on borough housing estates shall be fair and free from political bias, necessity to be the deciding factor.

As your watchdog I seek to be returned. I shall fight without gloves, without sentiment, in order that the will of the people might triumph over the will of the little men that rule us to-day. Our fight is your fight. The people's cause must win, and by your votes on Polling Day you can make a start to clean up local Government by sending a man of Action to the Council Chamber.

In your service,

F. FOWDEN.

31, Chain Road,
Hr. Blackley.

SOCIALISTS say:—

“ABOLISH RELIGION”

From a pamphlet of the Socialist Party of Great Britain called “SOCIALISM & RELIGION”:—

“CHRISTIANITY,” indeed, is a cemetery of dead religions.”

YAROSLAVSKY, Leader of “Union of Godless,” said:

“Remember that the struggle against Religion is the struggle for SOCIALISM.”

ALL MANCHESTER LABOUR M.P.s — CLYNES, WEDGWOOD BENN, and HENDERSON — voted in favour of the ANTI-GOD CONGRESS being held in London

Are you going to vote for
“Labour - cum - Communist”
Moscow's Anti-God Agents?

If you love your country, and the freedom of Religion which “British Union” guarantees you, there is only one answer

**“VOTE BRITISH”
for FOWDEN and “British Union”**

ELECTION ADDRESS.

140a, Oxford Road,
All Saints,
Manchester.

To the Electors of All Saints Ward.

Fellow Britons,

Once again the Council Elections are here. Now for the first time in history is your opportunity in All Saints to vote for a British Union Candidate, who will, for a change, put the interests of the electors of Manchester before the interests of Spain, China and Abyssinia.

The Tories at election time promise you nothing and see that you get it. The Labour Party promises you everything and see that you don't get it.

British Union now enters the field, not a political party because we do not believe in politics. I seek to be returned to the Council to act as the watch-dog of the people. I shall not take part in their party dog-fights, but I will fight against any attempt to cheat you of your rights as rate-payers.

I will fight without gloves and without sentiment, in order that the will of the people might triumph over the will of the little men that rule us to-day.

My fight is your fight. The people's cause must win and by your votes on Polling Day you can make a start to clean up Local Government by sending a woman of action to the Council Chamber.

Help British Union in their fight against the old parties, by voting for a woman of action, who remains in your service.

MARGARET E. PYE.

1.

Faringdon,
12, Jewlett Road,
Chorlton-cum-Hardy,
Manchester.

October 26. 38.

Dear Sir.

In response to an
urgent appeal from some
of the finest Patriotic
Youths of All Saints'
Ward, I have consented
to stand as their Candidate.
From a keen sense of
duty as a Patriot.

I see the Press
advertising me as a Fascist.
I am definitely

a member of
BRITISH UNION,

supporting all things that
pertain to Britain and the
British Empire, the finest
Empire the World has
ever known.

As the daughter of
an Indian Mutiny Veteran, and
niece of a Crimean Veteran,
both boys who played on
Frodwick Green before London
Road Station was built, I
claim to know a little
about the City, my birthplace
being Frodwick.

I am a free member
of the H. and was a member
of the H. Library at its

3.

Faringdon,
12, Hewlett Road,
Chorlton-cum-Hardy,
Manchester.

Very beginning.

Yours faithfully and
in Patriotism,

(Miss) Margaret E. Pye.

Charles Nowell Esq.
Chief Librarian.

2, Delacourt Road,
Fallowfield,
Manchester.

To the Electors of St. George's Ward.

Fellow Britons,

Once again the Council elections are here. Now is your opportunity to elect real live men to your Council who will, for a change, put the interests of the people first. How many times have the people elected local Councils and Governments to carry out their will only to be betrayed again and again by political careerists.

How often at Election time have the little men of the old parties promised you programmes of action and when they have been elected they have gone back to office to put every interest in the world before your own. Have you ever got from these parties what you voted for at Election time?

Thousands of local people to-day never take the trouble to vote in these elections. They know they will never get what they vote for because politicians and councillors are far too busy campaigning for Spain, China and Abyssinia while Britons starve. Busy looking after the interests of foreign causes while rates pile up in our own borough. Building costly town halls with money that could be better spent on building homes for the people.

The Tories at Election time promise you nothing and see that you get it. The Labour Party promises you everything and sees that you don't get it. That is the only difference between them; and so long as you put your faith in them nothing will ever get done.

British Union now enters the field, not a political party because we do not believe in politics, and having been put forward by the Hulme branch of the British Union I come to you with a new creed and policy of Action summed up in the Simple Formula "Britain First."

I am an ex-serviceman, having lost an arm in the Great War, and as I work amongst you I believe that my knowledge of the conditions prevailing in this Ward should prove invaluable if you decide to return me as your representative.

I do not promise you the moon but I promise you that I shall not take part in their party dog fights, but shall become the watchdog of the people in this city. I believe that the great social services should be a national responsibility not local.

I shall expose any attempt to cheat you of your rights as ratepayers. I shall expose the placing of the relatives and friends of councillors in snug jobs and demand fair play to all applicants for employment.

I shall demand that the letting of Flats of City Housing Estates shall be fair and free from political bias, NECESSITY to be the deciding factor.

As your watchdog I seek to be returned. I shall fight without gloves, without sentiment, in order that the will of the people might triumph over the will of the little men that rule us to-day. My fight is your fight. The peoples' cause must win, and by your votes on Polling Day you can make a start to clean up Local Government by sending a man of Action to the Council Chamber.

Remember it was the Labour Party that was responsible for introducing the Means Test.
B.U. stands for the only test which is a job at a decent wage.

Yours faithfully,

BERNARD TALBOT,

British Union Candidate.

Mr British Union Candidate's Election Address.

BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTIONS.

SOUTH GORTON.

Fellow Britons,

Once again the Council elections are here. Now is your opportunity to elect a real live man to your Council who will, for a change, put the interests of the people first. How many times have the people elected local councils and governments to carry out their will only to be betrayed again and again by political careerists?

How often at election time have the little men of the old parties promised you programmes of action and when they have been elected they have gone back to office to put every interest in the world before your own? Have you ever got from these parties what you voted for at election time? So long as you put your faith in them nothing will ever get done.

Thousands of local people to-day never take the trouble to vote in these elections. They know they will never get what they vote for because politicians and councillors are far too busy campaigning for Spain, China and Abyssinia while Britons starve; busy looking after the interests of foreign causes while rates pile up in our own borough; building costly town halls with money that could be better spent on building houses for the people.

British Union now enters the field. Not a political party, because we do not believe in party politics. I, as a representative of British Union, come to you with a new creed and policy of action summed up in the simple formula "Britain First."

If you will return me to the Council I promise you that I shall not take part in their party dog fights, but shall become the watchdog of the people of this borough, and will report faithfully to my constituents exactly what takes place during the deliberations of the Council, which the electorate is fully entitled to know. I believe that the great social services should be a national and not a local responsibility. The burden of A.R.P. should be shouldered by the Government.

I shall expose any attempt to cheat you of your rights as ratepayers. If rates go up, your spending power goes down. I shall expose the placing of the relatives and friends of Councillors in snug jobs, and demand fair play to all applicants for employment. I shall demand that letting of flats on borough housing estates shall be fair and free from political bias; necessity to be the deciding factor.

As your watchdog I seek to be returned. I shall fight without gloves, without sentiment, in order that the will of the people may triumph over the will of the little men that rule us to-day. Our fight is your fight. The peoples' cause must win, and by your votes on Polling Day you can make a start to clean up local government by sending a man of action to the Council Chamber.

In your service,

JAMES SIMMONDS.

"None Shall Stuff — while Others Starve"

POVERTY IN AN AGE OF PLENTY. THE RICH
HAVE ALL — THE POOR HAVE NONE. SO IT
WILL EVER BE WHILE THE PARTIES AND THE
FINANCIERS RULE.

THE DISGUSTING SPECTACLE OF FLAUNTING
EXTRAVAGANCE AND PARADED RICHES IN THE
FACE OF POVERTY EXISTS TO-DAY. 'THE MAN
THAT LIVES UPON HIS FATHER' LOOKS DOWN
UPON THE POOR AS BEING IN A LOWER CLASS.

SO IT WILL ALWAYS BE WHILE THE PARTIES OF
CLASS EXIST.

THE SNOB AND THE PARASITE MUST GO
THE RICH SHALL NOT EAT CAKE UNTIL
THE POOR HAVE BREAD

BRITONS
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in the classless movement of
BRITISH UNION

Local District Headquarters

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Name.....Date.....
Address.....

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A Non-Active

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1. PATRIOTISM & REVOLUTION.

BRITISH Union is loyal to King, Country and Empire. Our watchword is "Britain First" and we are determined to build a Nation and an Empire worthy of Patriots. Therefore we stand for revolution. Any changes in Government, in economics and in life itself.

2. ACTION.

BRITISH UNION stands for Action in Government which Parliamentary obstruction prevents. British Union will give Government power to act and thus to carry out the will of the people. Government will depend on the vote of the people and will be responsible to the whole Nation.

3. BRITISH UNION MOVEMENT.

OUR Blackshirts united in a voluntary discipline to serve their country because only a creed

which puts country before self can save our Nation and our people. Because British Union is a Movement of National revival we have no foreign models as we believe that "Britain Awake" can surpass them all. Our creed of Fascism and National Socialism is the new and universal creed of the 20th century, but in each country it has a policy, method, and character suited to that country and no other because it is a national and not an international creed.

Continued overleaf.

WHAT THE FLASH AND CIRCLE MEAN

The flash of action in the circle of union is the symbol of the British Union. National action can only come from

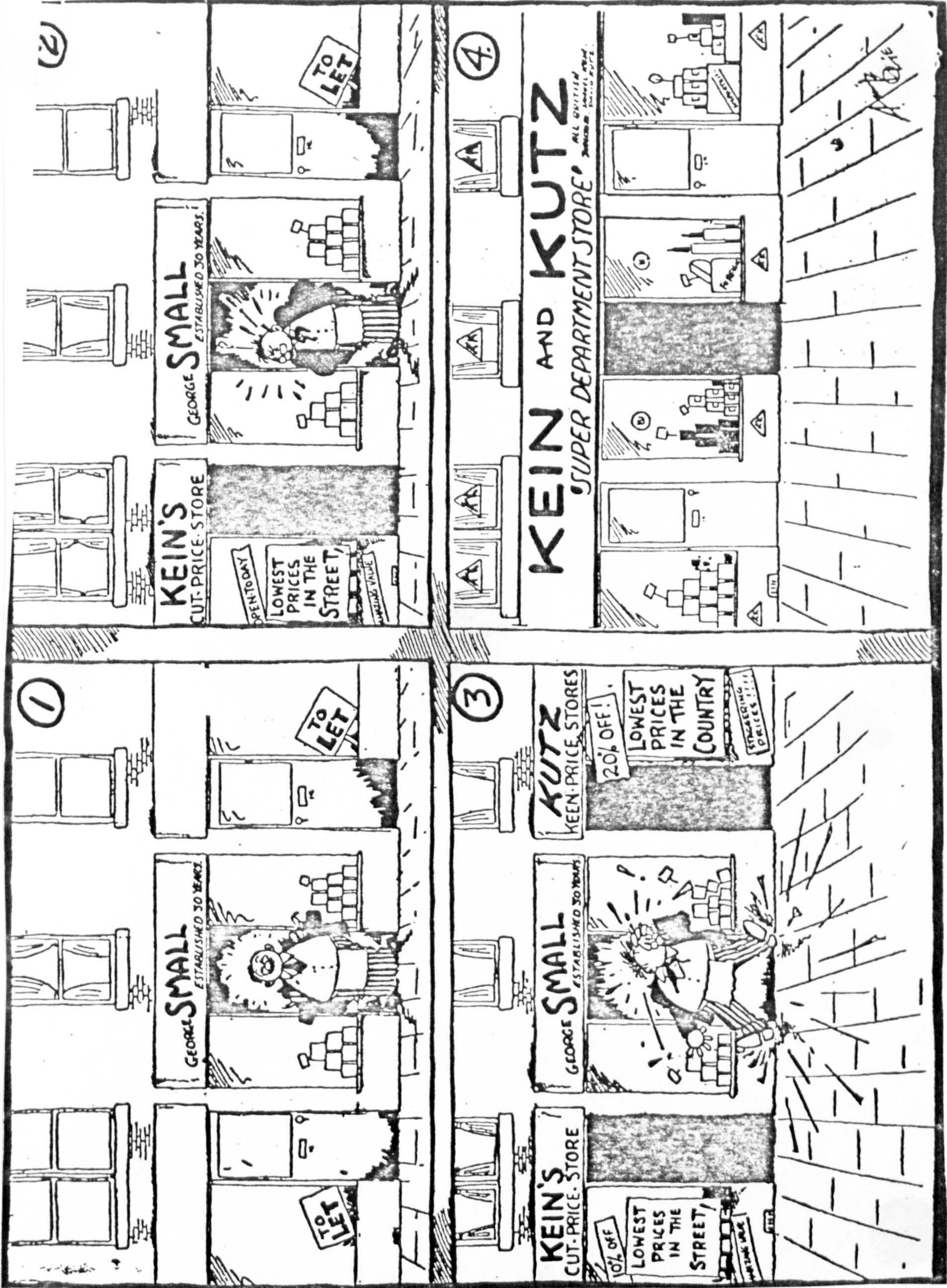


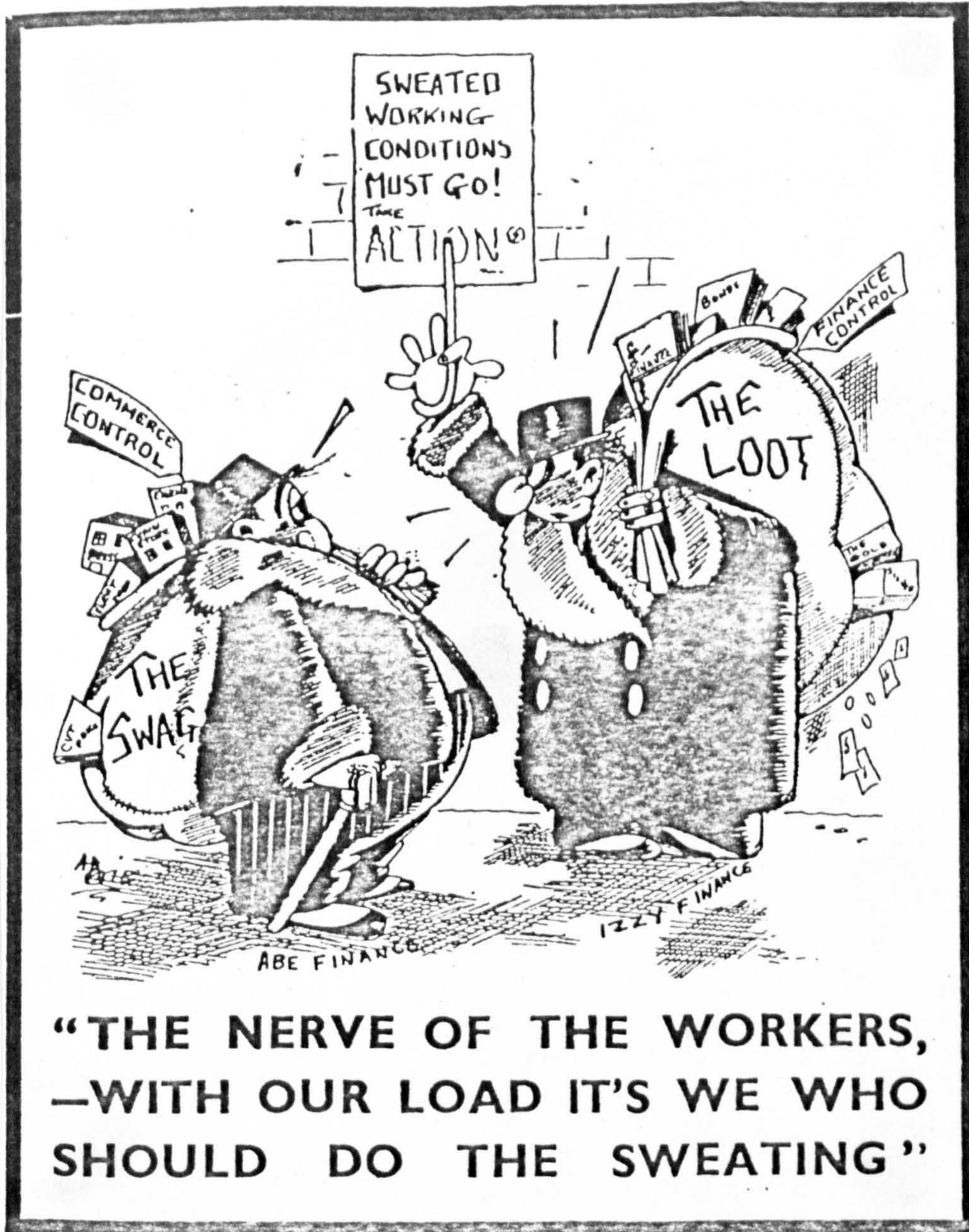
National union that ends the strife of Parties. Let Britons unite with the motto "Britain for the British."

APPENDIX B

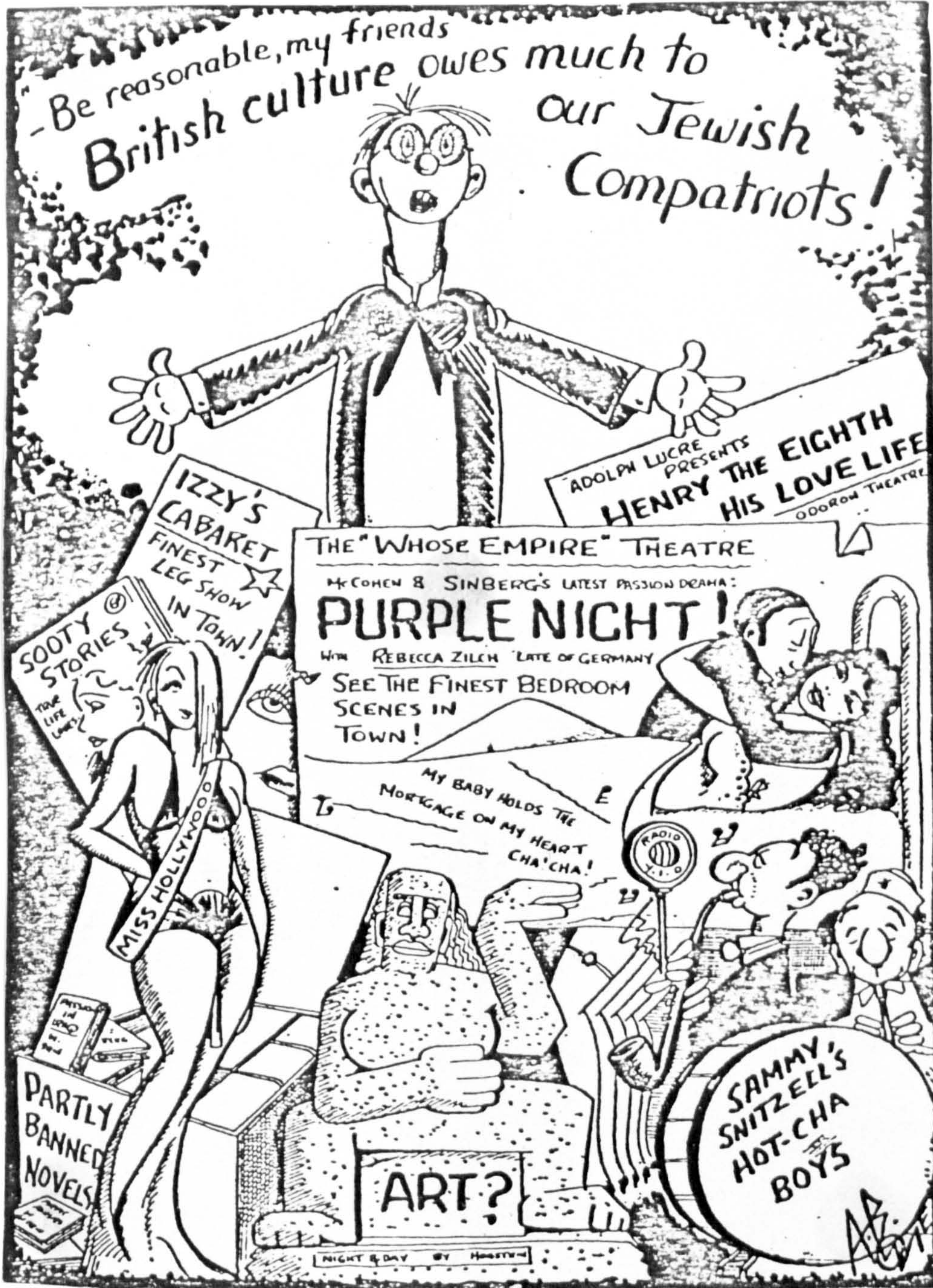
Anti-Semitic Cartoons

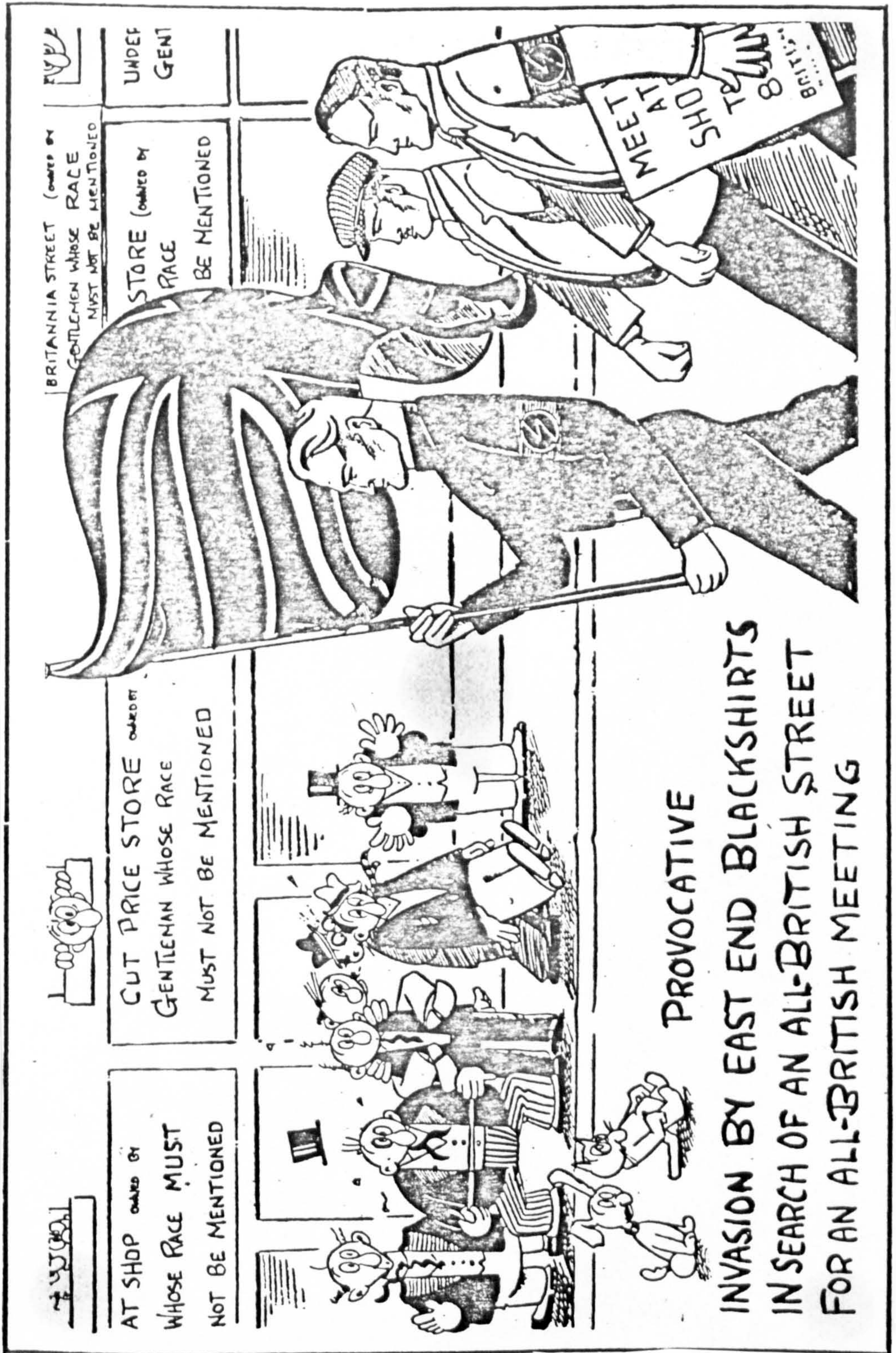
Published by the B.U.F. for internal
circulation. 1937.





**“THE NERVE OF THE WORKERS,
—WITH OUR LOAD IT’S WE WHO
SHOULD DO THE SWEATING”**





MURPHY

AT SHOP OWNED BY WHOSE RACE MUST NOT BE MENTIONED

MURPHY

CUT PRICE STORE OWNED BY GENTLEMAN WHOSE RACE MUST NOT BE MENTIONED

MURPHY

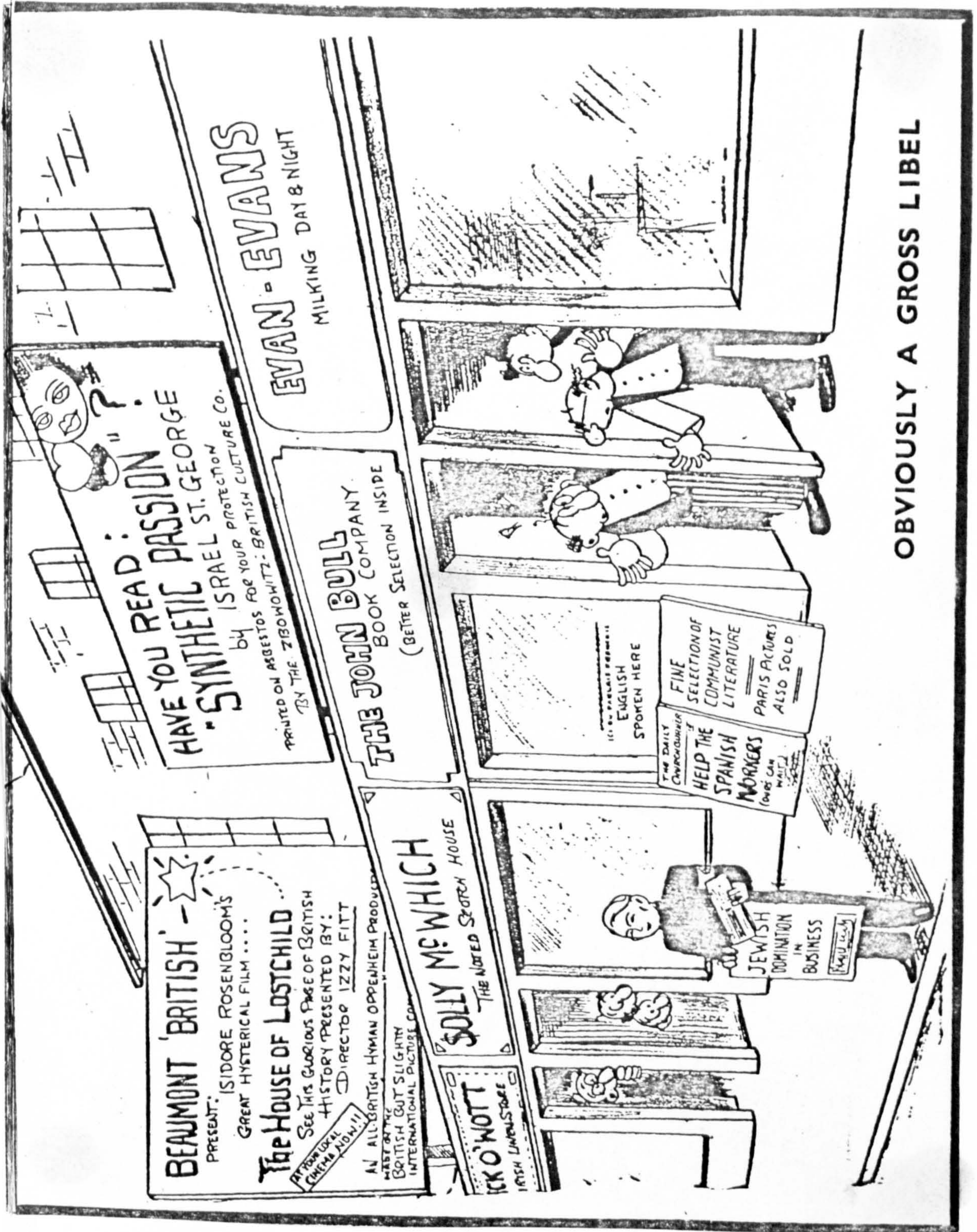
BRITANNIA STREET (OWNED BY GENTLEMEN WHOSE RACE MUST NOT BE MENTIONED)

STORE (OWNED BY RACE BE MENTIONED

UNDEF GENT

PROVOCATIVE
INVASION BY EAST END BLACKSHIRTS
IN SEARCH OF AN ALL-BRITISH STREET
FOR AN ALL-BRITISH MEETING

MEET
SHD AT
8 PM
BRITISH



BEAUMONT 'BRITISH' -
 PRESENT: ISIDORE ROSENBLOOM'S
 GREAT HYSTERICAL FILM
The HOUSE OF LOSTCHILD
 See THIS GLORIOUS PAGE OF BRITISH
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SOLLY McWHICH
 THE NOTED SCOTCH HOUSE

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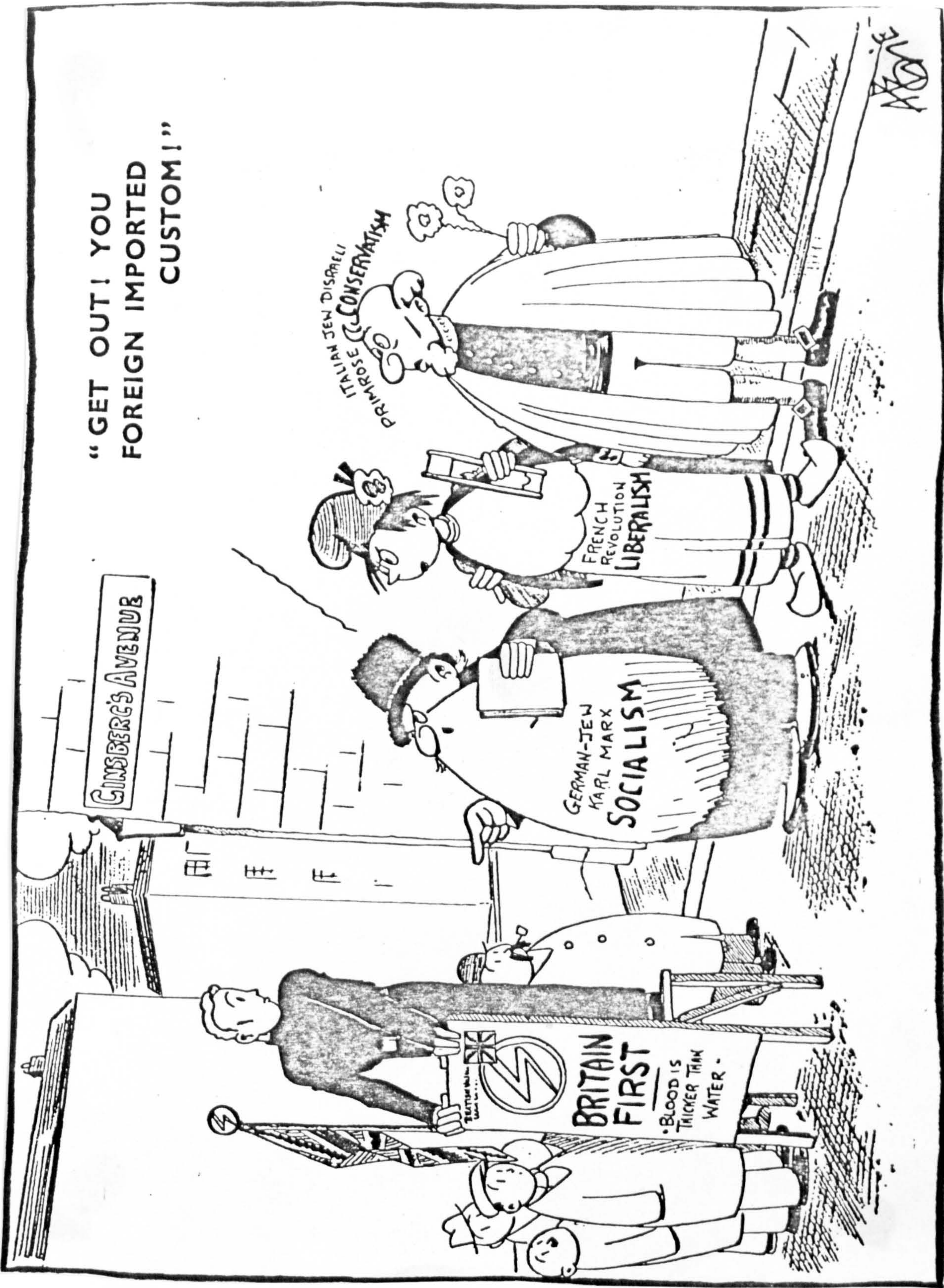
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BRITAIN
FIRST

BLOOD IS
THICKER THAN
WATER

M. G. Kelly

APPENDIX C

Correspondence from members of
the B.U.F.

Nov. 76

2 Sunnybank View
Bracken Edge
Leeds S.

Dear Sir,

Thanks for the interest shown in your research and I must apologise for some delay in replying, but working overtime and uncertain movements make any definite meeting rather difficult.

~~However~~ Sat. aft. or Sunday morning (noon)
I usually enjoy a pint or so at a local pub., so perhaps we could enjoy a chat at somewhere in between Leeds & Bradford as transport permits.

Maroon Alleyro
W H W

'Old Star' East Keswick
'Hopper Lane Inn' - Shilborth near.
'Travellers Rest' Harwood Av. or even
'Stone Trough' Yeadon are all O.K.

With increased interest from several sources in B. U. F. activities - shades of the Jarrow marches on 'Nationwide' B.P.C. and a suggested talk on Radio Leeds of my book, "Marching with Moley"

I can cover the years of your study in some detail.
 History has a way of repeating situations with modifying
 circumstances according to the age or generation conditions.
 then it was depression, now it is inflation & the 'economic climate'
 Fashions in words change too - from fantastic to dramatic
 - practical to viable - balance of power to détente etc.

The professional con men, or M.P. wishful thinkers,
 repeat their mistakes at other people's expense as always, and
 a study of ~~scary~~ ~~throughout~~ ~~the~~ ~~eyes~~, from Moses onwards,
 is quite enlightening even in this day and age.

The old marching song and some tape recordings of
 Mosley meetings & BBC & ITV documentaries make a complete
 picture, which I trust will satisfy your curiosity & study.

Yours sincerely

Wm H Wood

Britain Awake! Arise from slumber
 Soon comes the daybreak of rebirth

As from our villages and cities

Our marching legions shake the earth.

If Britain to herself be faithful - and each man to his fellow true etc.

UNION⁴⁰¹ MOVEMENT

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Telephone: 01-834 2500

14th September 1976.

S.J. Rawnsley Esq.,
83 Newhey Road,
Milnrow,
ROCHDALE,
Lancs.

Dear Mr. Rawnsley,

During a recent holiday in Blackpool I saw your letter re your Ph.D research project and would be glad to assist you. I am secretary of Sir Oswald Mosley and of this movement, which he founded and led up to 1966; I was also a member of the British Union of Fascists, in South Wales and in the Greater London area.

I expect you will know that the definitive books on the subject of your research are "My Life" by Sir Oswald Mosley and "Oswald Mosley" by Robert Skidelsky. Some of the critics found the latter too favourable but I would regard it as objective. We never object to hostile books but like to warn research students to take some of them with the proverbial pinch of salt. We have on occasion checked the learned footnotes in some of them and discovered that the "original sources" do not exist at all, or at least in the form quoted.

If you feel I can assist you do please write to me.

Yours faithfully,


E.J. Hamm.

replied 17 Sept 76

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7-10-76

Dear Mr Rowland

Thank you for your letter of 4th, I am pleased to learn that you contemplate writing a history of B U F (later changed to B i) from 1932-40, with particular attention to its activities in the North of England.

I will be glad to render you whatever assistance I may be able, as I served the Movement in the North and Midlands from 1936 until the outbreak of war; previous to 1936 my activities had been mainly in East Anglia.

In the main my memory is rather good, considering my advancing age; but I find that personal names often elude me.

I take it that you are aware of Knowledge is Power, published by Nelson, and Robert Sturges' Conrad Wesley, published by Macmillan. There is also Colin Cross' The Fascists in Britain, that is worth reading if the reader bears in mind that it is not only for fun and amusement, but relays one or two glowing

P. T. O

distinctions (of which the author was probably unaware when including such concessions from tainted sources!). Colin Cross, while a markedly hostile critic, yet retains a certain degree of sympathy for the British fascists and their aspirations. Many of the other "historians" (?) are so blinded by hostility that they are a waste of time to read.

I would be very pleased to set a day at your disposal, if you could manage to make your way to Wells, which is almost inaccessible by public transport. We would be very pleased if you could have a meal with us; but my wife now being an invalid, I am sorry that we cannot offer you a bed. There is a good hotel within a quarter of a mile.

We have few engagements on our calendar, except on 23/24 October and 16/17 November.

Looking forward to meeting you,
I am

Yours sincerely

R. Reynell Bellamy

P.S. The book post has just delivered your second letter and enclosed University references, for which I thank you.

P.P.S. I have just recalled that our "fascist" Guide in Rochdale in 1938-39 was a Ronald Roman, a corporal in the Royal North Devon Regt (if I remember right); he was intelligent without being an intellectual, but he was loyal, honest and sincere to a fault. 255

R. R. BELLAMY
 BLENHEIM HOUSE
 THEATRE ROAD
 WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA
 NORFOLK NR23 1DJ

24-11-76

Dear Mr Rawnsley

I enjoyed your visit last Sunday and was pleased to be able to tell you something of our Movement in Lancashire in the 1930s. After you had gone, however, I realised that there was one important phase in the history of ECF, which we had not touched upon. It was a most important turn of that time, and its consequences have misled several historians since.

We called it the "Campaign of Silliness", which was in fact a boycott of Mosley and his Movement by Press and Radio. Previously the media had used ridicule and slander, which weapons had proved ineffective; so it was decided never to mention Mosley nor British fascism, but in very exceptional circumstances such as a major riot for which the Blackshirts could be made to appear responsible, or some other notable instance such as "Mosley men found guilty of smashing milk bottle in street." (This was an actual caption in a newspaper, ^{the affair} it had nothing to do with the Movement, except that it came out in Court that the stupid lot had been a mobster!).

P.T.O.

This boycott was successful in 1937, and was in fact the most effective weapon used against us. A quite typical example was Mosley's meeting in King George's Hall, Blackburn on a ~~32~~ ^{Sunday} ~~evening~~ in May where he was loudly acclaimed by an audience of more than 2000, mostly unemployed cotton-workers. I will quote from my own books:

"The North Daily Telegraph which is published in Blackburn, in its issue of 9th May 1938, the day following that impressive meeting, devoted six inches of column space to what Sir John Gray had said at the opening of the Lateral Spring Fair in Bowdley; another six inches to the utterance of R. A. Cross, M.P., to a few dozen members of the Remounted Junior Unionist Circle, and forty eight lines to the method of banking that the Bishop of Blackburn had administered from his pulpit to Hitler and Mussolini. Mosley, whose audience would have outnumbered several times the combined listeners to the two politicians and the Bishop's congregation, was not granted one line of print. He and his two thousand audience might never have existed. Such was the freedom of the press in the 1930s."

Here with some further quotes from my MS -

"About this time, a handful of members of Parliament increasingly aware that the profligacy of the Press was not all that that same Press proclaimed it to be, raised the matter in the Commons. H. H. Hunt

15. 2. 39, quoted Lieut-Colonel Moore-Forebagen, Conservative Member for Wallasey, as saying: - 'Crawford Mackay, although he is the leader of a political party, is not mentioned at all. That must be because some form of arrangement and conspiracy exists within the Press. If that is so, we have not a free press, and that state of affairs should be altered.'

"Earl Winterton, Conservative Member for Worthing, Father of the House of Commons, in this same debate asked: 'Why is it that the Leader of a certain movement with which no one is in agreement in this House, I think addresses meetings which I understand are fully attended and crowded, but whose name has a report of his speeches in any of the London or provincial press. Speaking as an old Member of this House... I wonder what the explanation is. I wonder further, whether the questions asked by the Hon. Member and by me will be reported in the Press, and whether there will be any answer to it in the Press.'

"The Times, the Daily Telegraph, and the Manchester Guardian did actually report, although unenthusiastically enough, the questions and observations of those two distinguished parliamentarians, but refrained from offering any explanation or making a direct reply. The great popular newspapers on the other hand ignored the debate in the same way as they ignored the existence of Crawford Mackay and his movement.

"It was left to the Comptone, 29-3-39, in the hands of men who thought in terms of the future, to come out boldly. - One may dislike Sir Oswald Mosley. But a Press which ignores meetings as ^{many} ~~important~~ ^{important} ~~concerns~~ ^{concerns} to many thousands at a time, and are moved to great enthusiasm, cannot profess to be a representative Press. The great danger of such suppression of truth and suggestion of falsehood, is that we may be driven into a war in which we are not concerned, and in the interests of alien political movements and international finance."

It must have been this Press boycott that has been responsible for modern historians, even ^{who} ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ particular, finding no mention of blackist activities in the current newspapers, jumped to the conclusion that there had been nothing to report and that the movement was in decline. In other words they were misled and got their facts wrong; actually it was the period of the movement most significant and solid growth.

I trust that you will be able to revise this ill written and without too much difficulty; if there is any further help I can give I would be obliged to be able to attempt to supply it.

My wife and I both enjoyed meeting such a receptive listener to our ancient story and antiquated ideas. I trust that we may meet again, and when perhaps my wife is rather more physically capable of meeting the lister.

Yours sincerely
R. Raymond Williams

PS I would be most happy to
 re-visit the place if you wish;
 but there is no necessity at the moment.

R. R. BELLAMY
 BLENHEIM HOUSE
 THEATRE ROAD
 WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA
 NORFOLK NR23 1DJ

10th January 1977

Dear Mr Rawlings

A belated reply to your letter
 of 29th November; but not only has Christmas intervened,
 but also the plague (flu) which has not yet quite left me.
 I enclose a tape ~~recording~~ of a reading from a chapter of my
 book, dealing specifically with the Lannochie cotton trade
 and conditions in some of the cotton towns during the
 slump 1934-38

I am unable to give you much detailed information about
 B.U.F. in Lancashire in the years 1932-33-34-35 as
 in that period my activities were restricted to East Angles.
 Then in the latter part of 1935 it was decided to split the
 existing B.U.F. Organisation into North and South, the
 N. to be administered from a suite of about a dozen offices in
 Corporation St, Manchester, & the South to continue ^{from} the address
 in Great Smith St, S.W.1.

Neither D.C. was opened on 1st January 1936, presumed
 to be the best of my memory, as follows: -
Assistant Director-General Administration (Northern) John Howe:
 an ex-Sarumman who was also a Civil Engineer and widely
 travelled.
Assistant Director-General Organisation (Northern) John Scott
 ex-Consular Service, attached to the Eastern Boundary Commission.

2

and ^{had} ~~been~~ ^{been} with General Harrington's ... + Chomsky,
had also been a foreign correspondent.

Organiser National Meetings (Northern) R. R. Bellamy,
under military eye of during the War, and long returned after
eight years in Australia in S. A. Service.

Women's Organiser (Chatter) Miss Olga Stone, education.
I can recall little except that ^{she was a pleasant person and} she spoke fluent Spanish.

Senior Political Organiser (H) Thomas Ashbridge, a
former Conservative Agent whose job it was to instruct
a team of trained Election Agents (one for each constitu-
-ency throughout the North of England).

The above were the five senior B.U.F. officers in the North,
each of whom had his or her personal secretary (full time).

In addition there were 2 or 3 account officers, a Press
officer, 2 or 3 mail register and filing clerks, a van driver,
and 4 orderlies and messengers.

Outsiders were 4 National Inspectors: Captain Wright
(Lancs) P. Whitlam (Yorkshire), Armstrong (North East) and Charles
Bentley-Budd (Midlands), all war veterans. They
roamed in their respective areas, and reported regularly to National
H.Q.

There were also several outside organising officers (National
Organising Officers) whose work it was to recruit new B.U.F. members
of these officers were N.C.C. Fryer of Hull who was a Master in the
Rivingtons of Liverpool, was a volunteer, John ... of Southport
a R.F.C. Pilot and I ... Foreign ... also Hillman.

* These full time secretaries were probably better paid than their
"bosses". My pay at that time was £3 a week, and more than

Millington

another was wetland, and another particularly nice field, you see
 Army office was not able to do a plastic in Millington. These had
 fluctuated in number, and was more paid to a part, unless
 liability for more than a few months. If by that time they
 had failed to produce anything, they were used to their
 fallen down as those given an impossible incident.

Besides all the above was a parcel of Staff Speakers
 who were in responsibility. There must have been
 a dozen or more of them, quite well paid by comparison,
 standard, and considerably better paid than I was when
 several months above them. They were a very
 mixed lot - the only thing they had in common was in
 being greatly articulate. One or two were almost
 illiterate, but their obvious similarity was that most
 none of them was fool, and one at least was fit to
 removed from a crowd. Those with smooth cultured
 voices I sent to address University societies, and various
 cultural associations. Incidentally they were the
 ones I had least time for. The ones with rasping
 voices and erratic aspires was for the purposes outside the
 Labour Exchange and dark and factory; they had my reports
 as well as, were they, deeply sincere, but they often showed
 considerable courage. There was one speaker I held in
 high regard; Douglas Keiratt from Chesterton Hill, lower-
 middle class rather than working class, who never showed

4

a meeting

but blood, however, would continue to the end. There were others about as plenty, but he was, unfortunately, never letting himself get excited or abusive under the apparent provocation.

That was how things were in the Hall until late in 1957 or early 1958 when various "right" wing forces began giving S.O.F. financial assistance and financial help. You may guess by whom! Offer which there was drastic economies and restrictions.

The entire Nathan Staff, excepting John Smith and myself, lost their salaried appointments, and the Nathan H.Q. was closed down. Sant was appointed National Inspector for Yorkshire (also Derby, Lincoln, and Durham), while I was given Lancashire (also Cheshire and Westmorland and Cumberland and)

Actually, this turned out to be the best thing that could have happened, although it caused wide opinion among our members at the time, leaving me with no more than few spare active and dependable members for any the staging of a large indoor public meeting, where trouble would have been expected. But things started to improve and as District (London) became more self-reliant and proud of their independence, so that when towards the end of the year we took the Fire Drill Hall for a weekly meeting, I was able to tell London that I did not require any assistance from outside. I was solemnly warned that disaster would be my fault if that a weekly meeting got broken up. However, it did end triumphantly, and our few spare active members could be counted in that hundred.

There was another financial crisis about the year

late after which I was the next morning called on
 members of the Staff in the north of the north of England
 and the Midlands. More and more men of reputation,
 and experience were recruited into the Movement, and
 as they proved their worth was appreciated to the position
 previously held by salaried Staff Officers. We now
 had our own unpaid County Inspectors, ^{Specialists}
 Training School ^{Instructors} Inspectors, and Accounts Inspectors. There
 was even something like the beginning of a British Union Press
 Corps in Manchester; I was informed that at one meeting of
 the Salford Branch Council the bulk of the newspaper reporters
 were discussed to be wearing the "flash and circle" badge of British
 Union, as the Movement had by now come to be known.

I am afraid that I cannot quote you exact figures of
 membership at any period, as I never remember them. They
 were a secret known to Mackay, Francis Thompson, and possibly
 one other. But I can state truthfully that membership
 in the movement ^{was} diminished ^{to} a few names following the financial ^{crisis}
 and re-organisation of 1936 (?) it had risen to hundreds
 by 1939 mainly hundreds, by early 1939 which our supporters (those
 willing to stand for us but not work for us) was in the ^{thousands}
 of thousands. If it had not been for the war?

It was Henry Swaffer who considered that "but for
 we could have been a fascist State by now". I think

8

this prayer of gratitude was uttered in 1941 or 2.

Items of information recalled since our meeting:—
 Prior to the setting up of 'British & Foreign Corporation Ltd', and
 when the old M/C H.Q. was in Chestham Hill, (Northwood,
 St. Albans?) the senior officer was a Commander Tilletson
 D.N. Retd.

There may have been a "Cotton Campaign" in the days of the
 Tilletson regime, but I am not at all sure of this. There
 was two highly successful "cotton campaigns" in the time
 when I was the senior officer. We had the assistance
 of a Mr Robinson in getting together the necessary
 statistics. He was, perhaps, the best statistician in the cotton
 trade in those days, and spent a considerable time with us.
 If I remember correctly, his initials were H.V. He
 once had the temerity to tell old Lord Jock, that he
 had betrayed his country. It was after Lord Jock
 had addressed a meeting of representatives of the cotton
 trade on behalf of the Govt, the actual meeting
 was by the old boy having been put into his mouth
 by Govt stooges. Robinson was about the only man
 present who realised that what was proposed would lead
 to the ruin of us. The bulk of them were so com-
 stantly at being addressed by Lord Jock that they fell into line,
 after which our friend in question told us to tell his "chiefs"
 exactly what he had done. H.V. Robinson was threatened
 to be being packed up later under Def. Reg. 18-B. I did know
 that the Special Branch had been making enquiries about him.
 I hope you can read this narrative of my handwriting.

Respectfully,
 Yours sincerely,
 R. Daniels Esq.

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30:8:78

Dear Mr Rawnsley,

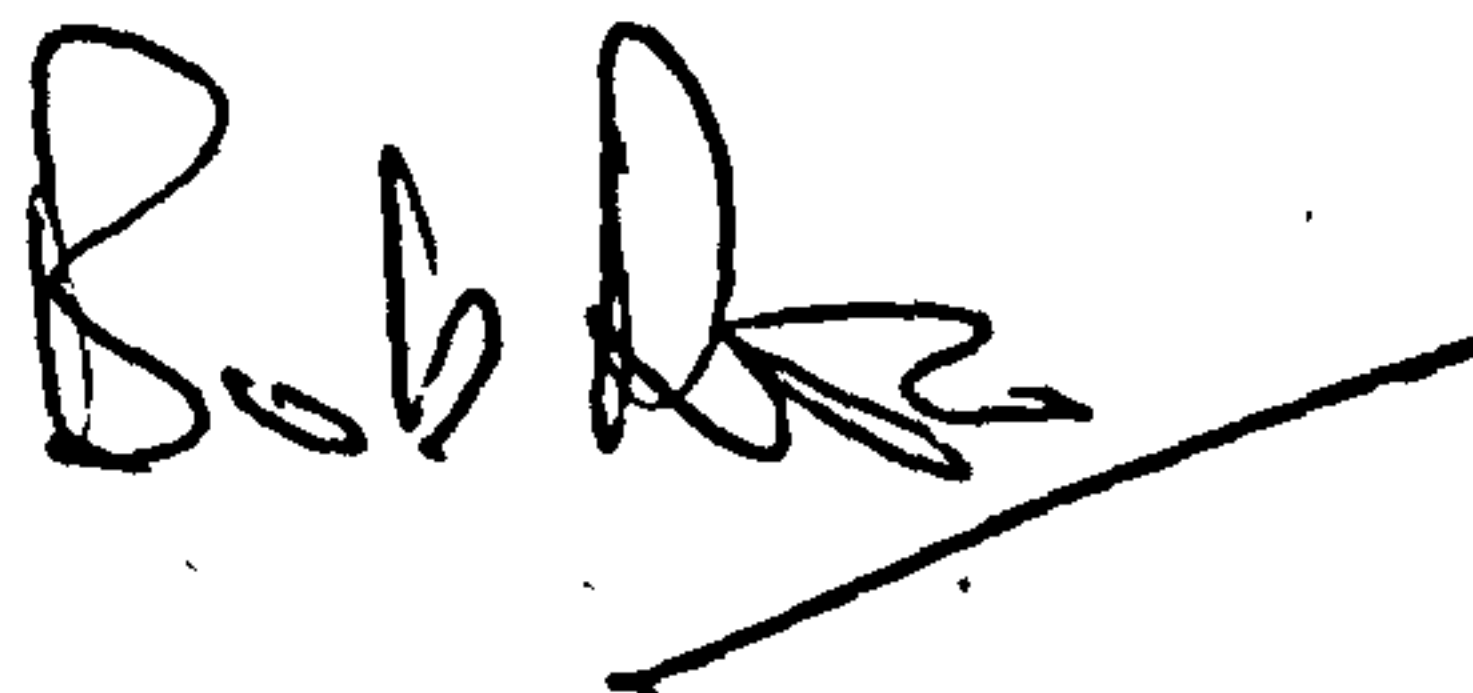
When you were here last week you said you would like photocopies of pre-war BUF cotton pamphlets, which I have pleasure in enclosing. Though no dates are printed on either, I think that "Cotton, India and You" came out fairly early, and Raven Thomson's "Cotton" must have been published around 1937. The reason for saying that is the address of the old Lancaster branch shown with others at the end. The branch moved from Church Street to China Street some time in 1937, as far as I can remember.

Sorry that the front cover of "Cotton" looks rather blurred: this is because it is coloured red, and also right at the end where the Lancashire branches are listed.

Reading through Raven Thomson's pamphlet again, I must say he was rather optimistic in thinking that the Indian millowners could have footed the bill of re-housing the thousands of Indian cotton workers; even all the millions of the Birla family would not have been enough for that! However, they certainly should have coughed up a good sum, having made their millions out of the sweatshops. In the event, had our policy been carried through in India, in all probability it would have been run on a national scale with the Birlas and other fat cats chipping in considerably. Nevertheless, the Indian workers would have been re-housed in decent conditions: Mosley was determined about that after seeing the Indian industrial slums on his tour of India with Ramsay MacDonald during his Labour Party days.

I hope all this helps you regarding the general pre-war Movement in Lancashire. The statistics alone are interesting.

Kind regards,



APPENDIX D

Letter from Mr G.V. Whittenbury

Member of the Manchester Co-ordinating
Committee Against Fascism.

Brighton 31389

21 Coombe Rise,
Saltdean,
Brighton BN2 8QN.

26th March 1977

Mr. S.J. Rawsley,
Postgraduate School, of Studies in Social Sciences,
University of Bradford,
Bradford,
West Yorkshire BD7 1DP.

Dear Mr. Rawsley,

Your letter to Mr. Reuben Falber was forwarded to me. I must apologise for the delay in writing to you, but in recent weeks I have been very pre-occupied with some urgent matters.

As you will understand, it is not easy to recall the events of over forty years ago. I do not remember being secretary of a North Manchester Co-ordinating Committee against Fascism (I lived in South Manchester) but I was an active member of a Manchester Co-ordinating Committee against Fascism during the middle 1930s.

The only important event of which I have clear memories was the visit of Oswald Mosley to Manchester I think in 1935. The British Union of Fascists held a meeting in Belle Vue Gardens, preceded by a march, all in a very military style with uniforms. The anti-fascist movement organised a counter-demonstration, which was officially banned by the Manchester Chief Constable. I was sent by the Co-ordinating Committee first on a deputation to the Chief Constable, and then to the Home Office in London in an attempt to get the ban lifted. We were supported by the labour movement and also by the Manchester Guardian (as it was then named). In the visit to the Home Office I was accompanied by John Strachey and Reginald Bridgeman (then secretary of the League against Imperialism), both prominent in the anti-fascist movement at that time. We were interviewed by the Permanent Undersecretary for Home Affairs. I

remember that by a strange coincidence both the Chief Constable and the Undersecretary were named Maxwell! In the event the ban was not officially lifted, but our counter-demonstration went ahead and was not interfered with by the police perhaps as a result of our protests.

At the B.U.F. meeting in the Belle Vue Gardens the public attending appeared to be anti-fascist to a man and surrounded the blackshirts, who were in military formation. A strange feature was that standing beside Mosley during his speech was a police officer whom I believe was the very Chief Constable I had met! I was certain of his identity at that time. He had a long police officer's staff which he kept pointing at the opposition for some reason. It was well known that the B.U.F. received strong police protection amounting sometimes to active help at that time in its public activities.

and University Anti-War Sec.

I might mention that I was sent by the Manchester Co-ordinating Committee to a conference in Paris in 1933. I enclose a copy of a report which I wrote for the magazine of Manchester University which might be of interest to you although not relevant to your enquiry about the B.U.F.

Yours sincerely,



G.V. Whittenbury.

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