

'A Poisonous Doctrine Entrenched?' A
Study of the Evolution of Proto-Fascism
and Fascism in Britain between 1900-
1939

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Abstract

Britain did not succumb to fascism between 1900 and 1939 unlike Italy, Germany and Spain. Indeed, there was a wave of fascism which engulfed several European nations in this period, nonetheless, British fascism was one of the least successful variants of European fascism. There were, however, several proto-fascist and fascist movements in Britain before the Second World War. Although, they were always minority movements, their existence alone provides insight into the political culture in Britain.

This dissertation researches the evolution of proto-fascism and fascism in Britain between 1900 and 1939 and focuses on the British Brothers League (BBL), the British Fascists (BF) and the British Union of Fascists (BUF). It is a comparative study of the three movements and the first to adopt such an approach. Although, the three movements should not be understood as consecutive manifestations of fascism, this study aims to reinstate the BBL and the BF as precursors to the BUF.

The parallels between the three movements shall be explored. Each movement expounded a discourse of national decline whereby Britain was suffering alarming and irreversible decline. Furthermore, each movement upheld a form of 'anti-alienism' and progressed to an obsessional and conspiratorial form of antisemitism which had immediate and lasting consequences.

The study will explore the historiographical understandings of proto-fascism and fascism and explore the nature, policy and impact of the three movements and question how 'fascist' each truly were. This study will also question how discourses of national decline and anti-immigration rhetoric is deployed in contemporary politics and discusses the extent this rhetoric can gain ground in British politics.

A range of primary sources have been used to draw these conclusions including official BBL, BF and BUF publications, speeches delivered by their leaders and members as well as multiple of their autobiographies, a variety of national and local newspapers and transcripts of House of Commons debates and speeches.

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Introduction

The Great War began in August 1914 and raged for more than four years. The conflict catalysed the birth and spread of fascism in Europe. Italy established a fascist state under Benito Mussolini in 1922 and the Nazis came power in Germany in 1933. Between 1920 and 1945, Europe was swept with multiple waves of fascism because of the devastating effects of the Great War and the Great Depression. By 1938, fifteen of Europe's twenty-seven former parliamentary systems had turned into right-wing dictatorships.¹ Only Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland upheld their democratic, parliamentary systems.² Nevertheless, the ideological essentials of fascism existed in Britain before 1914. Most definitely, the phenomenon of fascism had its own autonomous existence in Britain, it merely awaited a favourable climate to progress into numerous political forces.

The Great War had a far more severe impact upon Germany and Italy than Britain. Defeat, disarmament, the crushing impact of reparations and international humiliation left Germans with a sense of being preyed upon by malevolent neighbours.³ Italians emerged from the Great War with an understanding of a 'mutilated victory', a distorted belief they had won the war for the Allies.⁴ Most importantly, both nations endured 'total war' and this gave Italians and Germans a sense of national solidarity, and Mussolini in the 1920s and Hitler in the 1920s and 1930s exploited this feeling and integrated bitterness and resentment as central pillars of their manifestos.⁵ The national feeling in Britain was markedly different and the economic plight less severe. Britain's victory in 1918 enhanced national pride, renewed prestige on its national institutions and empire and considerably stabilised its political and social system.

¹ Morgan, P. (2002). *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 14.

² Morgan, P. (2002). *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 8.

³ Allen, W. S. (1975). *The Appeal of Fascism and the Problem of National Disintegration*. In H. A. Turner (Ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism* (pp. 44-69). New Viewpoints. Page 49.

⁴ Davies, P., & Lynch, D. (2002). *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*. Page 95.

⁵ Davies, P., & Lynch, D. (2002). *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*. Page 95.

The emergence of proto-fascist movements such as the British Fascists (BF) in the 1920s and the fascist organisation, the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in the 1930s cannot be explained alone with the emergence of Mussolini and Hitler, although the regimes were unquestionably influential. There were unifying factors, however, which led to the emergence of fascist movements in these three nations, namely anti-communism. The Russian Revolution of 1917 occurred as fascist ideas were still in embryo in Europe and early fascists agitated against the dangers Bolshevism posed.⁶ Fascism in the three nations emerged as a revolt. The birth of fascism in Italy and Germany is best understood as a reaction to the crushing impacts of the Great War and the Great Depression. In Britain, however, the emergence of proto-fascism and fascism is best explained as a revolt against the crisis of the British Empire, the crisis of Conservatism, the nation's deteriorating claim as a world power and economic uncertainty. Thus, it was a different type of crisis which led to the emergence of fascism in Britain and a different form of revolt which characterised it.

Like other European countries, Britain had a pre-fascist tradition.⁷ The ideas that laid the ground for fascism were evident in Britain during the forty years which preceded the outbreak of the First World War.⁸ The BBL formed in 1901, the BF (1922) and the BUF (1932) were each a response to perceived 'decline' in Britain. The three movements, therefore, were facets of decline; this was one of the few common denominators of the movements. The BBL were a nativist and ultra-conservative response to the immigration of Eastern-European migrants to the East End of London and the perceived resulting increase in poverty, housing issues and unemployment amid a period of imperial decline. The BF were an ultra-conservative response to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the rise of socialism, communism and Bolshevism in Europe as well as a response to the crisis of

⁶ Davies, P., & Lynch, D. (2002). *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*. Page 96.

⁷ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. *Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars*. Pimlico. Page 8.

⁸ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 7.

Conservatism and the British Empire. The BUF, on the other hand, were borne out of the Great Depression and the severe unemployment and trade depression which followed.

There was apprehension regarding the future of the British Empire in the late Victorian era. Britain had previously boasted a monopoly in several areas, namely the Far East, but by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was increasingly challenged.⁹ The industrialisation of continental Europe, growing protectionism, the 'new' imperialism and the emergence of USA, Russia and Japan as world powers generated uncertainty in Britain.¹⁰ Following decades of industrial supremacy, Britain experienced falling prices, narrower profit margins and stiffer competition from American and German manufacturers who boasted greater natural resources and domestic markets from the 1870s.¹¹ In December 1886, a Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry reported Britain was "beginning to feel the effects of competition in quarters where its trade formerly enjoyed a practical monopoly."¹² Between 1870 and 1914, Britain fell from a dominant first to third in the percentage share of world manufacturing production and its share of the world market for manufactured goods decreased from 41.4 per cent in the 1870s to 29.9 per cent by 1913.¹³ These statistics support the widely-held claim amongst contemporaries that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Britain's economy was in decline.¹⁴

There was also growing concern about the moral condition of British society from the 1880s. Indeed, the eugenics movement which began in the early 1880s fed directly into the degenerationist thinking which was a foundation of British fascism. Charles Darwin's theories of survival, adaptation and degeneracy influenced a generation of academics, writers and politicians and debates about moral degeneracy, racial rejuvenation and national unity during a period of unprecedented Jewish immigration to Britain, had a significant impact in

⁹ Wilson, K. M. (2001). *The International Impact of the Boer War*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 158.

¹⁰ Thurlow, R. (2000). *Fascism in Modern Britain*. Sutton Publishing. Page 47.

¹¹ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 11.

¹² Wilson, K. M. (2001). *The International Impact of the Boer War*. Page 158.

¹³ Green, E. H. H. (1995). *The Crisis of Conservatism*. Routledge. Page 28.

¹⁴ Green, E. H. H. (1995). *The Crisis of Conservatism*. Page 28.

laying the foundations for racist and fascist thought.¹⁵ The notion of evolutionary development was undoubtedly influential to the progression of fascist thinking. The revelations regarding the extent of urban poverty discovered by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree in the late 1890s also questioned the extent Britain was a physically degenerate society.¹⁶ Many late-Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals believed the procreation of the least 'fit' members, encouraged by a liberal society, was to blame for the nation's industrial, imperial and economic decline.¹⁷ In essence, the eugenicist and Social-Darwinist ideas prominent from the 1880s aggravated the existing fears of national decline and degeneracy held by many right-wing intellectuals.

The Second Boer War (1899-1902) fuelled further charges of imperial decline. By May 1902, Britain had put around 450,000 men into combat, the Boer Republics in South Africa had mustered only 60,000, yet the world's greatest empire required almost three years to defeat the Boers.¹⁸ As D. Reynolds points out, 'nothing brought home the limits of British power more forcibly than the events of the Boer War.'¹⁹ Furthermore, M. Pugh maintains, 'British fears about national decline and degeneracy reached a climax amid the disasters of the war in South Africa.'²⁰ Britain, it was feared, no longer had the strength to maintain its global position.²¹

The late Victorian and early Edwardian era also heralded the crisis of Conservatism. The Conservatives lost three consecutive elections in 1906 and 1910, the first and most devastating was a landslide victory for the Liberal Party. The Liberals, in sponsoring old-age pensions, health and unemployment insurance, were rewriting the responsibility of government in a way that threatened the economic interests of their opponents.²²

¹⁵ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 12.

¹⁶ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 13.

¹⁷ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 13.

¹⁸ Reynolds, D. (2000). *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 64.

¹⁹ Reynolds, D. (2000). *Britannia Overruled*. Page 63.

²⁰ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 14.

²¹ Wilson, K. M. (2001). *The International Impact of the Boer War*. Page 160.

²² Searle, G. R. (1979). *Critics of the Edwardian Society*. Page 81.

Additionally, the 'pacifist' stance of the Liberals, specifically their vow to reduce 'bloated arms expenditure' and the belief international conflicts should be resolved by goodwill and reasoning greatly angered many Conservatives at a time of mounting Anglo-German tension.²³ The notable growth of the labour movement in this period also exacerbated the fears of the Edwardian Right. This climate of fear and frustration which resulted in numbers of right-wingers moving away from conventional ideologies towards fascism.

The crisis of Conservatism in the early Edwardian era partially explains the rise of the BBL. The BBL were primarily a reaction to the unrestricted flow of Ashkenazi Jews to the East End in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, several Conservative MPs and right-wingers sympathised with the movement because it voiced their concerns about imperial decline, the degeneracy of society and the impacts of mass immigration.

The BF, Britain's first self-proclaimed fascist movement, were an ultra-conservative response to the consequences of the Great War, the rise of socialism, communism and Bolshevism and the prolonged crisis of Conservatism. The years that followed the Great War were ones of uncertainty for many Conservatives. The Trade Union movement had almost doubled in size between 1913 and 1920 from 4.1 million to 8.3 million, industrial militancy was rising which had resulted in a total of 86 million working days lost in 1921 alone, furthermore, the Labour Party had re-organised and assumed a distinctly 'socialist' identity and the eight million electorate before the Great War had mushroomed to over twenty-one million.²⁴ The franchise extension generated apprehension amongst right-wing circles in Britain. Lord Rothermere, the owner of the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Dispatch* known for his enthusiastic endorsement of the BUF for first half of 1934, bemoaned, 'the fact is that quite a large number of people now possess the vote who ought to never have been given it.'²⁵

These developments evidenced the left had assumed a profound importance in post-war

²³ Searle, G. R. (1979). *Critics of the Edwardian Society*. Page 80.

²⁴ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Pages 26, 30 and 41.

²⁵ Shelved. (1927, April 7). *Daily Mail*. Page 10.

Britain. Plus, the increase of 'direct action' was an alarming indication of the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution.²⁶ It provided numbers of Conservatives with the disturbing prospect that could befall Britain if disgruntled workers at home or revolutionary nationalists in the colonies mobilised.²⁷ Furthermore, the party's identity remained in question as their leaders were divided over Tariff Reform and Home Rule.²⁸

The advent of Mussolini received favourable reception amongst right-wing circles in Britain. Fascism prevailed in Italy shortly after the Russian Revolution and coincided with the rapid growth of the labour movement, the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920, an increase in trade union membership and militancy and the franchise extension in Britain. Mussolini aroused the attention of discontented right-wing Conservatives and influenced the creation of several far-right groups. The BF, as well as the Centre International d'Etudes sur la Fascisme (CINEF) founded in Lausanne in 1927 but represented in Britain by James Strachey Barnes and the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) founded in 1929 by Arnold Leese never threatened conventional politics in Britain, but briefly provided an alternative or a supplement to Conservatism.²⁹ These were predominantly middle or upper-middle-class organisations whose members desired a more intense and radical form of Conservatism than the Conservative Party could or would provide.

There were other breakaway movements which preceded the creation of BF. Sir Henry Croft, the Tory MP for Christchurch, founded the National Party (NP) in August 1917, an imperialist, protectionist, xenophobic and antisemitic organisation dedicated to eliminating German and Jewish influence in Britain.³⁰ The NP occupied the ideological ground between the pre-war Radical Right and the interwar fascist movements and attracted numbers of Tory votes at by-elections as a result.³¹

²⁶ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 27.

²⁷ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right 1918-1939*. Biddles Limited. Page 16.

²⁸ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 16.

²⁹ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 28.

³⁰ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 75.

³¹ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 76.

The Anti-Waste League were another example of a breakaway movement triggered by disillusionment with the Conservative Party.³² It emerged in 1920 under the patronage of Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook and agitated against the retention of high wartime tax and the bold 'Homes for Heroes' programme.³³ The Anti-Waste League tapped into the resentment of middle-class voters after the war who felt they had been neglected and the protection of the working-class had been prioritised.³⁴

Between 1916 and 1931, the Conservatives served in three coalition governments; the first under Herbert Henry Asquith in 1915; the second under Lloyd George in 1916 and the third led by Ramsay MacDonald in 1931. Many Tories resented their party for sacrificing their principles to form coalitions. The Lloyd George Coalition was deeply unpopular with right-wingers who began to succumb to the attractions of alternative political models.³⁵ Stanley Baldwin's electoral defeat in 1923, his progressive approach to social reform and his unimaginative and unsuccessful 'Safety First' electoral campaign in 1929 was scrutinised.³⁶ Baldwin's leadership and stance of tariffs aroused the creation of multiple reactionary movements. The Empire Economic Union (1929), the United Empire Party (1930) and the Imperial Economic Unity Group (1930) together represented a formidable challenge for Baldwin and proved influential factions of his party were disgruntled with his leadership.³⁷ There were also several ideological developments within the far-right in the 1920s which led to the growth of proto-fascism, specifically the emergence of 'anti-Bolshevism' and the resurgence of antisemitism.³⁸

Ultimately, the BF were essentially a far-right reaction the Bolshevik Revolution, the advent of Mussolini, the crisis of the Conservative Party and the resurgence of 'anti-Bolshevism' and

³² Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 76.

³³ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 76.

³⁴ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 76.

³⁵ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 40.

³⁶ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 27.

³⁷ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 34.

³⁸ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 26.

antisemitism amongst the Right.³⁹ It was this climate of fear and crisis which the BF attempted to exploit. The BUF were also a response to a domestic crisis. It was 'the child' of the 1929-1931 economic crisis. Most of the BUF's economic and political ideas were formulated in response to the crisis, however, their detailed policies and programmes set them apart from the BF, who lingered on the interwar fascist fringe and the BBL, the first proto-fascist movement in Britain.

The Wall Street Crash in October 1929 caused an unprecedented global depression. In Germany, the effects were most severe. By February 1932, there were 6.12 million unemployed and industrial production fell by 42 per cent.⁴⁰ The economic desperation of the Great Depression, coupled with the humiliation of defeat, reparations and territorial concessions created a unique sense of crisis and widespread discontent with the Weimar Republic for Hitler to exploit. In Britain, however, the impact was less severe, and recovery was swifter. The slump afflicted severe damage to British industry and the export market; the traditional staple industries of textiles, coal, iron and shipping suffered the most and the nation's export market almost halved in value between 1930 and 1931. Britain endured dramatic and sustained rises in unemployment too. As the minority Labour Government led by Ramsay MacDonald assumed office in June 1929, the number of unemployed in Britain was one million, but by November it had risen to 1.3 million.⁴¹ By July 1930, unemployment had climbed to two million and culminated at 2.5 million at the end of 1930.⁴²

In response, Sir Oswald Mosley adopted a pro-active and interventionist economic approach. His economic agenda was developed in reaction to the 'orthodox' deflationary approach of the 1929 Labour Government.⁴³ The Government perceived the slump as merely a temporary disequilibrium that would recover as the free market and internal trade

³⁹ Webber, G. C. (1986). *The Ideology of the British Right*. Page 25.

⁴⁰ McDonough, F. (2012). *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 14.

⁴¹ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Manchester University Press. Page 84.

⁴² Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 84.

⁴³ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 85.

revived and, in the meantime, several harsh deflationary measures were necessary, especially cuts in public spending and avoiding inflation and balancing the budget were the foremost priorities.⁴⁴ Mosley's interventionist approach, on the other hand, prioritised recovering production and trade, even if loans and deliberately running up budget deficits were necessary.⁴⁵ Production would be increased by the creation of new demand and wages would be forced up to encourage consumerism and a higher degree of private and public spending would be maintained.⁴⁶

The crisis reached its peak between 1930-1931 but the BUF were formed in 1932 as the economic situation in Britain was alleviating. Between 1932-1937, industrial output increased by 46 per cent and unemployment levels halved to one and a half million. Therefore, Mosley enjoyed a very brief opportunity to exploit the economic turmoil. Perhaps he miscalculated the political and economic situation or simply acted too late. As Britain's economy steadily recovered after 1934, the National Government was shielded from popular condemnation. Ultimately, the more secure hold the National Government had on the country's problems, or it appeared to have, the less middle-class voters saw the need for a fascist alternative. Nevertheless, the BUF continued to push a discourse of crisis throughout the 1930s; the vision of Britain in an inevitable and irreversible crisis dominated the party's propaganda and outlook, even though Britain's economy was steadily recovering in the second half of the decade.⁴⁷

Methodology and Sources

As noted, this thesis focuses on three movements: the BBL, the BF and the BUF. It is a comparative study of the three movements and charts the birth and evolution of fascism in Britain before the Second World War. It explores how longstanding fears of national decline

⁴⁴ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 85.

⁴⁵ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 85.

⁴⁶ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 86.

⁴⁷ Drábik, J. (2017). Spreading the Faith: The Propaganda of the British Union of Fascists. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25(2), 211-225. Page 218.

and degeneracy and economic uncertainty, as well as the influence of European fascism led to the emergence of proto-fascist and fascist organisations. This is a political history as it focuses on how the phenomenon of fascism changed and developed in Britain between 1900-1939. It analyses the rhetoric and policies of proto-fascist and fascist movements and draws connections, as well as differences to show how each of the three were different manifestations of the same political phenomenon. It also explores the ideologies of the BBL, BF and the BUF against the backdrop of Britain's political culture and democratic, parliamentary system. To explore the dimensions and impact of the BBL, BF and BUF, newspapers and ephemeral publications is at the heart of the analysis. This dissertation has utilised a range of different primary sources, benefitting from the material of multiple archives, namely the Labour History Archive at the People's History Museum in Salford, The National Archives and the British Online Archives.

This thesis relies on periodicals and pamphlets to gain a crucial insight into the rhetoric and ideology of the three movements. There are plentiful historical sources on the BUF available. The movement received a wealth of coverage in local and national newspapers, particularly the *Daily Mail* and consistently published pamphlets and journals throughout the 1930s, available at the British Online Archives. Nonetheless, there is a lack of historical sources on the BBL and the BF. The BBL were a small scale single-issue localised initiative, therefore, its coverage in national newspapers was limited and the number of its surviving publications are minimal. Researchers are limited to the exploration of local newspapers to study the movement. Several of the BF's official publications are available at the Labour History Archive at the People's History Museum, namely the *British Lion* and the *Fascist Bulletin*, but these publications were sporadic with months of activity omitted. Therefore, local and national newspapers have been used to explore the BF's ideology and impact in sufficient detail. Although newspapers do not provide the perspective of actual BBL and BF members, they do allow the history of the political discourse and coverage of these movements to be studied. It must be noted that this is not a flaw, but the use of newspapers is necessitated by

the types, or lack thereof, of sources available. Furthermore, newspapers provide an elite discourse on the movements and the perspectives and rhetoric of the movements are captured through the public words of their supporters.

Newspapers are practical and insightful historical sources. As A. Bingham points out, newspapers are 'interpreters, and representatives, of popular opinion, [and] retailers of the latest information.'⁴⁸ As daily or weekly publications, newspapers contribute significantly to the public discourse. The content of articles is shaped by the perceived needs and opinions of the intended reader. The varying political perspectives and readerships offered by different newspapers, as well as their local and national status enables them to be compared over time.⁴⁹ Newspapers also provide detailed coverage of past societies, including speeches, meetings, rallies, court proceedings and announced births, marriages and deaths.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, newspapers pose issues of authenticity for historians. The coverage is often very brief and certain happenings are completely omitted. Irrespective of the publication date, newspapers can have crucial gaps for the modern researcher. Furthermore, journalists and editors are prone to errors. Information is processed and discussed numerous times before it is printed, and the interviewee may provide false or insufficient information that the reporter is unaware of.⁵¹ Also, reporters have to adhere to strict deadlines meaning articles are often rushed and incoherent and reporters may only be given a shortened space in the published newspaper, therefore, they may be forced to omit crucial information.⁵² As a result, the authenticity and truthfulness of a report is compromised.

⁴⁸ Bingham, A. (2021). *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method Articles*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Page 3.

⁴⁹ Bingham, A. (2021). *Bloomsbury History*. Page 4.

⁵⁰ Bingham, A. (2021). *Bloomsbury History*. Page 6.

⁵¹ Bates, D. (2016). *Historical Research Using British Newspapers*. Pen & Sword Books Limited. Page 46.

⁵² Bates, D. (2016). *Historical Research Using British Newspapers*. Page 46.

National newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Times* often reflect the political agendas of their editors and owners which tend to be right-wing. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the *Daily Mail* subscribed to the agenda of the owner Lord Rothermere, a right-wing tycoon with fascist sympathies. Indeed, newspapers provide the public with essential political information, but the content often defends the interest of the ruling classes, rather than holding those with power accountable.⁵³ Local newspapers, however, inform researchers about the public opinion of specific regions and pressing local issues. They are by no means indicative of the wider public's perspective or opinion though. As historical sources, newspapers pose issues of bias, inaccuracy and misrepresentation.

Although this thesis relies on newspapers as the primary historical source, it does not use newspapers to reconstruct events. Alternatively, newspapers were used to explore the deeper patterns of continuity and change within the three movements and throughout Britain between 1900 and 1939. The information given by newspapers is not merely accepted, but critically examined. The use of newspapers means this is also a history of political discourse. The substantial coverage of fascism in local and national newspapers reveals it was a topical and pressing issue in the 1920s and 1930s. These newspapers involved individuals in public debates on immigration and fascism between 1900-1939 and shed light on how receptive the masses were to fascism, particularly in the East End of London. Historians of political discourse often focus exclusively on a particular newspaper and study its coverage of specific historical events or topics.⁵⁴ This study compiles a range of different newspapers but focuses mostly on the *Daily Mail's* coverage of immigration and fascist movements, particularly the BUF which the newspaper endorsed. Historians of political discourse also use newspapers to study opinions and representations of particular ethnic, racial or regional communities.⁵⁵ This study adopts this approach by exploring how representations of Jewish

⁵³ Bingham, A. (2021). *Bloomsbury History*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Page 7.

⁵⁴ Allen, R. B., & Sieczkiewicz, R. (2010). How Historians Use Historical Newspapers. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information*, 47(1), 1-4. Page 2.

⁵⁵ Allen, R. B., & Sieczkiewicz, R. (2010). How Historians Use Historical Newspapers. Page 3.

immigrants contributed to proto-fascist and fascist discourses. It also uses newspapers to measure how Jewish immigrants were perceived by the public, particularly in the East End of London, where the three movements gained significant support because of agitation against immigrants.

The use of national and local newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets also lends to the originality of this thesis. The relationship of the three movements have not been studied before and historians have not used ephemeral publications to construct an informed analysis of the BBL and the BF. Historians of British fascism have repeatedly dismissed the BF, suggesting the movement had little or no fascist features, but an analysis of the BF's pamphlets and periodicals prove the movement had ideological substance and by the 1930s, the movement had manifested an extensive fascist programme.

The following chapter reviews how historians have defined proto-fascism and fascism and a definition of these terms is settled upon for the purpose of this dissertation. This definition will be applied to each individual chapter to judge how 'fascist' each of the three movements were. This dissertation proposes rudiments of fascist ideology, specifically the politics of violence and the use of antisemitism, were embraced by the BBL at the beginning of the twentieth century. The BBL were the first expression of proto-fascism in Britain. It was dedicated exclusively to forcing immigration restriction and spreading antisemitism and prejudice in the East End of London. In this sense, the BBL set the precedent for the BUF who exploited the 'Jewish Problem' in the same area from September 1934. Furthermore, the BBL influenced the Aliens Act of 1905, therefore, the movement's importance in the history of immigration and fascism in Britain is noteworthy.

The birth of the BF in 1923 indicates discontinuity in the history of fascism in Britain between 1900-1939.⁵⁶ The movement had a limited understanding of the term. In the aftermath of the General Strike of 1926, however, it began to progress towards a fascist programme. By

⁵⁶ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement*. I. B. Tauris. Page 12.

1932, the BF had manifested into a fascist party and formulated a programme endorsing antisemitism, corporatism and chauvinism. The BF were the most significant proto-fascist movement in the 1920s and it sheds light on what the phenomenon of fascism meant to the early converts in Britain. Furthermore, the BF instigated the first wave of organised anti-fascist responses in Britain. The BUF were the culmination of fascism in Britain before the Second World War. Nevertheless, Mosley was not the only important figure in the history of fascism in Britain, nor was the BUF the only notable far-right organisation between 1900-1939. The emphasis here is not solely on the importance of the BUF, but equally on the impact the BBL and the BF.

Historiographical Understandings of Fascism and Proto-Fascism

Fascism is arguably the vaguest of all political terms. A definitive explanation continues to elude us. British fascism was one of the least successful variants of interwar European fascism. Fascist parties never won a parliamentary seat in Britain and only two local council seats in the inter-war period, nonetheless, the several manifestations of 'fascism' between 1900-1939 speak volumes about British political culture.⁵⁷

For decades historians have rummaged for a cohesive definition of fascism. The Italian fascists and the Nazis have informed modern understandings of what fascism is. Indeed, other fascist movements and dictatorships are measured against the criteria set by the Italian fascists and the Nazis. In the opinion of P. Morgan, who derives his definition of fascism through the study of Italy and Germany between 1919-1945, fascist movements are 'radical hyper nationalist cross-class movements with a distinctive militarist organisation and activist political style.'⁵⁸ Fascist movements appear in a climate of perceived national decline and sought national regeneration. As R. Paxton points out, fascism has been historically understood as a consequence of weak or failed liberal states or capitalist systems.⁵⁹ This was certainly the case in Germany as the Weimar Republic were blamed for the defeat and national humiliation of the Great War as well as political and economic incompetence.⁶⁰ The persecution of minorities and the existence of a centralised state and a regulatory form of socio-economic organisation have also been frequently cited as hallmark features of fascist movements because both regimes persecuted several minority groups and implemented corporatist economic structures.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Lunn, K., & Thurlow, R. (1980). Introduction. In K. Lunn, & R. Thurlow (Eds.), *British Fascism: Essay on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (pp. 9-18). Routledge. Page 9.

⁵⁸ Morgan, P. (2002). *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 14.

⁵⁹ Paxton, R. (2004). *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Alfred A. Knopf. Page 81.

⁶⁰ Paxton, R. (2004). *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Alfred A. Knopf. Page 81.

⁶¹ Morgan, P. (2002). *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 8.

In 1973, P. Hayes divided the essential components of fascism into eight sections; the myth of race, the idea of the élite and the leader, the totalitarian state, nationalism, socialism, militarism, economics and the concepts of morality and might in international affairs.⁶² Hayes compartmentalised the components of fascism to mould a working definition of the phenomenon. A decade later, S. Payne published his revelatory scholarship which moved away from Hayes' 'check-list' type definition. Alternatively, Payne produced a synthetic definition of fascism whereby the generic negations of fascist movements were understood to be anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-conservatism.⁶³ Payne also listed the creation of a new nationalist authoritarian state and a new form of regulated, classless national economic structure such as national corporatist or national socialist, and a radical change in the nation's relationship with other powers as the ideological components and objectives of fascism.⁶⁴ With regards to style and organisation, fascism attempted mass mobilisation and militarisation of political relationships and style in order to achieve a desired mass party militia. Meetings and rallies were usually heavily choreographed affairs, and the structure of fascist movements were militarist, according to Payne.⁶⁵ Fascism always carried a willingness to deploy violence to achieve objectives and favoured an authoritarian, charismatic, masculine style of command.⁶⁶ Though *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* by Hayes was published almost forty years ago, it informed subsequent and contemporary definitions of fascism. In 1985, I. Kershaw also associated fascism with an extreme chauvinistic nationalism, anti-socialism and anti-Marxism, a fixation on a charismatic and legitimised male leader, the use of terror and the glorification of militarism and war.⁶⁷

⁶² Hayes, P. (1973). *Fascism*. W & J Limited. Page 19.

⁶³ Payne, S. G. (1983). *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*. University of Wisconsin Press. Page 7.

⁶⁴ Payne, S. G. (1983). *Fascism*. Page 7.

⁶⁵ Payne, S. G. (1983). *Fascism*. Page 7.

⁶⁶ Payne, S. G. (1983). *Fascism*. Page 7.

⁶⁷ Kershaw, I. (1985). *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Imitation*. Edward Arnold. Page 38.

Kershaw also maintained fascism was informed by a backlash to the socio-political crisis confronting Europe after the First World War.⁶⁸

The dawn of this century heralded a new wave of historiography with revised definitions and descriptions of fascism beginning with T. Linehan's account, *British Fascism 1918-1939*.

Linehan deemed the basic components of fascism as 'a stress on elite and charismatic leadership, an emphasis on youth, a militaristic and authoritarian ethos, and a predilection for political violence.'⁶⁹ He insisted anti-Marxism, anti-conservatism, anti-rationalism, anti-positivism and anti-materialism were fundamental components of fascist ideology too.⁷⁰

R. Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* offers the most cohesive definition of fascism. Paxton attests,

'Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.'⁷¹

Furthermore, he cites, 'unlimited particular sovereignty, a relish for war, and a society based on violent exclusion' as other definitive components of fascism.⁷² Paxton's perception of fascism is arguably the informative definition of the phenomenon.

⁶⁸ Kershaw, I. (1985). *The Nazi Dictatorship*. Page 38.

⁶⁹ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 5.

⁷⁰ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 5.

⁷¹ Paxton., R. O. (2004). *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Alfred A. Knopf. Page 218.

⁷² Paxton., R. O. (2004). *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Page 32.

A consolidation of the numerous definitions of fascism provided by historians allows a working definition of the term to be formed. Fascism is an authoritarian and militaristic ethos. Fascism has several negations; anti-communism, anti-Marxism, anti-conservatism and anti-liberalism and seeks to build a society based on exclusion and extreme intolerance against all presumed oppositional groups, such as Jews. Fascists tend to seek the creation of an authoritarian state and are etatist in their outlook, also, fascism vouches to create a national economic structure. It is also characterised by an extreme chauvinistic nationalism and a desire for imperialist expansion. It also professes to be a mass party drawing all sectors of society and seeks the destruction of class-barriers to form a meritocracy. Fascists almost always possess a willingness to deploy violence to achieve political objectives. Furthermore, fascist movements adhere to a militaristic structure and fixate on a charismatic and legitimised leader, usually a male figure. Their meetings and rallies are heavily choreographed and place great emphasis on their aesthetic value.

Proto-fascism is another term crucial to the nature of this study. It refers to the predecessor ideologies and movements which directly influenced subsequent fascist movements. In the context of this study, the BBL and the BF should be understood as two proto-fascist movements which influenced the BUF, the most significant fascist movement in Britain between 1900-1939.

Historiographical Understandings of the Proto-Fascist and Fascist Movements in Britain (1900-1939)

The belief fascism in Britain was uniquely a product of the interwar years is longstanding. The historiographical study of earlier far-right movements such as the BBL and BF have been overshadowed by the wealth of commentary on the BUF. Indeed, as J.L. Liburd acknowledges, 'much of the scholarship on inter-war British fascism deals primarily with the 1930s and Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.'⁷³ Consequently, it is unsurprising that, as K. Lunn points out, we know 'comparatively little about British organised fascist precursors.'⁷⁴ However, a handful of historians have discussed the importance of the Edwardian era to the birth of fascist ideology such as R. Thurlow, who insists the years 1880-1914 were of 'fundamental significance to the emergence of British fascist ideology.'⁷⁵ Also, the BBL and the BF have been cited as 'significant' precursors to the BUF.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the question of whether the BUF were a spontaneous expression of fascism or whether it was a culmination of ideas which had been prominent for decades within the BBL and the BF deserves more attention.

The BBL were founded in 1901 by Captain William Stanley Shaw and existed until 1923.⁷⁷ The increasing number of immigrants settling in the East End from the 1880s provided the background to its emergence. The 1901 Census Report claimed, 'the highest proportion of foreigners to the total population was in London, where it reached 30 per 1,000.'⁷⁸ The Borough of Stepney alone was reportedly home to 40% of the entire Jewish population in

⁷³ Liburd, L. J. (2021). Thinking Imperially: The British Fascisti and the Politics of Empire, 1923-35. *Twentieth Century British History*, 32(1), 46-67. Page 47.

⁷⁴ Lunn, K. (1980). Political Anti-Semitism Before 1914: Fascism's Heritage?. In K. Lunn, & R. Thurlow (Eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (pp. 20-40). Routledge. Page 20.

⁷⁵ Thurlow, R. (1998). *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front*. I.B. Tauris. Page 12.

⁷⁶ Jackson, P. (2010). Extremes of Faith and Nation: British Fascism and Christianity. *Religion Compass*, 4(8), 507-517. Page 508.

⁷⁷ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939*. Routledge. Page 90.

⁷⁸ Office for National Statistics. (1901). *1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census*.

Britain.⁷⁹ The League agitated against the perceived social and economic consequences of mass immigration such as urban overcrowding, unemployment and poor housing and campaigned for immigration restriction.⁸⁰ The movement has been alluded to as ‘the most visible and the most vocal of the anti-alien associations that came into existence between 1880 and 1914’.⁸¹ The BBL attained crucial support from the Conservatives and the Liberal Party, but the membership was insignificant; it is believed to have peaked in the middle of 1903 at 12,000.⁸²

S. Johnson is convinced the BBL were a proto-fascist organisation but notes it has been afforded ‘little historiographical attention’.⁸³ Historians have rendered the BBL insignificant in the history of British fascism because of the movement’s lack of durable influence and the unavailability of archival material belonging to the League.⁸⁴ Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the scale of its influence because it was almost defunct following the Aliens Act of 1905.⁸⁵ The few historians who have studied the BBL have highlighted staunch anti-alienism and restrictionism as its defining features. S. Johnson maintains the BBL had little ‘actual political intent,’ rather it was ‘exclusively concerned with immigration.’⁸⁶ N. Toczec described the BBL as ‘intensely xenophobic’ and ‘specifically anti-Jewish’.⁸⁷ Irrespective of the League’s questionable influence, its existence alone indicates anti-immigration discourse, specifically antisemitism, was ‘deeply embedded as a social and cultural phenomenon’ in Britain.⁸⁸ Most historians have refrained from discussing the links between the BBL, the BF

⁷⁹ Office for National Statistics. (1901). *1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census*.

⁸⁰ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 90.

⁸¹ Glover, D. (2012). *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act*. Cambridge University Press. Page 117.

⁸² Toczec, N. (2018) *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Routledge. Page 79.

⁸³ Johnson, S. (2014). “Trouble is Yet Coming!” The British Brothers League, Immigration and Anti-Jewish Sentiment in London’s East End, 1901-1903. In R. Nemes, D. Unowsky, & H. Kieval (Eds.), *Sites of European Antisemitism in the Age of Mass Politics, 1880-1918* (pp. 137-155). Brandeis University Press. Page 138.

⁸⁴ Johnson, S. (2014). “Trouble is Yet Coming!” Page 139.

⁸⁵ Glover, D. (2012). *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*. Page 117.

⁸⁶ Johnson, S. (2014). “Trouble is Yet Coming!” Page 143.

⁸⁷ Toczec, N. (2018) *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 76.

⁸⁸ Johnson, S. (2014). “Trouble is Yet Coming!” Page 155.

and the BUF. Although, the BBL fell woefully short of a fascist movement, their importance as a proto-fascist precursor to the BUF deserves far more comment.

The BF were founded in May 1923 by Rotha Lintorn-Orman. The female founder-ship of the BF is 'almost unique in the history of fascist movements during the inter-war period'.⁸⁹

Several historians believe Mussolini's National Fascist Party was the 'principal guide' for the organisation, citing the BF's shift to state corporatism in 1930s, an economic structure the Italians had championed since the late 1920s and the similar adoption of aggressive tactics.⁹⁰ Others, namely J.L. Liburd, have interpreted the BF as a far-right reaction to 'colonial unrest, the rise of the Labour Party and increasing trade union militancy, and the spectre of the Bolshevik Revolution.'⁹¹

A notable degree of commentary has been devoted to the BF. Historians have questioned the authenticity of the movement's self-proclaimed fascist identity, discussed the obvious nod to Italian fascism, and identified staunch imperialism, anti-communism, anti-alienism and antisemitism as cornerstones of the movement's ideology. Historians are convinced the membership of the BF was relatively small and exhibited a high turnover rate despite the absence of membership rolls.⁹² The rest of historiography on the BF, however, is incredibly divisive. The most significant branch of historiography can be grouped under the 'Conservative with Knobs On' thesis, this epitomises the prevailing perception identified by P. Stocker that the BF should be understood as 'virulent' version of Conservatism rather than a fascist movement.⁹³ In 1971, R. Benewick insisted 'there was little Fascist content' in

⁸⁹ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 11.

⁹⁰ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 12. See also May, R. (2019). *Breaking Boundaries: British Fascism from a Transnational Perspective, 1923 to 1939* [PhD Thesis, Sheffield Hallam University]. Page 1.

⁹¹ Liburd, L. J. (2021). *Thinking Imperially*. Page 51.

⁹² Blinkhorn, M. (1990). *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Taylor & Francis Group. Page 269.

⁹³ Stocker, P. (2016). Importing Fascism: Reappraising the British Fascisti, 1923-1926. *Contemporary British History*, 30(3), 326-348. Page 331.

the ideology of the BF.⁹⁴ R. Griffins then branded the BF as 'a Conservative movement obsessed with the dangers of civil emergency' which 'stood for British values, the Empire and the status quo.'⁹⁵ T. Linehan has contributed greatly to the 'Conservatism with Knobs On' thesis; his *British Fascism 1918-1939* published in 2000 is the most nuanced publication on the BF. Linehan charts the crucial stages in the development of the movement and insists there was 'very little evidence of fascism in its ideology or programme' until after the General Strike and concluded, 'although it adopted the paraphernalia of fascism, it was not revolutionary either in intent or outlook.'⁹⁶

K. Lunn is the most notable historian to repudiate the 'Conservative with Knobs On' thesis. He insists its proprietors have understated the salience of fascist ideology within the BF and maintains it was an authentic fascist party.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the BF have since been alluded to as the 'first consciously 'Fascist' group in Britain.'⁹⁸ Also, J. Stevenson and C. Cook have cited the BF's state corporatism, their intention to implement large-scale drastic economic reforms and antisemitism as evidence of the movement's fascist authenticity.⁹⁹ The movements chauvinism, imperialism, anti-communism and anti-alienism place it firmly on the Radical Right, but whether the movement was truly fascist requires further consideration.

There is a wealth of commentary on the BUF, far more than on the BBL and the BF.¹⁰⁰

Formed in October 1932 by former Conservative and Labour MP Sir Oswald Mosley, the BUF is widely acknowledged as the pinnacle of fascism in Britain. It was the largest and

⁹⁴ Griffins, R. (1980). *Fellow Travellers of the Right*. Constable. Page 86.

⁹⁵ Griffins, R. (1980). *Fellow Travellers of the Right*. Constable. Pages 86-88.

⁹⁶ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 65.

⁹⁷ Lunn, K. (1989). The Ideology and impact of the British Fascists in the 1920s. In T. Kushner, & K. Lunn (Eds.), *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives of Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain* (pp. 140-155). Manchester University Press. Page 148.

⁹⁸ Jackson, P. (2010). Extremes of Faith and Nation: British Fascism and Christianity. *Religion Compass*, 4(8), 507-517. Page 508.

⁹⁹ Stevenson, J., & Cook, C. (1977). *The Slump: Britain in the Great Depression*. Jonathan Cape Limited. Page 213.

¹⁰⁰ May, R. (2020). Saving Our Empire from the Bolsheviks: The British Fascists from a Transnational Perspective. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 49(1), 70-92. Page 70.

most programmatic fascist party too.¹⁰¹ The bulk of work on the BUF has focused on the leader and its novel features, namely antisemitism, state corporatism, violence and ultra-nationalism.¹⁰²

Historians have focused overwhelmingly on the party's antisemitism. The BUF adopted antisemitism as an official policy in September 1934 and Mosley's antisemitic outbursts at the Belle Vue Rally in Manchester on 24 September 1934 is understood as the beginning of the movement's relentless agitation against Jews. D. Tilles insists the BUF adopted a 'progressively more explicit, comprehensive and vituperative anti-Jewish message' from Autumn 1934,¹⁰³ likewise, T. Linehan cites Mosley's 'official endorsement of antisemitism in September 1934' as the 'most significant' policy development.¹⁰⁴

This dissertation focuses on the impact the BBL and BF had on the BUF, therefore, it is important to consider what historians have said about the two precursor movements in relation to the BUF. Few historians have studied their impact, rather, as N. Copsey notes, they have tended to dismiss the precursor movements as 'irrelevances, unimportant both in ideological and organisational terms.'¹⁰⁵ D.S. Lewis claims, 'none of this motley collection of groups calling themselves fascist represents a precursor for the BUF.'¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, R. Skidelsky stresses the BUF 'picked up almost where the (BBL) left off' by exploiting the grievances of the East End.¹⁰⁷ Evidently, several historians have isolated the BUF as the only notable fascist movement in Britain before 1939 and have played down the influence of

¹⁰¹ Stocker, P. (2015). 'The Imperial Spirit': British Fascism and Empire, 1919–1940. *Religion Compass*, 9(2), 45-54. Page 50.

¹⁰² Cullen, S. (1987). The Development of the Ideas and Policies of the British Union of Fascists. *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 22(1), 115-136. Page 115.

¹⁰³ Tilles, D. (2015). *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses 1932-40*. Bloomsbury Academic. Page 79.

¹⁰⁴ Linehan, T. (1996). *East London for Mosley*. Frank Cass. Page 4.

¹⁰⁵ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Palgrave. Page 5.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, D. S. (1987). *Illusions of Grandeur*. Page 29.

¹⁰⁷ Skidelsky, R. (1975). *Oswald Mosley*. Macmillan. Page 396.

the BBL and the BF and few believe the two movements were crucial to the formation of the BUF.

Chapter One: The BBL – A Proto-Fascist Prelude (1901-1923)

Antagonism in the East End

For almost three decades beginning in the 1880s, there was mounting public agitation against the unprecedented flow of “penniless immigrants” to Britain, particularly the East End. As a result, immigration restriction became the dominant political issue from the late 1880s. Jewish immigrants were unquestionably the focus of anti-alien agitation; Jews bore the brunt of British domestic frustrations and throughout the 1880s, the term “destitute alien” became synonymous with the Jewish immigrant.¹⁰⁸ By settling in densely populated and poverty-stricken areas such as Spitalfields, Jewish immigrants were blamed for exacerbating existing social and economic problems such as unemployment, overcrowding and lowering living standards.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Spitalfields developed a reputation as one of the poorest and most dangerous areas in the East End and was characterised by slum properties and cheap lodging houses.¹¹⁰

Several editions of the *Polish Yidel* from October 1884 prove antisemitism was widespread throughout London during the 1880s. An article titled ‘Small Clouds in the Sky’ described the abuse local Jews were subjected to everyday; “Try it: go out on a Saturday afternoon in Whitechapel...and every time a Jew walks by you will hear the friendly call, “bloody Jew!” Is that a sign of brotherly love?”¹¹¹ Furthermore, Jews often were outrightly refused tenancy by local landlords because of their religion.¹¹² These are sickening illustrations of the discrimination Jews had to endure daily throughout London in the 1880s. The following page urged; “Jews, open your eyes before it is too late! A program in Brick Lane, or in the side

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, S. (2014). “Trouble is Yet Coming!”. Page 138.

¹⁰⁹ Garrard, J. A. (1967). English Reactions to Immigrants Now and 70 Years Ago. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 1(4), 24-32. Page 24.

¹¹⁰ The National Archives. *Spitalfields, London*. The National Archives. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/census/events/britain4.htm>.

¹¹¹ Small Clouds in the Sky. (1884, October 3). *The Polish Yidel*. Page 69.

¹¹² Small Clouds in the Sky. (1884, October 3). *The Polish Yidel*. Page 69.

streets of Commercial Road, could be bloodier and more terrible than a pogrom in Balta.”¹¹³ The mention of Balta refers to the severe Jewish pogrom which broke out in the city in the Odessa district of Ukraine in 1882, which saw over 1,200 Jewish houses and businesses pillaged, but an attempt to organise a defence by local Jews was fiercely repressed by the police.¹¹⁴ In October 1884, The *Polish Yidel* also stressed that the everyday occurrences of antisemitism were bound to manifest into organised responses.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the formation of the BBL in 1901 validated this claim.

By the late 1880s, antisemitism and anti-alienism were also becoming increasingly common throughout the East End Press. On 4 April 1887, the *St. James's Gazette* published their take on the number of Jews residing in East London. The title of the article itself, “Jewish East End,” implies the area has been arrogated by Jews. The article reported of a “colony of 30,000 or 40,000 aliens, steeped to the lips in every form of moral and physical degradation,” and insisted, “the presence of such a colony constitutes a very serious social and economic evil.”¹¹⁶ The article branded the immigrants as “Nihilists, Socialists and Anarchists of the very worst type,” and slammed their absence of patriotism and reluctance to assimilate.¹¹⁷ Jewish immigrants were increasingly branded as radicalised anarchists and nihilists in the 1890s and blamed for spreading dangerous political doctrines throughout London.

The Creation of the BBL

The BBL were a reactionary movement. The League was founded as a defensive response to unprecedented immigration levels in Britain. It marked the culmination of the anti-alien agitation and restrictionism that had been mounting for two decades. Indeed, the BBL were

¹¹³ Small Clouds in the Sky. (1884, October 3). *The Polish Yidel*. Page 69.

¹¹⁴ Jewish Virtual Library. *Balta, Ukraine*. Jewish Virtual Library. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/balta>.

¹¹⁵ (1884, October 3). *The Polish Yidel*. Page 70.

¹¹⁶ Jewish East London. (1887, April 4). *St. James's Gazette*. Page 5.

¹¹⁷ Jewish East London. (1887, April 4). *St. James's Gazette*. Page 5.

motivated solely by a 'vehement desire' to halt a further influx of "destitute aliens" from arriving and settling in Britain.¹¹⁸ The immigration question provided a means of existence and created an incredible sense of urgency and relevance for the League.

The League was formed on 25 February 1901 and founded 'officially' on 9 May 1901 at the inaugural meeting at Stepney Meeting House.¹¹⁹ It was founded by Captain William Stanley Shaw, formerly of the Middlesex Regiment. The inaugural meeting was said to be a "stormy" and "lively" affair.¹²⁰ It was chaired by Spencer Charrington, the Conservative MP for Mile End with a considerable number of other East End MPs present.¹²¹ In addition, a few hundred working-class locals also attended, as did multiple trade union representatives. Major William Evans-Gordon, the Conservative MP for Stepney, funded the expenses of the meeting and his speech stressed the anti-immigration feeling in the area was not fuelled by antisemitism; a remark which did not sit well a working-class interrupter who reportedly "rushed up to the platform, and accused the speaker of having got into parliament by the help of the Jewish vote."¹²² The incident was followed by a "great disturbance", then Isaac Solomons, the Jewish Secretary of the National Boot and Shoe Workers' Trade Union, claimed "nothing short of the complete organization of the people themselves of their industry, and the public ownership by the nation of the means of life would solve the question at issue."¹²³ Solomons was heckled off the platform by shouts of "No more Jews!", "Sweater!" and "Go home!," and various scuffles broke out leading to a series of ejections.¹²⁴ Another interrupter, a working-class man, demanded the audience vote on whether "no more Jews should be brought into this country," the motion was greeted by the majority of hands.¹²⁵ Evidently, the BBL's debut onto the

¹¹⁸ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!". Page 138.

¹¹⁹ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 90.

¹²⁰ Current Comments. (1901, May 14). *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*. Page 3. See also British Brothers League. (1901, May 11). *East London Observer*. Page 5.

¹²¹ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 144.

¹²² British Brothers League. (1901, May 11). *East London Observer*. Page 5.

¹²³ Current Comments. (1901, May 14). *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*. Page 3.

¹²⁴ Current Comments. (1901, May 14). *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*. Page 3.

¹²⁵ Current Comments. (1901, May 14). *East End News and London Shipping Chronicle*. Page 3.

political stage was chaotic and tainted with prejudice. Even though Evans-Gordon insisted the movement were not antisemitic, it is evident many working-class supporters believed it was.

The BBL were remarkably consistent within their aims and policy. It was intent on pressuring immigration restriction. The early propaganda proves it was exclusively dedicated to the issue of immigration. One of the first pieces of propaganda affirmed, "The East End of London is rapidly becoming for dust-bin of Europe, into which all sorts of human refuse is shot."¹²⁶ Furthermore, it referenced the "sweating," and "bloodmoney";¹²⁷ this was clearly a reference to the miscellaneous activities associated with Jews. In early June 1901, the League published a manifesto outlining its organisational structure and addressed the issue of "destitute" immigration. The manifesto was addressed to the "working men of East London" and insisted "thousands of foreign paupers" had been rushing to East London and "driving English people out of their native parishes, and literally taking the bread out of English mouths."¹²⁸ Furthermore, the manifesto claimed only "a body of united and organised, resolute and determined Britishers" could force restrictive legislation. It was a short but incredibly emotive manifesto which stressed unity and collective action, specifically brotherhood. It also outlined the organisational structure of the movement; membership was "open to all natural-born Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotsmen, or Welshmen," and members were urged to pay an optional joining fee of sixpence. Evidently, the League placed an intense emphasis on the masculine principle. It also adhered to a rigorous militaristic structure. There were sections consisting of one hundred men and ten sections constituted a ward of a thousand men, sections were named alphabetically, and wards numerically. The Executive Committee were tasked with establishing the general policy. The manifesto evidenced the strong sense of nativism which underpinned the movement and potently illustrated its foremost desire to halt "pauper" immigration.

¹²⁶ *British Brothers League*. (1901, May 11). *East London Observer*. Page 5.

¹²⁷ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 143.

¹²⁸ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 90.

The case of primary sources relating to the BBL is problematic for there is minimal archival material available. Nonetheless, the lack of primary sources can be mitigated by the local and national newspapers which lent an attentive ear to the League and were passionately vocal on the issue of immigration in the East End at the dawn of the twentieth century. These newspapers demonstrate that popular, cultural, and political forms of anti-alienism and antisemitism were disseminated to heighten the issue of immigration in the East End and laud the BBL. The *Daily Mail* was the most vocal newspaper on the issue. On 19 November 1901, the *Daily Mail* branded the BBL as a 'well-marked movement in London against the evils of pauper immigration.'¹²⁹ Furthermore, it insisted the League were 'vigorously throwing up branches in the East-End boroughs,' and their policy of restricting the immigration of "destitute" aliens was 'enthusiastically endorsed' by 'working men of every shade of political opinion.'¹³⁰ The *Daily Mail* also claimed the movement had 'scores of branches' and a staggering membership of 45,000 just a month after it was founded.¹³¹ It insisted the BBL were 'the outcome of popular feeling which has been stirred to its deepest depths by this very near and pressing problem.'¹³² By branding the immigration crisis in the East End as a 'very near and pressing problem' under the title, 'The Foreign Invasion of London', it is evident the newspaper was intent on scaremongering the public to heighten the issue's importance.¹³³ Furthermore, by lauding the BBL for its soaring membership and wide-reaching appeal, the *Daily Mail* deliberately placed the movement at the forefront of the ongoing struggle against "pauper" immigration, maximising the League's significance and appeal to the newspaper's nationwide readership.

¹²⁹ Inroad of Pauper Aliens. (1901, November 19). *Daily Mail*. Page 3. *Daily Mail Historical Archive*. link.gale.com/apps/doc/EE1863440185/GDCS?u=hudduni&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=c77a7f14.

¹³⁰ Inroad of Pauper Aliens. (1901, November 19). *Daily Mail*. Page 3. *Daily Mail Historical Archive*.

¹³¹ Mountmorres, D. (1902, September 18). The Foreign Invasion of London. *Daily Mail*. Page 4.

¹³² Mountmorres, D. (1902, September 18). The Foreign Invasion of London. *Daily Mail*. Page 4.

¹³³ Mountmorres, D. (1902, September 18). The Foreign Invasion of London. *Daily Mail*. Page 4.

The People's Palace Meeting and the Emergence of Antisemitism

The rest of 1901 was a period of notable development. On 25 May 1901, the Conservative MP for Sheffield Sir Howard Vincent declared his agreement with the League's principal aim to restrict "pauper" immigration.¹³⁴ The BBL developed its organisational structure over the spring and summer of 1901 too. Major Evans-Gordon ascended as the leading light of the movement just months after his election to Parliament as the Conservative MP for Stepney. By June, it had developed a hierarchal administrative structure headed by a chair with a subordinate executive committee, several wards, and sections. There was notable branch expansion too. In October 1901, the first branches were formed in Bromley and Bow and Poplar and in the following month, a branch was convened in Hackney and Bethnal Green, then in Shoreditch, Stepney, St. George's-in-the-Est, Limehouse, Haggerston.¹³⁵ The meetings throughout 1901, however, were modest affairs. Held weekly in Hackney and Bethnal Green in public houses such as the Baker's Arms and the Volunteer, there tended to be less than a hundred in attendance.¹³⁶ A definitive membership figure in this period continues to elude historians. On October 15, 1901, at a meeting held at the Pott Street Schoolroom in Bethnal Green Road, William Stanley Shaw, the President, insisted there were 5,000 members, nearly a fifth of whom paid the sixpence entrance fee.¹³⁷ This is the most accurate indication of the membership throughout the last quarter of 1901 even though the figure was most definitely inflated to bolster the League. The movement's first ten months were rather promising. It claimed the support of several influential politicians, reorganised and expanded efficiently, nevertheless, meetings were still modest affairs, and the membership was trivial.

The BBL's restrictionist outlook quickly fuelled reactions from official Jewish outlets. On 1 November 1901, the Jewish Chronicle (JC) published an article was written by an "outsider"

¹³⁴ To the Editor of the East London Observer. (1901, May 25). *East London Observer*.

¹³⁵ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 147.

¹³⁶ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 147.

¹³⁷ Alien Immigration. (1901, October 18). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 14.

present at a recent BBL which provides crucial insight into the early mechanisms of the movement even though the contents of the meeting were allegedly mitigated because of the outsider's presence.¹³⁸ From the outset of the article, the author denounces the movement as a "combination of Primrose Leaguers and radical workingmen," whom "know nothing of the alien immigration problem."¹³⁹ The Primrose League were a sub-movement of the Conservative Party which was founded in 1883 for the purpose of fostering popular, working-class participation in Conservative politics.¹⁴⁰ The JC also insisted the members of the BBL "would, individually, not say "boo" to a Jewish goose", painting the members as sheepish.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, it confirmed "Sir Howard Vincent is the head and Mr. William Stanley Shaw is the mechanism between the two parts."¹⁴² This supports the notion held by N. Toczek that Shaw, despite being the founder, occupied an integral yet "strictly back-room role" within the BBL.¹⁴³ The article also insisted "a strong repugnance" against Jews is growing throughout the East End which the BBL were exploiting.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the BBL's anti-Jewish stance was opportunistic because it recognised anti-alienism was growing amongst the public and exploited local grievances such as poverty, unemployment and housing issues to grow and substantiate the importance of the movement.

The BBL made even greater strides in the New Year. On Tuesday 14 January 1902, the League held their first 'Great Public Demonstration' in the Queen's Hall in the People's Palace in Mile End. Queen Victoria opened the People's Palace in 1887 and it served as an

¹³⁸ British Brothers' League. A Description, an Analysis and a Deduction. (1901, November 1). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 12.

¹³⁹ British Brothers' League. A Description, an Analysis and a Deduction. (1901, November 1). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 12.

¹⁴⁰ Green, E. H. H. (1995). *The Crisis of Conservatism*. Routledge. Page 107.

¹⁴¹ British Brothers' League. A Description, an Analysis and a Deduction. (1901, November 1). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 12.

¹⁴² British Brothers' League. A Description, an Analysis and a Deduction. (1901, November 1). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 12.

¹⁴³ Toczek, N. (2018). *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 76.

¹⁴⁴ British Brothers' League. A Description, an Analysis and a Deduction. (1901, November 1). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 12.

educational and recreational space for East End working men.¹⁴⁵ The People's Palace Meeting marked the movement's ascendancy onto the mainstream political scene and propelled it into the public domain. Over 4,000 people reportedly attended.¹⁴⁶ It was hoped such a notable venue with a large crowd would lend the movement the respectability it craved and grant the speaker's maximum political leverage. Passionate speeches were given by Major Evans-Gordon, Sir Howard Vincent, Samuel Forde Ridley and Harry Simon, the respective Conservative MPs of Stepney, Sheffield, Bethnal Green Southwest and Limehouse. The Liberal MP for Wolverhampton Southeast Henry Norman also spoke, as did David Hope Kyd the Unionist candidate for Whitechapel and A.T. Williams the London County Council Member for Stepney. Arnold Henry White, the author and journalist, and one of the most renowned proponents of antisemitism in Britain in the twentieth century, also took to the platform.

The official poster promised an emphatic event. It spoke of a 'Great Public Demonstration' chaired by Major-Evans Gordon and promised the presence of MPs, County and Borough Councillors, Members of Boards of Guardians of 'all shades of politics,' and Ministers of Religion of 'all Denominations.'¹⁴⁷ For a grassroots movement less than a year into its existence, the presence of such an array of senior political figures was impressive. It not only proves that anti-alienism was a dominant political phenomenon entertained by many prominent political and social figures, but it also suggests these individuals found common ground within the anti-immigration agitation of the League. The poster stated the BBL were 'in favour of restricting the further immigration of destitute foreigners into this country.'¹⁴⁸ The League's opposition to immigration was by far its defining hallmark and perhaps its only

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 149.

¹⁴⁶ Garrard, J. (1971). *The English and Immigration: A Comparative Study of the Jewish Influx 1880-1910*. Oxford University Press. Page 81.

¹⁴⁷ The Guardian. (2015). *A Poster for the BBL's Biggest Rally, at the People's Palace in Mile End in 1902* [Poster]. The Guardian.

¹⁴⁸ The Guardian. (2015). *A Poster for the BBL's Biggest Rally, at the People's Palace in Mile End in 1902* [Poster].

programmatic component. Specifically, the League vouched to halt further immigration of 'destitute foreigners'; evidently, it was concerned with the economic consequences of immigration initially. The BBL constantly reiterated Eastern European immigrants were an economic burden on the public purse. The movement were intent on channelling the keenly felt concerns of ordinary working people throughout the East End who saw the increasing flow of immigrants as a mounting economic threat.

The meeting opened with choruses of 'Soldiers of the Queen', 'God bless the Price of Wales', 'There's no place like home' and 'Britons shall never be slaves.'¹⁴⁹ There was a vigorous nationalist spirit evident from the outset of the meeting. There were several notable speeches. Firstly, Samuel Forde Ridley claimed 90,000 aliens had settled in Britain within the first nine months of 1901, a claim he had no actual evidence for.¹⁵⁰ Rather, as T.M. Endelman estimates, around 100,000 Russo-Jewish immigrants settled permanently in Britain between 1881 and 1905.¹⁵¹

A.T. Williams stressed immigrants were polluting the East End. Williams referred to Mile End and Cable Street as "your streets," then added, "I see names have changed. I see good old names of tradesmen have gone, and in their places are foreign names – the names of those who have ousted Englishmen into the cold."¹⁵² Williams hoped to incite a widespread hatred of immigrants amongst the crowd and create an urgency for immigration restriction and judging by the accompanying cries of "Wipe them out!" and "Give it them thick!", the crowd were indeed provoked by the contents and resonance of his speech. By lacing his speech with nostalgic references to the former days when the East End was filled with "good old names" in contrast with the unrecognisable, foreign names now present, Williams argued the immigrants were

¹⁴⁹ Toczec, N. (2018). *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 77.

¹⁵⁰ Toczec, N. (2018). *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 77.

¹⁵¹ Endelman, T. M. (2002). *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000*. University of California Press. Page 127.

¹⁵² Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 93.

having a parasitical impact on the East End, implying they had ‘taken over’ the area and victimised English people in their wake. There were parts of Spitalfields which had a 95% Jewish population in 1901 and the 1901 Census Report estimated around 40% of Britain’s Jewish population resided in the Borough of Stepney.¹⁵³ A. T. Williams was one of several East End MPs angered by the increasingly Jewish identity their constituencies were gaining.

Henry Norman’s speech revealed his anger and disillusionment the issue of immigration. Norman attested, “This is England. It is not the backyard of Europe; this is not the dustbin of Austria and Russia.”¹⁵⁴ Clearly, Norman was angered with the unprecedented flow of immigrants from the Russian Empire, particularly Jews, who had settled in Britain over the previous thirty years. These speeches prove numerous MPs vigorously opposed immigration and resented immigrants for settling and working in the East End. Harry Simon Samuel and David Hope Kyd’s speeches were less impassioned and more rational than those of Ridley, Williams, and Norman. Both stressed the BBL were not an antisemitic movement but declared immigration control was necessary. Samuel insisted this was not “an antisemitic movement” but if unrestricted immigration continued then, “the future boded ill for the Jewish race in England.”¹⁵⁵ Kyd too insisted, “it was not a movement against the Jews, but a movement in defence of Englishmen.”¹⁵⁶ The presence alone of so many prominent MPs and council members and, more importantly, their passionate speeches suggest various politicians found common ground within the BBL as they could express their desire to restrict immigration and for some, the League was an outlet for their anti-Jewish sentiments.

The most notable character among all the speakers at the People’s Palace meeting was Arnold Henry White. He gave the most consequential speech. Historians of British

¹⁵³ The National Archives. *Spitalfields, London*. The National Archives.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/census/events/britain4.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ Special Report. (1902, January 18). *East London Observer*. Page 2.

¹⁵⁵ Glover, D. (2012). *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*. Page 118.

¹⁵⁶ Glover, D. (2012). *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*. Page 118.

antisemitism have repeatedly rendered White as a 'key exponent of racially orientated anti-Jewish sentiment' in Britain before the Great War.¹⁵⁷ B. Gainer alluded to White as a 'self-confessed and unrepentant anti-Semite'.¹⁵⁸ Though White's eugenic ideas were never endorsed by the BBL, his association with the League suggests racial antisemites found conviction within the movement for their degenerationist and declinist fears relating to the moral condition of British society.

White began his career in 1885 as a social reformer working primarily in the East End. It is important to note, during the 1880s, London was a rapidly expanding metropolis at the heart of the British Empire, and this was crucial to shaping his outlook. White identified several problems plaguing the East End, namely alcoholism, overcrowding and fecundity, all, he believed, were a result of the poverty, disease, and unemployment caused by the 'pauper alien,' merely a generalised term for the immigrant Jew.¹⁵⁹ Before 1902, White produced several works which drove the central theme of the 'alien menace' and illustrated the dreadful consequences of Jewish immigration. The *Problems of the Great City*, *The Destitute Alien in Great Britain: A Series of Papers dealing with the Subject of Foreign Pauper Immigration* and *The Modern Jew* all revealed White's obsession with the "alien menace."¹⁶⁰

In *The Modern Jew*, White explicitly linked Eastern European Jewish immigrants with anarchism, criminality, and poverty. He regretted that 'Asiatic' Jews could settle freely in Britain and insisted, 'in other countries, the diseased, the anarchist, the criminal, and the pauper are not admitted.'¹⁶¹ Through his works, White tuned into the nationwide fear of anarchism sweeping the British tabloids in the 1890s. Following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, S. (2013). 'A veritable Janus at the gates of Jewry': British Jews and Mr Arnold White. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 47(1), 41-68. Page 41.

¹⁵⁸ Gainer, B. (1972). *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905*. Heinemann Educational Publishers. Page 121.

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, S. (2013). 'A veritable Janus at the gates of Jewry'. Page 41.

¹⁶⁰ Toczec, N. (2018). *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 77.

¹⁶¹ White, A. (1899). *The Modern Jew*. Frederick A. Stokes Company. Page 180.

1881, British newspapers frantically reported anarchist incidents across Europe, namely in Paris, Rome, and Barcelona.¹⁶² In 1894, French President Carnot was fatally stabbed by Italian anarchist Sante Geronimo Caserio in Lyon and leading up to the assassination there were eleven dynamite explosions in Paris.¹⁶³ In 1897, the Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo was shot dead by an Italian anarchist, the following year Empress Elizabeth of Austria was also killed by Italian anarchist and in 1900 and 1901 King Umberto I of Italy and American President William McKinley were fatally shot by anarchists respectively.¹⁶⁴ Although London did not experience anarchist outrages of such severity, these assassinations fuelled fear and scepticism across Britain and several newspapers feared an anarchist outrage in London loomed. It was reported, 'there exists in London an Anarchist conspiracy for chloroforming and kidnapping public men, government officials, or foreigners of note visiting this country, and holding them to ransom, with the mad idea of thus replenishing the revolutionary treasury.'¹⁶⁵ In August 1897, the *Daily Mail* claimed recently exiled Spanish Anarchists were forming alliances with Russian Anarchists in the Jewish areas of the East End.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, in the same month, the *Daily News* insisted the 'foreigner quarter of London' was the 'home of Anarchism in Britain.'¹⁶⁷ These articles explicitly imply anarchism was being imported and spread throughout London by immigrants, namely Russian Jews.

The Russo-Jewish immigrant and the foreign anarchist became increasingly synonymous in the 1890s because of White's works. Russian Jews were blamed for anarchist outbursts significantly more than any other minority in Britain. Indeed, Jewish immigrants did occasionally join anarchist circles, however, it was only the minority. The district stretching from Backchurch Lane to Morgan Street was suspected to be the 'resort and principal abiding-

¹⁶² Knepper, P. (2008). The Other Invisible Hand: Jews and Anarchists in London before the First World War. *Jewish History*, 22(3), 295-315. Page 296.

¹⁶³ Knepper, P. (2008). The Other Invisible Hand. Page 296.

¹⁶⁴ Knepper, P. (2008). The Other Invisible Hand. Page 296.

¹⁶⁵ The Anarchists in London. (1892, April 16). *Berrows Worcester Journal*. Page 8.

¹⁶⁶ The Exiled Spanish Anarchists Now in London. (1897, August 3). *Daily Mail*. Page 5.

¹⁶⁷ Anarchists in London. (1897, August 12). *Daily News*.

place of the East End Anarchists.¹⁶⁸ Specifically, Berner Street was believed to be the centre of Russo-Jewish anarchism in London where anarchists, communists and socialists sought converts, however, it was reportedly relocated to a 'quieter and more obscure corner' in October 1894 to evade surveillance.¹⁶⁹ Located on Berner Street, the International Workers' Educational Club was founded by Morris Winchevsky in 1885 to spread 'true socialism' amongst Jewish workers and housed the Society of Jewish Socialists and ran the Yiddish anarchist newspaper, the 'Worker's Friend.'¹⁷⁰ *The Standard* claimed the members were 'all Jews and Jewesses,' 'neatly and quietly dressed,' under forty, and identifiable by their distinct Jewish features.¹⁷¹ The Jews who aligned themselves with the International Workers' Educational Club did so for several reasons. Thousands of Jews had emigrated from Jewish towns along the western and southwestern border of Russia where anarchist movements blossomed, furthermore, many Jews turned to anarchism in London in 1890s because it offered them a sense of belonging, unity and understanding amid an unsettling period of social upheaval.¹⁷² Alongside the suggestive newspaper reports, White's publications were crucial to developing the idea the immigrant Jew was synonymous with the foreign conspirator in the late nineteenth century.

At the People's Palace Meeting, White vehemently urged for immigration restriction and relayed the conspiracy the government were at the mercy of Jewish anarchists and that international Jewish finance was crippling Britain. In his first proposal, White demanded the prevention of unfettered immigration to solve housing issues. He insisted, "the housing problem in London is insolvable until the immigration of foreign houseless poor is prevented."¹⁷³ Most notably, White insisted the aliens that came to Britain did so "not...because they were persecuted" but "because they wanted our money," as a result, the

¹⁶⁸ The Haunts of the East End Anarchists. (1894, October 2). *Standard*. Page 2.

¹⁶⁹ The Haunts of the East End Anarchists. (1894, October 2). *Standard*. Page 2.

¹⁷⁰ Knepper, P. (2008). *The Other Invisible Hand*. Page 300.

¹⁷¹ The Haunts of the East End Anarchists. (1894, October 2). *Standard*. Page 2.

¹⁷² Avrich, P. (1967). *The Russian Anarchists*. Princeton University Press. Page 17.

¹⁷³ Alien Immigration. (1902, January 15). *Times*. Page 12.

“riches and wealth and magnificence of this great Empire” were at risk.¹⁷⁴ His flagrant use of antisemitism proved particularly damaging for the movement, as did the dozens of supporters who indulged in attacks upon Jews and Jewish property after the meeting.¹⁷⁵ The People’s Palace Meeting and the chaotic instances at the inaugural meeting at the Stepney Meeting House suggest multiple politicians prominent within the movement and many of its working-class supporters were antisemitic.

The JC regretted the persistent support for immigration restriction had ‘culminated’ the following day.¹⁷⁶ It dismissed the ‘men of straw’ who made up the BBL, instead, it bemoaned the MP’s who gave speeches at the meeting.¹⁷⁷ It suggested they were deliberately trying to incite racial and religious animosity and shunned the absurdity of H.S. Samuel’s promise, himself a Jew, that if the immigration of “destitute aliens” were restricted then the housing problem would be solved at once.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, it regretted that the numerous ‘violent and ignorant diatribes’ against Jewish immigrants had obtained the biggest applause.¹⁷⁹ The following week, H.S. Samuel wrote to the JC and protested his innocence, emphasising he did not use the word ‘Jew’ once and insisted ‘if we Jews are to be the only section of the English public to resist the ever-increasing desire of the people to keep out the alien-pauper...we shall assuredly turn the anti-alien agitation into an antisemitic one.’¹⁸⁰ The JC’s Treasurer, A.C. Rodgers dismissed Samuel’s defence as ‘out of date’ and insufficient, and attested the BBL were antisemitic.¹⁸¹ The People’s Palace Meeting proved to be one of the movement’s few defining moments. It was a spectacular affair which aroused a huge degree

¹⁷⁴ Glover, D. (2012). *Literature, Immigration, and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*. Page 117.

¹⁷⁵ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 97.

¹⁷⁶ The People’s Palace Demonstration. (1902, January 17). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 16.

¹⁷⁷ The People’s Palace Demonstration. (1902, January 17). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 16.

¹⁷⁸ The People’s Palace Demonstration. (1902, January 17). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 16.

¹⁷⁹ The People’s Palace Demonstration. (1902, January 17). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 16.

¹⁸⁰ The Anti-Alien Agitation. (1902, January 24). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 9.

¹⁸¹ The Anti-Alien Agitation. (1902, January 24). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 9.

of public and press attention, but it was damaging for it afforded the League an unshakeable tag of antisemitism.

In April 1902, a significant organisational change disrupted the movement. The founder, Captain William Stanley Shaw resigned. The League's annual report stated Shaw was overburdened with work and family responsibilities, however, his exit was equally a consequence of the League's increasing association with antisemitism.¹⁸² Shaw was aggravated by a BBL leaflet which read, "If you or any of your friends have suffered by the alien Jews coming here, now is the time to say."¹⁸³ Shaw affirmed this was a departure from the League's original policy.¹⁸⁴ These blatant instances of antisemitism, though Shaw never admitted, must have been pivotal to his resignation. Just weeks after the resignation, the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration was convened.

Rallies throughout 1902 continued to showcase the League's strength, camaraderie and militarism. In May 1902, the members of the Hackney Branch paraded through Old Bethnal Green Road, Commercial Street, Brick Lane, Old Montague Street, Vallance Road and Whitechapel Road waving large banners, accompanied by a band playing patriotic anthems such as "Britons never shall be slaves."¹⁸⁵ The members repeatedly chanted "Go back to Jerusalem,"¹⁸⁶ implying the movement targeted immigrants because of their Jewishness opposed to their foreignness. The BUF modelled their marches and parades on the precedent set by the BBL. BUF parades involved hundreds of members marching through the same areas of the East End provoking local Jews. Whereas the BUF encountered substantial Jewish opposition from 1934, the BBL did not. Jewish anti-fascism was not fully mobilised until it was

¹⁸² Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

¹⁸³ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 154.

¹⁸⁴ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!" Page 154.

¹⁸⁵ British Brothers League. (1902, May 3). *East London Observer*. Page 6.

¹⁸⁶ British Brothers League. (1902, May 3). *East London Observer*. Page 6.

provoked by the existence of the BUF and the inferior magnitude of the BBL may have not been deemed necessary to warrant organised Jewish responses.

Respectable Support is Lost

The movement's antisemitism was incredibly damaging. Firstly, the *East London Observer* hastily rebuked their support for League after it was appalled by the exaggeration, misrepresentation and antisemitism at the People's Palace. The xenophobic speeches, namely Arnold White's, and the flurry of impassioned individuals who indulged in attacks on Jews and Jewish property after the meeting greatly undermined the movement. Antisemitism alienated moderate supporters and forced several Tory MPs to withdraw their support for the movement. Interestingly, towards the end of 1902, the Conservative Party reportedly warned several MPs about their involvement with the League, proving it was keen to sever any official ties.¹⁸⁷

The Tory restrictionists turned instead to the more moderate and respectable Immigration Reform Association (IRA) from the beginning of 1903.¹⁸⁸ The IRA was founded in February 1903 and has been cited as one for the key pressure groups pushing for the immigration restriction, specifically the exclusion of undesirables, leading up to the Aliens Act of 1905.¹⁸⁹ The BBL were indebted to its parliamentary support, it was a means to legitimise the movement, therefore, as it began to wither, the League inevitably struggled to assert its cause.

The Aliens Act of 1905

The Royal Commission sat from 24 April 1902 until the summer of 1903. It was a thorough parliamentary investigation into the causes and impacts of immigration, and subsequent legislation was inevitable. The summoning of the Commission met the League's demands.

¹⁸⁷ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

¹⁸⁸ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

¹⁸⁹ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

Nonetheless, the League's impact on the convening of the Commission is greatly undermined by the fact it was not mentioned once during the numerous House of Commons' debates on immigration in the months preceding April, even that on 29 January, just two weeks after the People's Palace Meeting.¹⁹⁰ Several BBL members, however, were instrumental to the Commission's proceedings, namely Major Evans-Gordon. He chaired the Commission and gave crucial evidence which was undoubtedly influential to the Commission's final report.¹⁹¹ In 1902, Evans-Gordon travelled extensively to aid his understanding of immigration restriction. He was impressed by the extensive health and financial screening processions immigrants were subjected to by the United States, and claimed, 'if the emigrants desirous of going to England could be passed through similar committees, the inflow of the undesirable and useless would doubtless be very largely checked.'¹⁹²

In August 1903, the Royal Commission recommended that legislation be enacted to prevent the arrival and settling of 'undesirable' aliens and allow their removal, as well as the creation of an Immigration Department.¹⁹³ All of the recommendations suggested by the Commission were encompassed into the extensive Bill 147, entitled the Alien Immigration Act of 1904. Nonetheless, the Bill was abandoned by the Grand Committee and a far tamer bill was legislated the following year. The Aliens Act of 1905 was 'deficient in scope, ineffective and full of legal loopholes.'¹⁹⁴ Historians agree that the Act was mostly ineffective.¹⁹⁵ Under the Act, an 'undesirable' immigrant was one who could not prove they could financially support themselves and their dependants, also, a 'lunatic' or 'idiot' was one who appeared likely to become a 'detriment to the public', or those convicted of specific crimes or had an expulsion

¹⁹⁰ Evans-Gordon, M. (1902, January 29). *Immigration of Destitute Aliens* [Hansard]. (Vol. 101). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1902/jan/29/immigration-of-destitute-aliens>.

¹⁹¹ Bloom, C. (2004). Arnold White and Sir William Evans-Gordon: Their Involvement in Immigration in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. *Jewish Historical Studies*, 39(1), 153-166. Page 162.

¹⁹² Evans-Gordon, M. (1903, February 26). *Immigration of Destitute Aliens* [Hansard]. (Vol. 118).

¹⁹³ Bashford, A., & Gilchrist, C. (2012). The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40(3), 409-437. Page 418.

¹⁹⁴ Bashford, A., & Gilchrist, C. (2012). The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act. Page 424.

¹⁹⁵ Bloom, C. (2004). Arnold White and Sir William Evans-Gordon. Page 303.

against them.¹⁹⁶ Primarily, it was the first two grounds which most refusals were based on.¹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, any immigrant deemed undesirable possessed the right to appeal to the immigration board.¹⁹⁸ The Act did include several strict provisions though, such as the Commission's recommendation to deport specific criminal aliens already living in Britain and the power to deport any alien who was found to be 'a public charge' within the first year of their arrival.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, immigrants who were found to have given false information could be punished with up to three months of hard labour.²⁰⁰ Ultimately, those affected by the Act never rose much above a thousand a year. Yet, the Act possesses a symbolic importance as the onset of modern immigration control.²⁰¹

The 1905 Aliens Act had a trivial impact on the BBL. Indeed, the legislation itself was unquestionably influenced, not solely, by the constant and strident anti-alien agitation of the League throughout the East End. The Act granted the League its foremost wish, even though it was mostly ineffective. As an extra-parliamentary grassroots organisation dedicated entirely to forcing immigration restriction, one may conclude the 1905 Aliens Act confirmed the League's success. Nonetheless, the enactment essentially robbed the League of a purpose. The demise of the BBL mirrors that of the right-wing populist party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). The crude rhetoric about immigrants swarming and undermining the nation deployed by the BBL was expounded by Nigel Farage who fed the immigration debate into the mainstream parties and unquestionably influenced the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union on 31 January 2020 following the Brexit Referendum.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Wray, H. (2006). The Aliens Act 1905 and the Immigration Dilemma. *Journal of Law and Society*, 33(2), 302-323. Page 309.

¹⁹⁷ Wray, H. (2006). The Aliens Act 1905 and the Immigration Dilemma. Page 309.

¹⁹⁸ Bashford, A., & Gilchrist, C. (2012). The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act. Page 425.

¹⁹⁹ Bashford, A., & Gilchrist, C. (2012). The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act. Page 425.

²⁰⁰ Bashford, A., & Gilchrist, C. (2012). The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act. Page 425.

²⁰¹ Wray, H. (2006). The Aliens Act 1905 and the Immigration Dilemma. Page 303.

²⁰² Morillas, P. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs. (2017). Settling the Brexit Agenda: Populism and UKIP in the United Kingdom. Barcelona Centre for International Affairs. https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/cidob_report/n1_1/setting_the_brexit_agenda_populism_and_ukip_in_the_united_kingdom.

UKIP had a brief climax between 2010 and 2015, mirroring the short-lived influence of the BBL in the years preceding the 1905 Aliens Act. Furthermore, the Act robbed the BBL of its only purpose and Brexit had a similar effect on UKIP. The voices of those who profess immigration enriches our society are perhaps as muffled in the present aftermath of Brexit and UKIP as those at the dawn of the twentieth century during the height of the BBL.

It is plausible to suggest the League were in decline as early as late 1902 as parliamentary support began to wither, certainly, as Colin Holmes asserts, the League had lost its 'major thrust' by 1903.²⁰³ However, the BBL never assert the same degree of influence as it had done leading up to 1905 for the next eighteen years of its existence. In 1905, the League campaigned unsuccessfully in the Mile End by-election for Jewish Liberal Unionist and ardent restrictionist, H. Lawson against B. Strauss, the Liberal Candidate.²⁰⁴ C. Holmes alludes to this rather fittingly as the League's 'last kick'.²⁰⁵ A small remnant of the League existed until 1923. Until then, it was largely associated with the Distributist movement of A.K. Chesterton and Hilarie Belloc.²⁰⁶

Post-1905: The Years of Struggle

There were three subsequent pieces of immigration legislation throughout the remaining years of the League, the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914, and the Aliens Act of 1919 and the Aliens Order of 1920. The former was an emergency act passed weeks after the outbreak of the Great War. It has previously been acknowledged as one of the strictest and illiberal pieces of immigration law.²⁰⁷ The Act essentially gave the Secretary of State a free hand to regulate the arrival of aliens deemed 'fit'.²⁰⁸ It established an array of regulations governing their entry,

²⁰³ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

²⁰⁴ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

²⁰⁵ Holmes, C. (1979). *Anti-Semitism in British Society*. Page 94.

²⁰⁶ Toczec, N. (2018). *Haters, Baiters and Would-Be Dictators*. Page 79.

²⁰⁷ Hogg, Q. (1969, January 22). *Immigration Appeals Bill* [Hansard]. (Vol. 504).

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1969/jan/22/immigration-appeals-bill>.

²⁰⁸ Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Croom Helm. Page 72.

residence and deportation and any other matters deemed of concern to the safety of the realm, and, permitted the designation of aliens to specific places.²⁰⁹ The Aliens Act of 1919 stated that the provisions of the 1914 Act were not confined to wartime and could be enforced at any time.²¹⁰ The Aliens Order of 1920 established comprehensive system of immigration legislation in the post-war era. It ensured all aliens were subjected to entry controls and granted the crown specific prerogative powers which the Government could excise without parliamentary approval.²¹¹ This meant the Home Office had a free hand to take arbitrary action against aliens.²¹² Aliens could only apply for naturalisation as British subjects after a certain period, usually five years.²¹³ The BBL exercised virtually no influence upon these Acts. Indeed, the League ushered in the Aliens Act of 1905, yet their insignificance to the three subsequent pieces of immigration law proves the League did not have a longevous impact on British immigration policy.

Conclusion

The most important question lies in the extent the BBL were a proto-fascist or a fascist organisation. The League was, by no means, authentically fascist. Nor did it proclaim to be. It did not fixate and idolise a charismatic and legitimised leader, nor did it want the creation of an authoritarian state. Furthermore, it did not wish to implement a national corporatist economic structure. It also did not wish to expand the British Empire. The League was only an extra-parliamentary grassroots movement, so it is unsurprising it possessed none of the above archetypal fascist remnants. Alternatively, it is within the prejudices of the League and their style of meetings which grants it the classification of a proto-fascist movement. Firstly, the League's meetings, especially the People's Palace Meeting, involved a mass mobilisation of people, particularly the working-classes and were characterised by prominent political and

²⁰⁹ Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Page 73

²¹⁰ Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Page 73.

²¹¹ Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Page 73.

²¹² Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Page 73.

²¹³ Bevan, V. (1986). *The Development of British Immigration Law*. Page 73.

social figures giving impassioned and prejudicial speeches. Furthermore, their rallies were highly militarised and choreographed affairs, for example, the members of the Hackney Branch who paraded through the surrounding areas in May 1902 waving large banners and chanting antisemitic slurs alongside an accompanying band playing patriotic choruses proves BBL rallies were premeditated demonstrations of antisemitism intended to frighten and provoke local Jews. The meetings were also militarised; at the People's Palace meeting it was reported around 260 "big, brawny stalwarts [and] dock labourers" were employed as stewards,²¹⁴ moreover, the meeting was opened by a parade of the battalions from Stepney, Hackney, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green carrying banners and singing nationalist songs.²¹⁵ Evidently, the League's rallies were militarised and choreographed affairs. The BBL also upheld a form of chauvinistic nationalism. Their slogan 'Britain for the British' confirms this. It also placed extreme stress on the masculine principle. The League's name alone proves this, as does the fact the League's manifesto in June 1901 was addressed solely to the "working men of East London."²¹⁶

Nonetheless, the League's nod to proto-fascism lies predominantly in its latent antisemitism. It was responsible for 'encouraging and compounding' prejudice against Jews throughout the East End of London.²¹⁷ The BBL's prejudice set a precedent for the BUF who exploited the 'Jewish problem' in the East End from September 1934. The BBL were defined by their vigorous anti-immigration stance which was unquestionably actuated by antisemitism. It exploited the public's cry for immigration control and utilised it as a license to spread antisemitism. The League was defined by chauvinism, nativism, militarism and antisemitism. Nonetheless, its policy and aims were solely confined to the realms of restricting immigration meaning it did not possess the ideological qualities associated with fascism. The movement appeal was thus limited, and it did not attract members and sympathisers beyond London.

²¹⁴ Special Report. (1902, January 18). *East London Observer*. Page 2.

²¹⁵ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!". Page 150.

²¹⁶ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!". Page 146.

²¹⁷ Johnson, S. (2014). "Trouble is Yet Coming!". Page 155.

The League's staunch opposition to immigration was compounded by the notion that had been sweeping across upper-class right-wing circles since the 1880s that immigration was the principal cause of poverty, unemployment and degeneracy in British society, as well as the spread of anarchy. The BBL briefly provided a supplement for many right-wingers including factions of the Conservative Party because it was passionately vocal on the issue of immigration. This also allowed the League to capture the support of working-class locals as well because it provided them with a scapegoat, Jewish immigrants, for the rise of poverty, unemployment and housing issues. Most importantly, the BBL created an incredible sense of urgency around the issue of immigration and framed it as the most immediate threat to Britain. Ultimately, the BBL were a proto-fascist movement. It preceded the developed form of proto-fascism adopted by the BF and most importantly, the BBL remains the most notable precursor to the BUF.

Chapter Two: The BF: A Prolonged Consolidation of Fascism (1923-1935)

The BF were Britain's first self-proclaimed fascist movement. They marketed themselves as an emergency defence group and imperial solution to the pending imperial crisis confronting the nation and the empire. For the first three years, the movement had minimal coherence and clarity and sported a brand of ultra-conservatism rather than fascism. It was not until the closing years of the 1920s, in the aftermath of the cataclysmic General Strike, that it began progressing towards a complex fascist programme.

The Sudden Revelation

The BF were founded in May 1923 by Rotha Beryl Lintorn-Orman. The movement is unique in the history of inter-war fascist movements because of its female founder-ship and brief female leadership. Lintorn-Orman had an extensive experience of voluntary, uniformed, and paramilitary service.²¹⁸ She volunteered as an ambulance driver in the Great War with the Women's Reserve Ambulance, then the Scottish Women's Hospital Corps with whom she sailed to Serbia in 1916 and was awarded the Croix de Charit  for 'gallantry in action'.²¹⁹ Her wartime experiences contributed to her frequent illnesses and increased her dependency on drugs and alcohol, a feature which would repeatedly discredit her leadership in the BF and undermine the movement.²²⁰ Lintorn-Orman feared the threat posed by communists, socialists and immigrants to Britain and the empire and this prompted her to find the militant anti-communist and nationalist defence group.²²¹ In this sense, the movement was a right-wing reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of the Labour Party, increasing trade union membership and militancy, disillusionment with the Conservative Party and colonial unrest.²²²

²¹⁸ Cullen, S. (2017). Rotha Lintorn-Orman. *The Historian*, 1(135), 31-35. Page 35. See also Gottlieb, JV. (2005). *Orman, Rotha Beryl Lintorn-*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-93720>.

²¹⁹ Gottlieb, JV. (2005). *Orman, Rotha Beryl Lintorn-*.

²²⁰ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 14.

²²¹ Gottlieb, JV. (2005). *Orman, Rotha Beryl Lintorn-*.

²²² Liburd, L. J. (2021). *Thinking Imperially*. Page 51.

Lintorn-Orman's mother, Blanch Lintorn-Simmons provided her with a sum of £50,000, the equivalent of £1.25 million today, to finance the endeavour.²²³

The First Year: A Lack of Identity and Purpose

The 'inaugural' meeting reportedly took place on 7 October 1923. It is likely there were several smaller meetings in the preceding months.²²⁴ The 'inaugural' meeting was attended by around 500 people, most interestingly, it was disrupted by communists, as were the two subsequent meetings held at London's Hammersmith in November.²²⁵ These disturbances set the general tone of subsequent meetings; communists were a persistent threat at meetings which often resulted in pandemonium.

There was minimal coherence and clarity within the BF's purpose or programme for most of the first year. During this period, the BF were dedicated entirely to exposing and combating the evils of communism. A notable parallel can be drawn between the BF in its infant year and the BBL. Both movements dedicated their energies to tackling single issues. In its first year, the BF had only one identifiable purpose; to protect the nation and the empire from the well-orchestrated, international communist plot it perceived. Indeed, the BF's resentment for communism would endure for its entire existence but by 1926, it would elude any further programmatic comparisons with the BBL once it had developed a more coherent programme.

In 1924, the BF published *Facts about Fascism and Communism* and asserted their claim as a fascist movement and illustrated their obsessive desire to combat communism. The BF intended to 'revive the sane spirit of patriotism in this country and in the Empire.'²²⁶ It regretted the nationalist spirit present before the Great War had withered because of the influence of

²²³ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 11.

²²⁴ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 5.

²²⁵ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 5.

²²⁶ The British Fascisti. (1924). *Facts about Fascism and Communism* [Booklet]. The British Fascisti. <https://mrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/MSH/2/55/1>.

communists 'whose definite aim is to bring about a revolution in country and disrupt to Empire.'²²⁷ The BF understood fascism as simply an antidote for communism. The booklet provides insight into the early mechanisms of the movement too. It adhered to a militaristic structure from the beginning. The organisational aspects demonstrated its pugnacity. Members were classified into units of seven, these troops were commanded by a chosen leader. The seven-member units were organised across districts and counties and led by individual local commanders. The commanders were only male and were charged with classifying their members in terms of their physical and financial capabilities, and whether they were committed unremittingly to the cause or could only be relied upon during serious instances. Such records were noted extensively so that if the commander needed several members at any given time, he could refer to the books.

The movement was governed by a President, Brigadier General Robert D. Blakeney, with a subordinate Executive Committee who were charged with policymaking and guided by a subservient Council who regularly concurred with the Local Commanders. The General Headquarters consisted of a Secretarial Department, a Men's Unit Department, a Women's Unit Department, and Intelligence Department, and a Propaganda Department. The latter produced the movement's monthly magazine, "The Fascist Bulletin", a publication which gave a 'clear idea' about the movement and information about communists which members were urged to subscribe to for 2/6 per year. The BF insisted fascism embraced all classes and promoted class friendship in their 1932 programme. Most notably, the booklet stated the movement had adopted the slogan of "Britain for the Britons."²²⁸ This is unquestionably a jingoistic nod to the BBL who sported the almost identical slogan, "Britain for the British", from 1902.

²²⁷ The British Fascisti. (1924). *Facts about Fascism and Communism* [Booklet]. The British Fascisti.

²²⁸ The British Fascisti. (1924). *Facts about Fascism and Communism* [Booklet]. The British Fascisti.

The booklet defined their version of fascism as 'sane and intelligent patriotism', a creed of 'self-sacrifice, discipline and self-control.'²²⁹ Fascism was understood to be 'a doctrine of national efficiency, of duty, discipline,' and a sense of responsibility.²³⁰ Evidently, in the formative years, the BF had a very limited understanding of fascism. The movement held the importance and adulation for the nation primarily and it was unquestionably its rallying cause. The resentment of communism and bolshevism was an enduring facet of the movement. The movement interpreted the Russian Revolution as the first organised step in a conspiracy to gain world power and feared Russian revolutionaries were converting disillusioned circles in Britain.²³¹

The nature of the BF's membership provides crucial insight into the appeal and dimensions of the organisation. It recruited from members of the landed elite, the aristocracy, distinguished military and naval individuals and newly enfranchised women. T. Linehan insists the BF were 'very successful in attracting upper-class support' and appealed foremost to members of the elite who agitated against the threat the revolutionary left posed to democracy in Britain.²³² Individuals such as the 6th Marquis of Aylesbury, Earl and Countess Temple of Stowe, Baroness Zouche of Haryngworth, Lord Ismay, Lord Langford as well as Lord Ernest Hamilton and the 8th Earl of Glasgow were examples of elite figures prominent within the movement.²³³ The Earl of Glasgow directed the Scottish Units, also Viscount Downe and the Countess of Eglington and Winter were county commanders. Furthermore, Lady Sydenham of Combe oversaw the Fascist Children's Clubs.²³⁴

²²⁹ The British Fascisti. (1924). *Facts about Fascism and Communism* [Booklet]. The British Fascisti.

²³⁰ The British Fascisti. (1924). *Facts about Fascism and Communism* [Booklet]. The British Fascisti.

²³¹ Holmes, C. (2016). *Searching for Lord Haw-Haw: The Political Lives of William Joyce*. Routledge. Page 3.

²³² Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 154.

²³³ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 154.

²³⁴ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 154.

The BF also attracted numbers of the military class such as Brigadier-General Robert D. Blakeney, the BF President from 1924 to 1926, and Brigadier-General Sir Ormonde Winter who headed the BF's London Units.²³⁵ Most of the County Commanders were military officers. Rear-Admiral Armstrong, the BF's Vice-President between 1924 and 1926 and Rear-Admiral W. E. R. Martin, the paymaster, are examples of the notable influence military and naval officers held within the BF.²³⁶

The BF also appealed to a significant number of newly enfranchised and politicised women. J. Gottlieb identifies the uniquely 'feminine side' of the BF's appeal and the 'high degree of female activism and propaganda directed towards women.'²³⁷ In the 1920s, the BF provided a platform for women who held a profound dread of communism.²³⁸ The BF established a Women's Unit Department in 1922 and paved the way for the BUF's creation of a Women's Section in March 1933. The BF also established a Women's Unit First Aid Squad who were trained and equipped to maintain order at meetings and rallies. Women were indispensable to disseminating the BF's conspiratorial worldview. They presided over the network of Fascist Children's Clubs established in 1925 with intention of counteracting the influence of Socialist Sundays Schools. The work of women was crucial to the BF's belief communism and Bolshevism must be thwarted by militancy as well as education and indoctrination.

The BF granted agency and autonomy to many women. Mrs. D. G. Barnett, the Commander of the Ulster Units, Nesta Webster, the prolific conspiracy writer, and of course the founding leader, Rotha Lintorn-Orman are examples of women empowered by the BF. Numbers of lower-class women sided with the organisation too. Lintorn-Orman boasted the 'poorest kind of women' were among the 'very keenest members' in Scotland. She attributed this to the wearing of the Fascisti uniform which removed class distinctions. Indeed, the BF forged a new

²³⁵ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 154.

²³⁶ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 156.

²³⁷ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 11.

²³⁸ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 14.

concept of female right-wing political activism, nonetheless, Lintorn-Orman perceived women only as agents of nationalism and patriotism and firmly believed women were ‘undeniably the weaker sex.’²³⁹ The BF never campaigned for equality or women’s rights either.

The Adoption of Aggression and Anti-Fascist Responses

In the spring of 1924, the BF emerged as a threat in the eyes of several MPs. It adopted disruptive and aggressive tactics to undermine their communist enemies and Conservative factions were also targeted. From May 1924, BF units began storming meetings, raiding premises and assaulting people present. This prompted a handful of MPs to raise their concerns in the chamber. Nonetheless, Arthur Henderson, the Home Secretary of the newly elected Labour Government, was repeatedly dismissive of numerous attestations from his peers. On 16 May 1924, *The Times* reported Henderson believed the existence of the BF did not warrant the grounds for investigation, he dismissed the movement as an irrelevance.²⁴⁰ During a House of Commons debate on 29 May 1924, the Labour MP for East Ham South informed the Home Secretary that several BF members had raided a Young Communist League meeting at the Labour Hall in his constituency nine days earlier. On the same Thursday, another body of BF members, reportedly ‘armed with ash sticks,’ rushed a Rotherhithe Conservative Party meeting at Rotherhithe Town Hall, as a result, two young men were ‘brutally assaulted.’²⁴¹ Both instances were put forward to the Home Secretary at multiple House of Commons debates in May 1924. Nonetheless, Henderson passively claimed the police had not been notified about the disturbances, and that he could not have taken any action to prevent their occurrence.²⁴² Henderson’s attitude in spring 1924 reflected that of his

²³⁹ Durham, M. (1992). Gender and the British Union of Fascists. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27(3), 513-529. Page 518.

²⁴⁰ News in Brief. (1924, May 16). *Times*. Page 16.

²⁴¹ Smith, B. (1924, June 5). *Rotherhithe Disturbance* [Hansard]. (Vol. 174). <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1924-06-05/debates/27bb7b71-cd73-44c4-b47d-74249193f783/RotherhitheDisturbance?highlight=british%20fascisti#contribution-f9e9743a-7177-45bd-b4e2-f29904f91519>.

²⁴² Smith, B. (1924, June 5). *Rotherhithe Disturbance* [Hansard]. (Vol. 174).

party; until late 1925, the Labour Party were dismissive to the growth of fascist militancy in Britain.

The BF's aggression became more politically charged in 1925. The kidnapping of Harry Pollitt, the General Secretary of the CPGB, by BF members in March 1925 was the culmination of the militant tactics which had begun several months prior. It was a gutsy demonstration of the movement's readiness and willingness to crush communism. Pollitt was kidnapped from Liverpool's Edge Hill Station but released after two days of captivity in a North Wales Farmhouse.²⁴³ The Political Bureau of the CPGB demanded the Labour Party and Trade Unions Congress (TUC) launch an inquiry into the strength of the BF and act. The Labour Party believed the CPGB were unnecessarily alarmist and perceived the kidnapping as merely a public seeking-stunt. The Labour Party's dismissiveness naturally fuelled charges the State was dangerously complacent regarding domestic militant fascism. In July, Rajani Palme Dutt, the leading theoretician of the CPGB, shunned the Labour movement as 'stupid' for its tendency to 'laugh at the Fascists in this country.'²⁴⁴ Dutt believed the BF were not an 'isolated freak phenomenon', rather one of several manifestations of a wider and deeper social movement grappling the bourgeoisie and unorganised proletariat.²⁴⁵ The CPGB were by far the most notable opposition the BF. The kidnapping of Harry Pollitt proved the BF's adoption of guerrilla tactics and Dutt was convinced they would capitalise on any given opportunity to suppress strike action.²⁴⁶ The formation of the Organisation of the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) in late September 1925 aggravated Dutt's analysis. The OMS was founded as a 'non-political' organisation dedicated to ensuring the delivery of essential supplies during the event of a General Strike and boasted the sponsorship of the government.²⁴⁷ The CPGB labelled the OMS as a 'fascist-type' operation and 'the most definite step towards organised fascism

²⁴³ Hodgson, K. (2010). *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism, 1919-1939*. Manchester University Press. Page 101.

²⁴⁴ Palme Dutt, R. (1925, July 7). Fascism. *The Labour Monthly*, 7(7), 385-443. Page 385.

²⁴⁵ Palme Dutt, R. (1925, July 7). Fascism. Page 385.

²⁴⁶ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 9.

²⁴⁷ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 9.

yet made in this country.²⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the Labour Party and the TUC insisted the OMS were not 'political' or 'aggressive'.²⁴⁹ In response, the CPGB established the Workers' Defence Corps alone.²⁵⁰ The Defence Corps was made up of small cells of men, mostly in London, and was deployed during the General Strike in May 1926.

The BF initiated the first wave of organised anti-fascist opposition in Britain. The BF were never likely to obtain power in Britain, however, there were pockets of anti-fascists in the public, namely communists, who believed organised responses were necessary. Left-wing militants were quick to realise the fascist threat required specific anti-fascist organisations.²⁵¹ The earliest initiative came in January 1924 with the creation of the People's Defence Force (PDF). The PDF issued a statement on 26 January from the 1917 Club in Soho which insisted, 'the existence of a militant body calling itself the British Fascisti obviously inspired by the example of Italian reactionaries...calls for a corresponding force pledging to resist any interference with the due operation of the constitution.'²⁵² The PDF claimed to be an independent, non-aggressive and legal organisation. It aligned itself with the 'workers' movement and promised to 'keep a watchful eye on the activity of the Fascisti' and 'resist any attempt to break up meetings.'²⁵³ A second anti-fascist force was formed in 1924, the National Union for Combating Fascismo (NUCF). It pledged to check the influence and growth of the BF and 'meet Fascist outbreaks' and pursue 'vigorous Socialist propaganda'.²⁵⁴ Primarily, the NUCF wanted to create a 'united anti-fascist front' so that socialists in Britain could launch 'a concerted attack' on fascism.²⁵⁵ It was hoped this would bring an end to left-wing factionalism. Clearly, the NUCF professed an ambitious agenda, but it never progressed beyond a skeleton

²⁴⁸ Bell, T. (1937). *British Communist Party: A Short History*. Lawrence and Wishart. Page 107-108.

²⁴⁹ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 9.

²⁵⁰ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 9.

²⁵¹ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 6.

²⁵² Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 6.

²⁵³ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 7.

²⁵⁴ TNA CAB 30/69/220: Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom. Report No. 270. 4 September 1924.

²⁵⁵ (1925, June 5). *The Daily Herald*.

organisation, nor did the tame PDF. The failure of these two anti-fascist organisations proves most of the political left in Britain were unduly concerned with the threat of the BF throughout the 1920s, but their existence and objectives alone prove organised anti-fascism pre-dates the widely held notion anti-fascist organisations did not manifest in Britain until provoked by the existence of the BUF after 1932.

On 17 October 1925, four BF associates allegedly hijacked a *Daily Herald* delivery van at gunpoint on Fleet Street at around 1:00am. The van had been crashed and abandoned outside of the Church of St. Clement Danes.²⁵⁶ This event finally awoke the Labour Party to the growing threat of domestic fascism and militancy. Edward Lionel Batson-James, an engineer, Jesse Edgar Bishop, a managing clerk, and Edward John Herbert, a plumber, all aged twenty-four, were remanded for a week on bail in their own recognizances in £100 each.²⁵⁷ The three defendants were only charged with a breach of peace opposed to the more severe and deserving charge of larceny. This judicial leniency alarmed the Labour Party. It believed the judicial system had acted favourably towards the fascists. A handful of prominent Labour MPs, namely George Lansbury, Ernest Thurtle and the former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, demanded the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and his Home Secretary William Johnson-Hicks enforce the law to prevent the BF's militarism. Nonetheless, both claimed to be unaware the movement regularly drilled and infringed meetings bearing arms; the Government was, yet again, rather dismissive despite attestations from the Opposition.²⁵⁸ Evidently, mainstream political circles were initially unconcerned by the BF, but the CPGB were aware of the threat of domestic fascism from the very beginning and would continue to wage war against it until the demise of the BUF in the late 1930s.

A Conspiratorial Worldview

²⁵⁶ News Van Held Up. (1925, October 17). *Hull Daily Mail*. Page 1.

²⁵⁷ Charge Of Stealing Newspaper Van. (1925, October 29). *Times*. Page 11.

²⁵⁸ Joyson-Hicks, W. (1925, November 16). *Fascist Societies* [Hansard]. (Vol. 188). <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1925/nov/16/fascist-societies>.

As the BF increased their militancy through 1924 and 1925, they began pushing the notion Britain faced an unprecedented communist enemy. The BF held a notable rally on 24 May 1925, Empire Day, in Hyde Park. The *Fascist Bulletin* boasted some 5,000 fascists assembled surrounding the platforms in a hollow square.²⁵⁹ Lintorn-Orman, addressing ‘large nuke regions of the public’, described the substantial growth of the movement in a mere two years.²⁶⁰ Blakeney warned the Empire faced ‘a far greater peril than that of 1914’ and spoke of a ‘secret conspiracy directed by an internal foe,’ and insisted fascism was ‘endeavouring to counteract the bacteria of Communism.’²⁶¹ Blakeney’s speech on Empire Day set the tone for the BF’s publications and meetings for the next year. The party began relentlessly pushing the conspiracy international plotters, specifically Russian Jews, were infiltrating British society and industry and spreading revolutionary ideals. Indeed, Blakeney began exposing the conspiracy almost eighteen months earlier, but by summer 1925, the leadership of the movement were firmly committed to doing so too. On Monday 25 February 1924, Blakeney insisted there was ‘a plot against the British Empire planned by the Communist International’ at a BF dinner at the Lyceum Club.²⁶² Most alarmingly, the struggle against the conspirators, he attested, would be ‘the most appalling in the history of humanity,’ just years after the Great War.²⁶³

The *Fascist Bulletin* reiterated the grave danger communists posed to Britain, even from its first volume. On 13 June 1925, it stated “For King and Country” defined their attitude against ‘rebel internationalists’, a term for those who spread ‘disloyalty and class hatred and organised Sovietism with Trade Union Funds.’²⁶⁴ Furthermore, Lintorn-Orman penned an urgent appeal in the same edition; ‘Fascists must realise that there is active work to be done everywhere. If

²⁵⁹ Great Fascist Rally in Hyde Park on Empire Day. (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶⁰ Great Fascist Rally in Hyde Park on Empire Day. (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶¹ Great Fascist Rally in Hyde Park on Empire Day. (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶² British Fascisti Ideals. (1925, February 25). *Times*. Page 17.

²⁶³ British Fascisti Ideals. (1925, February 25). *Times*. Page 17.

²⁶⁴ (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 2.

we are to accomplish our object, which is the extermination of Communism, all ranks and classes must unite and work together for this end.'²⁶⁵ The imminent threat of communism dominated BF publications and meetings for the next twelve months. Communists were said to subscribe 1/- per month 'for the purpose of wrecking the British Empire,' and the *Fascist Bulletin* questioned, 'WHAT are YOU willing to pay to help an ORGANISATION whose sole object is the preservation of the BRITISH EMPIRE.'²⁶⁶ The *Fascist Bulletin* also warned communists, led and funded by revolutionaries in Moscow, had 'gained a foothold within our hospitable shores,' and were advocating the destruction of the British Empire.²⁶⁷ The BF also penned an urgent appeal in July 1925; 'It is time that every British man and woman sat up and woke up to the fact Communism means revolution. If they do not wake up, they may have the nightmare of what Red revolution means.'²⁶⁸ The BF's conspiratorial worldview was fuelled by antisemitism. At a meeting in Edinburgh in May 1925, Blakeney attested the 'revolutionary scum of Central Europe' were Zionists and the source of the 'Bolshevik conspiracy' were 'a gang of international Jews', who sought the 'absolute control of a chaotic and defenceless world.'²⁶⁹ Although the party did not adopt antisemitism officially until 1932, it is clear the conspiratorial worldview pushed by the hierarchy and the publications from 1925 was actuated by antisemitism. Evidently, during 1925, the BF offered very little ideologically. The movement were obsessed with combating the evils of communism and provocative appeals dominated their publications.

The General Strike: A Humbling Affair

The BF suffered their first split in 1925 because of their lack of ideological coherence and identity. Some 100 activists, reportedly disgruntled by the movement's diluted form of 'fascism', broke away to form the National Fascisti (NF).²⁷⁰ The *Fascist Bulletin* interpreted the

²⁶⁵ (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶⁶ British Fascists Appeal. (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶⁷ British Fascists Appeal. (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁶⁸ (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 2.

²⁶⁹ (1925, June 13). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 1. Vol. 2. Page 3.

²⁷⁰ Stocker, P. (2016). *Importing Fascism*. Page 331.

split as an attempt to 'water down' their organisation and demanded the defectors to immediately 'rejoin the parent body.'²⁷¹ The NF were committed to developing a more 'virile brand of fascism' consciously modelled on Italian Fascism. They were also far more radical and violent in their methods and favoured street activism. The movement trained its members for direct action through their own boxing and fencing clubs. Their members progressed to form an East End BUF branch in Bow.²⁷² The organisation does not bear the same historical significance as its parent organisation, but the split in 1925 alone evidences the BF did not have the ideological clarity nor coherence to sustain the support of those who were firmly committed to fascism.

The General Strike catalysed the BF's programme. It forced the movement to address key issues such as industrial reform, foreign policy and immigration. Though the outbreak of the strike appeared to legitimise the BF's long held claim Britain was edging closer to a national catastrophe, specifically a 'Red' Revolution, the nine-day strike, in fact, 'cruelly exposed the lack of factual substance at the heart of the BF's alarmist anti-labour rhetoric.'²⁷³ Just months before the General Strike, the BF suffered its second and most damning split. The question of how, and to what extent the BF should assist the Government in the event of a strike divided the party's leadership. The TUC's official backing of the miners prompted the BF to offer the Government voluntary support to ensure the maintenance of essential supplies in the event of a General Strike. The BF planned to provide volunteers for the Supply and Transport Organisation, a strike-breaking body formed by the Government. As the two entered negotiations, the Home Secretary, William Joyson-Hicks threatened to resign as vice-president of the National Citizens' Union and withdraw government support if the BF's proposal was accepted.²⁷⁴ The Home Secretary made the acceptance of the BF's offer

²⁷¹ (1926, June 12). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 43. Vol. 3.

²⁷² Dorril, S. (2007). *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism*. Penguin Books. Page 199.

²⁷³ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 66.

²⁷⁴ Hope, J. (1992). British Fascism and the State, 1918-1927: A Re-examination of the Documentary Evidence. *Labour History Review*, 57(3), 72-83. Page 72.

conditional only if the movement removed 'Fascist' from its title and abandoned para-militarism and professed support for parliamentary democracy.²⁷⁵ These conditions split the BF into two factions; Lintorn-Orman adamantly rejected the Government's edict, whereas President Blakeney wanted the movement to concede to the terms. The Fascist Grand Council voted in favour of Lintorn-Orman's faction by 40-32.²⁷⁶ As a result, Robert Blakeney, Lord Ernest Hamilton, A.E. Armstrong and Patrick James Boyle resigned from the movement along with a handful of others. Blakeney and his fellow defectors founded the British Loyalists whose organisational profile met the terms of the Government.²⁷⁷ The split severely weakened the BF. The movement had lost several leading members. Blakeney was instrumental in solidifying the movement's identity as vehemently anti-communist and chauvinist and developed the disciplined paramilitary structure.²⁷⁸ He was also responsible for anglicising its name to the "British Fascists" in 1924 to avoid the charge that the movement owed loyalty to Italy and Mussolini.²⁷⁹

As trade union militancy quickly simmered down and the General Strike was understood to be an overall failure, it was clear the existence of a paramilitary defence force such as the BF was unnecessary. The General Strike stripped the BF of a core element of its identity. In the aftermath, the *Fascist Bulletin* claimed the General Strike had been orchestrated by Russian communists and Bolsheviks. It insisted it was a 'striking example' of the desire of Russian communists to spread hate and division in Britain.²⁸⁰

The fact the movement continued to push their conspiratorial worldview after the General Strike reflected the growing influence of Nesta Webster. She became increasingly active within the movement from the second half of 1926 and was crucial to keeping the conviction that

²⁷⁵ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 65.

²⁷⁶ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 65.

²⁷⁷ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 66.

²⁷⁸ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 62.

²⁷⁹ Dorril, S. (2007). *Blackshirt*. Page 198.

²⁸⁰ (1927, August). *The British Lion*. No. 21. Page 5.

Britain faced a global subversive plot at the core of the movement's identity and policy in the immediate aftermath. Webster was one of the most influential conspiracy theorists of the twentieth century. She authored an array of influential works through which she 'popularised complex conspiracy theories' and 'provided a framework for political action.'²⁸¹ Specifically, her *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements* (1924) assessed the role of Jews in subversive movements and the work increased her popularity with far-right political movements such as the BF. She concluded, 'the immense problem of the Jewish power [is] perhaps the most important problem with which the modern world is confronted.'²⁸² Webster sat on the Fascist Grand Council for periods of 1926 and 1927. She authored the BF pamphlet, *The Need for Fascism in Britain* in 1926 which stressed the grave danger socialism, Bolshevism and communism posed to Britain and urged patriots to defend the nation from impending ruin. Webster hailed the BF as 'the only disciplined organisation to combat the "Reds," and professed her solidarity with the movement.'²⁸³ She defined fascism as a 'form of patriotism designed to meet a particular emergency – disintegration from within' and stressed 'the spirit of patriotism' must be upheld in order to defeat subversive attempts to undermine the nation.'²⁸⁴ From late 1926, she addressed BF meetings as the principal speaker, and Lintorn-Orman clearly revelled at the heightened role Webster had assumed within her movement. At a meeting at Kensington Town Hall on 17 December 1926, Lintorn-Orman introduced Webster by alluding to her unparalleled work; "Her books had brought before the public the evils of Socialism and Bolshevism more than anything else."²⁸⁵ Then, she announced Webster had been elected to the Grand Council which was met with 'loud cheering.' In her address, Webster claimed there were many organisations committed to overthrowing the 'Red menace,' but insisted, "the (BF) have done more good work in the brief

²⁸¹ Lee, M. F. (2005). Nesta Webster: The Voice of Conspiracy. *Journal of Women's History*, 17(3), 81-104. Page 81.

²⁸² Webster, N. (1924). *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*. Boswell. Page V.

²⁸³ Webster, N. (1926). *The Need for Fascism in Britain*. The British Fascists. Page 2.

²⁸⁴ Webster, N. (1926). *The Need for Fascism in Britain*. Page 2.

²⁸⁵ Mrs. Nesta H. Webster on Fascism. (1927, January 7). *The British Lion*. No. 14. Page 7.

period of their existence than all of the organisations put together.”²⁸⁶ The BF afforded Webster increased political visibility from late 1926; she spoke regularly at meetings and wrote for the *Fascist Bulletin* and the *British Lion*. She was drawn to the movement for its conspiratorial worldview, but, as B. Farr states, she only saw the movement as “a vehicle to disseminate her opinions rather than as a philosophy to be embraced.”²⁸⁷ Therefore, Webster abandoned the movement in mid-1927 to pursue her own political project, “The Patriots’ Inquiry Centre.”²⁸⁸ Indeed, the BF afforded Webster notable political visibility between 1924-1927; it provided a vehicle for her antisemitic conspiracy theories which the movement utilised to spell out the Jewish-communism plot seeking to destroy the British Empire.²⁸⁹

Although the *Fascist Bulletin* claimed, ‘the 1926 General Strike found the British Fascists ready for the national emergency, and the then Government made full use of their services,’²⁹⁰ it severely weakened them. The party emerged with very little political direction and identity. It needed other ideological components besides anti-communism and chauvinism to grow and sustain support. It forced the BF to consolidate their identity and firmly commit themselves to fascism. Between the summer of 1926 to the spring of 1929, the BF progressed towards a distinctly fascist programme. After this period, the movement actualised their identity as a ‘fascist’ movement. From the onset of the 1930s, their programme championed the corporate state and encompassed drastic economic reforms and the exclusion of Jews and aliens from public office and other positions of influence and vouched to abolish their voting rights.²⁹¹ The policy developments coincided with the influx of more fanatical individuals into the leadership of the movement. Following the departure of several influential members in 1926, ardent fascists, namely Mandeville Roe, an enthusiast for corporatism and Neil Francis-Hawkins,

²⁸⁶ Mrs. Nesta H. Webster on Fascism. (1927, January 7). *The British Lion*. No. 14. Page 7.

²⁸⁷ Farr, B. (1987). *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903-1932*. Garland Publishing. Page 76.

²⁸⁸ Lee, M. F. (2005). Nesta Webster. Page 95.

²⁸⁹ Stocker, P. (2016). *Importing Fascism*. Page 340.

²⁹⁰ (1932, March 1). *British Fascism*. No. 19.

²⁹¹ Stevenson, J., & Cook, C. (1977). *The Slump*. Page 213.

known for his passion for militarism, pushed the movement towards a pro-fascist position, a marked change from the ultra-Conservatism and chauvinism that had defined the movement beforehand.²⁹²

Striding Towards Fascism (1926-1929)

The BF's policy in July 1926 demonstrated a non-partisan approach to industrial reform. It promised a 'practical protection' for 'all loyal patriotic citizens and workers against all forms of aggression, sweating, Trade Union tyranny, Profiteering and Money Lending.'²⁹³ The protection was to be provided by a 'British Fascist Insurance Scheme' and industrial disputes were to be settled with the legal advisers of the G.H.Q Council.²⁹⁴ No further details about the insurance scheme were specified other than it was a means of protection from exploitation for workers. Their policy towards industry was incredibly vague and lacked substance in 1926. In May 1929, however, the movement intensified its approach to industrial reform. The party proposed a package of dramatic industrial reforms which would minimise the influence of TUCs. The BF were alarmed by the 'subversive political activities of a large number of Trade Unions' and wanted to greatly compromise their powers.²⁹⁵ Alliances between TUCs would be forbidden, plus strikes and lockouts made illegal, also Courts of Arbitration would be introduced and their decision final. Additionally, secret ballots would replace card votes.²⁹⁶ Evidently, the BF progressed from a non-partisan approach to industry to an interventionist approach from 1926-1929 which reflected the movement's hatred for TUC militancy and influence.

The BF's approach to the British Empire intensified between 1926-1929 too. The movement revealed its expansionist urges. In July 1926, the movement professed the 'fullest

²⁹² May, R. (2019). *Breaking Boundaries*. Page 53.

²⁹³ Policy. (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

²⁹⁴ Policy. (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

²⁹⁵ (1929, May). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 31. Page 3.

²⁹⁶ Stevenson, J., & Cook, C. (1977). *The Slump*. Page 213.

encouragement towards Inter-Empire Trade expansion and prosperity.²⁹⁷ It urged for the boycott of foreign goods, industry and labour and demanded the sole purchase of British Empire goods and the employment of British labour.²⁹⁸ In 1929, the BF campaigned for the 'rapid economic development of the Overseas Empire' and 'Inter-Imperial Free Trade' and promised to protect British workers from the 'unfair competition of foreign sweated labour.' It also wanted to abandon the international treaties that bound Britain to armed intervention and use the armed forces to preserve and expand the Empire.²⁹⁹ Evidently, between 1926-1929, the BF vowed to expand the British Empire through military zeal.

Nonetheless, by 1929, the movement had decelerated their policy towards immigration. This was the only programmatic component which the party did not intensify between 1926-1929. In 1926, the movement desired the 'gradual purification of the British race by drastic restriction of future alien immigration into Great Britain and the Dominions.'³⁰⁰ A tax was to be imposed on all aliens entering the country to reside and an Alien Immigration Tribunal would determine their general desirability. Furthermore, trade licenses would be withdrawn from all aliens to prevent them abusing their privileges. The movement wanted to purge the nation from alien influence and minimise the number of immigrants entering Britain. This was an extremely radical approach to immigration and by 1929, the movement had somewhat retreated. The 1929 manifesto promised to 'tighten up alien legislation with the view of excluding the undesirable alien, and to prevent alien dominance in our national life.'³⁰¹ There was no nod to the movement's desire to purify the nation and eradicate alien influence, it promised only to 'tighten' immigration restriction in 1929.

²⁹⁷ Policy. (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

²⁹⁸ Policy. (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 7.

²⁹⁹ Stevenson, J., & Cook, C. (1977). *The Slump*. Page 213.

³⁰⁰ (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

³⁰¹ (1929, May). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 31. Page 3.

Several publications in the months preceding the 1926 manifesto prove the party were taking the Alien question much more seriously. In the *Fascist Bulletin* on 6 February, the party were urged to address the issue more thoroughly; 'I should like to see the British Fascists take up the Alien question more fully, there is no doubt that the Alien question is a serious one, as far as the British working-man is concerned.'³⁰² *The British Lion* warned Britain was being overwhelmed with 'undesirable extremists' who wanted to transfer Government power to a 'Communist body'.³⁰³ The issue urged Britons to 'WAKE UP! Be British! If you love your country, get up on your feet, or you'll be trodden on by the hordes of well-paid, well-led foreign agitators who are striving to lead this country into the same deplorable conditions which exist in Russia.'³⁰⁴ BF publications relentlessly expounded the notion that all subversive individuals and organisations in Britain belonged under the general umbrella of the 'Alien', and that all were intent on overthrowing the King and destroying the nation and the constitution. The party also tried to justify their call for the purification of the nation and the drastic reduction in immigration by insisting immigrants were the sole proprietors of communism and Bolshevism in Britain.

Living Up to the 'Fascist' Title (1930 Onwards)

In June 1930, the BF, after brief retreat the previous year, re-intensified their approach to immigration. There was the familiar call for the 'purification of the British Race' and the 'drastic reduction' in immigration.³⁰⁵ The same components of the 1926 manifesto remained such as the imposition of tax upon aliens, the establishment of an Alien Immigration Tribunal and the withdrawal of their trade licenses, but it added that immigrants were no longer eligible for unemployment insurance.³⁰⁶ Regarding industrial relations, a Fascist Guilds or Corporations would be established in order to secure the 'unity of Capital and Labour,' and fascists cells

³⁰² (1926, February 6). *The Fascist Bulletin*. No. 30. Page 2.

³⁰³ (1926, Early July). *The British Lion*. No. 2.

³⁰⁴ (1926, Early July). *The British Lion*. No. 2.

³⁰⁵ (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

³⁰⁶ (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 7.

would be deployed to combat any unpatriotic or subversive activities in industry.³⁰⁷ The programme demanded the purchase of only British Empire goods, the encouragement British industries and the sole employment of British labour, as it had done in 1926. It also promised to wage an 'intensive propaganda' against 'all Bolshevist, Communist, Socialist, and other subversive and anti-Christian movements' until 'the Empire is purged of all seditionists and disloyalists.'³⁰⁸

Over the next two years, the anti-immigration line of the 1926 manifesto progressed to antisemitism, as it did with the BBL and the BUF. The BBL initially adopted a hardened restrictionist stance towards immigration, but following the People's Palace Meeting in January 1902, the movement endorsed antisemitism. The BUF adopted an official anti-Jewish policy in September 1934, although antisemitism was entrenched within the BUF leadership from the very beginning. There is a fundamental difference, however, between the timing of the BBL's and the BUF's adoption of antisemitism and the BF's. The BF did not adopt antisemitism as an official policy until 1932, almost a decade after it was founded, prior to that only a vague form of 'anti-alienism' featured in the movements policy and publications.³⁰⁹ Perhaps the coded language about alien immigration functioned to mask the antisemitism that lingered within the party throughout the 1920s. Nevertheless, the BF became more ideologically inclined towards the Nazis in the 1930s which may have nudged it towards embracing antisemitism as an official policy.³¹⁰

In the 1932 manifesto, all 'members of the Jewish race' were to be classified as aliens, disenfranchised, banned from holding official positions in the State and from 'controlling the financial, political, industrial and cultural interests of the British people.'³¹¹ In autumn 1932,

³⁰⁷ (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

³⁰⁸ (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

³⁰⁹ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 178.

³¹⁰ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 178.

³¹¹ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

British Fascism addressed the question, 'Why are we Anti-Semitic?', stating, 'the reason is simply that we are Nationalists and Imperialists, put our own people first, and therefore have to deal with any non-racial element which has been allowed to assume a controlling power in our midst.'³¹² It was affirmed, 'British Fascism takes its stand on the principle that Great Britain must be ruled, run and controlled by Britons,' and that Jews 'had no right to shelter themselves under the cloak of British citizenship.'³¹³ Furthermore, Jews were believed to control the main markets in London and deemed fraudsters by nature since 'nearly all of the causes of fake fires, fake bankruptcies and fraud of all descriptions can be traced to Jews,'³¹⁴ despite only constituting less than two per cent of the population. The BF summarised their antisemitic stance; 'Our cause in a nutshell is that the Jew should be declared an alien by nationality, and therefore he should not have the privilege of British citizenship granted him when it is an actual fact that he seeks the privileges without being prepared to assume the duties!'³¹⁵

By 1932, the BF had manifested a coherent fascist political programme. In summer 1932, the party published its twenty-four-point policy. It wished to capture the political power of the State because the party system was too 'obsolete and totally inadequate.'³¹⁶ 'Every Briton,' it insisted, 'must thoroughly realise that the time is at hand when the Party system will be thrust aside and the fight for power restricted between Fascism and Social-Communism.'³¹⁷ Though it had always professed resentment for democracy and decadence, it was not until 1932 that the BF revealed their statist intentions to capture the political power in Britain which proved the party had become increasingly revolutionary in their political outlook. The movement were committed to the Corporate State too. Once the party system was abolished, a Corporate State would be formed through 'the Guilds and Corporations of workers, traders, employers

³¹² (1932, Autumn). *British Fascism*. Extra Autumn Issue. Page 7.

³¹³ (1932, Autumn). *British Fascism*. Extra Autumn Issue. Page 7.

³¹⁴ (1932, Autumn). *British Fascism*. Extra Autumn Issue. Page 7.

³¹⁵ (1932, Autumn). *British Fascism*. Extra Autumn Issue. Page 7.

³¹⁶ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³¹⁷ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

and owners.³¹⁸ The Propaganda Officer, Mandeville Roe, was responsible for the movement's commitment to a national corporatist economic structure.³¹⁹ He unquestionably occupied the foremost role in the policy shift in 1932. The destruction of class barriers and the establishment of a meritocracy was another overtly fascist component of the programme. The BF planned to significantly reorganise industry. There would be a greater use of machinery to maximise production and higher wages would be implemented to boost consumption levels.³²⁰ Yet again, there was great emphasis on the preservation and expansion of the British Empire. The BF urged for the creation of an 'Imperial political and economic board,' whereby Britain would be the sole 'director of the Imperial destinies.'³²¹ From 1932, the BF moulded their economic agenda upon fascist principles. It vouched to implement a national corporatist economic structure and stressed that the parliamentary system was decadent. The BF assumed an isolationist approach towards foreign policy. It wished to abandon the international treaties which bound the nation to armed intervention and maintain a policy of 'benevolent neutrality' to all nations.

The State, it insisted, must maintain 'the dignity, justice and power of the British name through His Majesty's colonies and dominions,'³²² and the armed forces must possess the capacity to defend and uphold the nation and the empire. The BF held a 'profoundly racist' understanding of the British Empire for it believed British culture and traditions were superior and that the British Empire ensured Anglo-Saxon dominance over the colonial native.³²³ The Empire was understood to be a mode to exercise Anglo-Saxon dominance over 'inferior' colonial natives. The movement's stance towards race and immigration was underpinned by antisemitism, eugenics, the punitive treatment of 'aliens', as well as an obsession with a pure "British race".

³¹⁸ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³¹⁹ May, R. (2019). *Breaking Boundaries*. Page 54.

³²⁰ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³²¹ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³²² (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³²³ Stocker, P. (2016). *Importing Fascism*. Page 335.

An intense ultra-nativism was a defining hallmark of the movement.³²⁴ Anyone not of “British race” would be excluded from public employment and parliamentary positions.³²⁵ Furthermore, ‘coloured men’ were forbidden from cohabiting with white women. Naturalisation laws were to be tightened too.³²⁶ The movement wished to ‘purify’ Britain by drastically tightening immigration laws, and by outlawing interracial procreation and the employment of anyone not of “British race” from influential and representative roles from 1932.

The BF had also become rabidly antisemitic by 1932, a drastic shift from the anti-alienism which had characterised their stance towards immigration in the previous years. The BF professed latent prejudice for Jews in their publications and their accompanying manifestos and policies were intent on excluding and exploiting Jews. Evidently, ultra-nativism and racism were the undercurrents of their colonial and immigration policy from 1932.

Throughout the 1920s, the BF had a very limited understanding of fascism. It believed fascism was a tool to combat communism and suppress revolutionary and subversive factions. The Empire was hailed as the ‘beacon’ of civilisation as well as an ongoing ‘project’ which needed protecting and preserving by vigorous militarism.³²⁷ In the 1930s, however, the BF had developed a refined fascist programme which reflected the sincerity of its intentions and finally justified its long-held claim as a fascist movement. Indeed, the sudden intensification of policy in 1932 was a response to the creation of the BUF in October 1932 and their more defined and radical programme.³²⁸ The arrival of the BUF created several problems for the BF. It became increasingly ostracised in the landscape of the extreme right. The BUF enjoyed significantly greater resources and funding and boasted a more informed policy and identity as well as a far more capable and charismatic leader in Oswald Mosley. Lintorn-Orman, on

³²⁴ Stocker, P. (2016). *Importing Fascism*. Page 343.

³²⁵ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³²⁶ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³²⁷ Stocker, P. (2021). *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c.1920-1980*. Routledge. Page 6.

³²⁸ Sykes, A. (2005). *The Radical Right in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan. Page 46.

the other hand, was dependent on drugs and alcohol and regularly suffered from illness which undermined her leadership. In the 1930s the BF edged closer to bankruptcy too. Their episodic publications and the regular pleas for donations proved the movement were desperately short of money. In summer 1932, *British Fascism* declared, 'Funds are urgently required,' and insisted, 'contributions however small will help us.'³²⁹

The premature death of Lintorn-Orman in September 1935, at the age of 40, sealed the fate of the BF. By then, the party had been reduced to her loyalists after many members had defected to the BUF.³³⁰

Conclusion

Ultimately, the BF struggled with their identity. It was Britain's first self-proclaimed 'fascist' movement yet had a woefully narrow understanding of the term. Throughout the 1920s, the BF were essentially an ultra-conservative and imperialist movement obsessed with combating the rise of communism and Bolshevism. Nonetheless, through this rhetoric, the movement tapped into the fear of many middle-class and upper-class Britons who feared the rise of left-wing politics in Britain in general. In this sense, the BF exploited the fears of the British upper-classes and marketed themselves as the imperial solution to the grave imperial crisis confronting the nation and the empire. The movement arose just years after the Russian Revolution amid a climate of fear in Britain over the spread of Bolshevism, communism and socialism and the pervasive threat these doctrines posed to the British Empire and domestic society. The BF also emerged as the Labour Party were becoming increasingly prominent and establishing itself as a viable party for government, trade union membership and militancy was also rising at an alarming rate and these developments coincided with the prolonged crisis of the Conservative Party. The BF, therefore, exploited the fears of the middle- and upper-

³²⁹ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 12-13.

³³⁰ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 68.

classes by deploying populist tropes of decline. The movement spoke to a proportion of the middle- and upper-classes who were genuinely alarmed at the increased political visibility afforded to the working classes, the influx of immigrants, the influence of Bolshevism, communism and socialism and the vulnerability of the British Empire.

The movement only began to actualise its claim to fascism in the 1930s. Certainly, by 1932 the BF had developed a coherent fascist programme which encompassed antisemitism, corporatism, chauvinism and imperialism. Furthermore, it is important to note the BF triggered the first manifestations of anti-fascist organisations in Britain which would continue to grow with the arrival of the BUF. The BF should be granted fascist credentials with caution. Even by the dawn of 1930s, a fully-fledged fascist movement with the potential to gain mass electoral support was yet to manifest in Britain.

Chapter Three: The BUF: The Culmination of Fascism in Britain (1932-1939)

The BUF posed a far greater threat to conventional politics than any other proto-fascist or fascist movement in Britain before the Second World War. Fascism was a phenomenon that manifested several times between 1900-1939 in Britain, but it was not actualised until the creation of the BUF. The BBL were proto-fascist, and the BF had an equivocal identification with fascism; the BUF, on the other hand, were unquestionably an authentic fascist party. There is an abundance of historiographical output devoted to the BUF. Nevertheless, the importance of the two precursor movements to the BUF and the parallels and differences between each has eclipsed the attention of historians. The BUF were the most notable of the far-right parties in Britain before the Second World War. Indeed, none of the precursors boasted the same prominence nor significance, but a cross-examination of the three organisations reinstates the forgotten importance of the BBL and the BF, a fundamental purpose of this dissertation.

Mosley's Vision

In 1932, Mosley authored *The Greater Britain* and introduced his idea of the corporate state. He envisaged, 'a nation organized as a human body,' whereby 'every part fulfils its function as a member of the whole', and explained, 'the whole body is generally directed by the central driving brain of government.'³³¹ Evidently, Mosley held an organic view of the corporate state and expressed the system through a human body metaphor revealing his fascination with the human anatomy. This is an example of Mosley's affinity with holism, a notion embraced by the Nazis. Specifically, National Socialists deployed traditional völkisch tropes that understood the German people, known as "Volk", as a pseudo biological whole and the state as an "organism" in which every individual assumed a function.³³² Hitler

³³¹ Mosley, O. (1932) *The Greater Britain*. Greater Britain Publications. Page 26-27.

³³² Harrington, A. (1996). *Reenchanting Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*. Princeton University Press. Page 175.

revealed his belief in holism in *Mein Kampf* when he described the democratic state as a “dead mechanism” and then his vision for statehood in Germany, “there must be formed a living organism with the exclusive aim of serving a higher idea.”³³³

The Corporate State, to Mosley, was a system of bureaucratic government where technical experts were charged with implementing decisions rather than, as Mosley understood, the incapable politicians of an outdated democratic parliamentary system. The BUF vowed to apply corporate principles to all aspects of industrial life.³³⁴ Alexander Raven-Thomas, the BUF’s chief authority on the Corporate State, planned an entire reorganisation of the economy into twenty corporations composed of employers, workers and government-appointed consumer groups.³³⁵ The twenty corporations were essentially self-governed but worked in harmony with a Fascist Parliament, based on national elections, and a National Corporation of Industry which was envisaged as a centralised body charged with planning and regulating economic activity on a national scale. The latter would also replace the House of Lords and most of the members would be technical experts elected in an occupational franchise. The National Corporation of Industry would work with a National Investment Board, an investigative body dedicated to counteracting the influence of ‘international finance’. The BUF’s mode of government was moulded upon the fascist leadership principle. The ‘Prime Minister’ would hold the overriding influence. A ‘Super-Cabinet’ would assist the ‘Prime Minister’ to co-ordinate national affairs. This idea was retained from the New Party. The BUF emphasised those who sat in the Fascist Parliament and the National Corporation of Industry did so on an occupational rather than a residential basis and elections would determine their positions. The BUF embraced bold economic ideas. First, demand-side economics were trusted to reflate the impacts of ailing overseas export levels.³³⁶ An increase

³³³ An extract of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (1925). Cited in and received from Harrington, A. (1996). *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*. Page 175.

³³⁴ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 90.

³³⁵ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 90.

³³⁶ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 89.

in Britain's manufacturing levels would coincide with a 'scientific' increase in purchasing power, therefore, consumption levels would follow the increase in production.

There are several parallels between the economic agenda of the BUF and that of the BF from the latter half of 1932. The BF also committed itself to a nationalist corporatist economic structure. Specifically, the Special Summer Propaganda Number of *British Fascism* posed a drastic centralisation of the economy. It promised the 'abolition of the Party System and its replacement by the Corporate State, through the Guilds and Corporations of workers, traders, employers and owners.'³³⁷ Evidently, the BF and the BUF vouched to implement a Corporate State whereby corporate principles would influence every industrial sector, also, both organisations were keen to dictate the management of industry to technical experts opposed to democratic politicians. Furthermore, the BF pledged to increase production using machinery and intensify consumption by the payment of higher wages.³³⁸ This mirrors the demand-side economics favoured by the BUF whereby increased manufacturing levels would result in a correspondent increase in purchasing power. The two organisations believed an increase in production and the payment of higher wages would inevitably maximise consumption levels.

The British Empire was a 'vital cornerstone' of the BUF's economic plans.³³⁹ The BUF advocated for an autarkic empire, whereby the domestic economy would be insulated against the uncertainty of the liberal international trading order.³⁴⁰ A self-sufficient British Empire would mean Britain and the dominions would observe reciprocal trade agreements with the mother country focusing on manufacturing products and the dominions on food

³³⁷ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³³⁸ (1932, Summer). *British Fascism*. Special Summer Propaganda Number. Page 8.

³³⁹ Cullen, S. (1987). *The Development of the Ideas and Policies of the British Union of Fascists*. Page 123.

³⁴⁰ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 90.

output. Mosley first embraced the autarkic model in mid-1930 but had to wait for the creation of the BUF to express it.

The BUF's economic agenda was informed by key aspects of socialism. Rajani Palme Dutt believed the BUF emerged 'from the heart of the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party (ILP).'³⁴¹ Mosley's fascism claimed to offer a utopian solution to eradicate the economic problems plaguing contemporary society. Specifically, Mosley's pro-active and interventionist economic approach was formulated in reaction to the 1929-1931 economic crisis and the trade depression and unemployment which followed. In the 1930s, socialism was most appropriately understood as a mode to achieve the betterment of the lives of working people through maximum employment and a bundle of measures now understood as the 'welfare state', also, to dissolve class conflicts and inequalities.³⁴² The Corporate State, the BUF's utopia, promised full employment in a high-wage economy and the party wished to enhance the welfare of the people through a series of schemes implemented by the national corporatist structure. The salience of socialism within the BUF's economics reflected the notable number of socialists wielding influence within the party's leadership. Alexander Raven-Thomas was a former socialist, John Beckett and Robert Forgan were previously Labour MPs and Wilfred Risdon was the former divisional organiser of the ILP in the Midlands. John Scanlon and W.J. Leaper defected from the ILP and Thomas Moran, Marshall Diston, Henry Gibbs, Leslie Cummings, Rex Tremlett, Alexander Miles and Mary Richardson were several other former ILP and Labour Party affiliates prominent in the BUF.³⁴³ In his unpublished memoir, John Beckett claimed to have found 'far more sincere and earnest Socialist conviction' within the BUF than he had 'ever seen' in the Labour

³⁴¹ Dutt, R. P. (1935). *Fascism and Social Revolution: A Study of the Economics and Politics of the Last Stages of Capitalism in Decay*. Gollancz. Page 264.

³⁴² Coupland, P. M. (2005). 'Left-Wing' Fascism in Theory and Practice. In N. Copsey, & D. Renton (Eds.), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (pp. 95-117). Palgrave Macmillan. Page 96.

³⁴³ Beckett, F. (1999). *The Rebel Who Lost His Cause: The Tragedy of John Beckett*. London House. Page 115-125.

Party.³⁴⁴ He admitted, 'my speeches were practically the same as those I had made in the Independent Labour Party, because my change of organisation had no effect upon my Socialist convictions and policy.'³⁴⁵ The truth of such claims is very questionable; nonetheless, they imply the BUF drew the support of numbers of disillusioned socialists.

The BUF had a significant number of socialists and former ILP and Labour Party affiliates at its hierarchy. This is entirely different from the nature of the leadership and membership of the BF and their vituperative view of socialism. The BF were founded as a militant anti-communist and anti-socialist movement and proclaimed an 'efficacious hostility towards all Bolshevist, Communist, Socialist and other subversive and anti-Christian movements.'³⁴⁶

The BF's leadership and membership was composed primarily of Conservatives, aristocrats and upper-class anti-socialists. Nesta Webster was inaugurated into the movement and hailed for her books which, according to Lintorn-Orman, 'had brought before the public the evils of Socialism and Bolshevism.' Nevertheless, the BF claimed to merge all classes under the umbrella of 'patriotic socialism,'³⁴⁷ a strange paradox considering the party prided itself upon opposing the left.

Most definitely, the BUF had more influx from the Labour Party including socialists and working-class people than the BF. There are a handful of reasons for this pattern. Firstly, the BF were made up largely of aristocratic and landed figures, men from military and naval backgrounds, as well as disillusioned Conservatives, all who sided with the movement to express their enduring sense of nationalism, their mounting fears of the spread of Bolshevism and the growing influence of socialism and trade unionism in Britain. Therefore, the BF had a rather limited appeal. The movement did not attempt to appeal to the vast

³⁴⁴ Beckett, F. (1999). *The Rebel Who Lost His Cause*. Page 128.

³⁴⁵ Beckett, J. (1938). *After My Fashion* [unpublished typescript]. Page 350. The John Beckett Collection at the University of Sheffield Library. GB/200/MS/238.

³⁴⁶ Policy. (1926, Late July). *The British Lion*. No. 1. Page 6.

³⁴⁷ (1932, March 1) *British Fascism*. No. 19.

majority of lower-middle or working-class people; it did not address the most important issues of the working-classes such as employment or housing, plus, it was concentrated almost entirely in London. Furthermore, the BF's anti-communist and anti-socialist agenda was, at times, indistinguishable from upper-class snobbery.³⁴⁸ The BUF, on the other hand, made a pro-active attempt to appeal to the lower-middle and working-classes, particularly in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Propaganda and meetings were aimed directly at the problems plaguing local industry; in Lancashire, the BUF promised to reverse the decline of the cotton industry and in Yorkshire the emphasis was placed upon the ailing textiles industry. In July 1934, the BUF launched the first of a series of cotton campaigns throughout Lancashire which vowed to 'restore the cotton industry to a proper economic condition.'³⁴⁹ In Preston, Mosley promised "immediate work for 65,000 cotton operatives!" He vowed to lower Indian tariff barriers resulting in another 500,000 yards of cotton goods and employment for 25,000 workers, also, to 'exclude Japanese and other cheap competition from India', providing a further 580,000 yards of cotton and an additional 30,000 jobs for Lancashire people, and to exclude foreign competition from the Crown Colonies, which Mosley promised a market for a further 220,000 yards and employment for another 11,000 workers.³⁵⁰ *The Blackshirt* regularly detailed the alarming decline of the woollen textile industry in Yorkshire and lent a voice to the increasing number of unemployed textile workers in the county.³⁵¹ Therefore, the BUF attracted a proportion of the lower-middle and working-classes because the party made a deliberate attempt to capture the support of local people by addressing their grievances.

The BUF also addressed issues regarding gender regularly within their policy. It advocated for 'equal pay for men and women doing similar work...no dismissal upon marriage' and 'holiday on full pay for mothers upon the birth of a child.'³⁵² The BUF built upon the precedent set by

³⁴⁸ Stocker, P. (2016). *Importing Fascism*. Page 332.

³⁴⁹ (1934, December 21). *The Blackshirt*. No. 63. Page 12.

³⁵⁰ (1934, December 21). *The Blackshirt*. No. 63. Page 2.

³⁵¹ (1934, July 20). *The Blackshirt*. No. 63. Page 12.

³⁵² Raven-Thompson, A. (1937). *The Coming Corporate State*. *Action*.

the BF which afforded women increased visibility in far-right movements but adopted a more progressive stance towards the roles and rights of women in employment than the precursor. The BUF established a Women's Section in 1933, the Women's Defence Force in 1934 and the Women's Drum Corps in 1937, nonetheless, women were still assigned to quotidian functions such as spreading fascism "by word of mouth" and keeping branches in an orderly condition by the party's male leadership.³⁵³ Furthermore, the BUF advocated for equal pay, a change in marriage laws and maternity leave because it aligned with the notion women should be confined to family affairs and the realms of their homes. D.S. Lewis insists the BUF had no intention of opposing sexual discrimination in employment, instead, it fronted to support equal pay because it knew the increased cost of employing women would inevitably result in their dismissal and economic dependency on men.³⁵⁴ Indeed, the BUF advocated for women's equality in employment, but it was by no means sincere. The BUF desired for women to be priced out of employment and confined to family and home affairs. Indeed, the BUF built on the concept of 'fascist feminism' forged by the BF, but the two parties held deeply misogynistic and traditionalist views of gender.

The BUF's Most Prosperous Period

The BUF had resources far beyond those enjoyed by precursor movements. Their substantial funds were sufficient to maintain a paid staff and sponsor rapid branch expansion. For the first several months of 1934, the BUF enjoyed their most triumphant era, partly a result of their substantial purse. The BUF claimed three hundred branches at the beginning of the year, by June there were an estimated five hundred with a soaring membership of around 400,000. Mosley enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Mussolini and reaped the benefits of his substantial sponsorship and donations. In January, Mosley

³⁵³ Gottlieb, J. V. (2008). Female "Fanatics": Women's Sphere in the British Union of Fascists. In P. Bacchetta, & M. Power (Eds.), *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World* (). Taylor & Francis Group. Page 34.

³⁵⁴ Lewis, D. S. (1987) *Illusions of Grandeur*. Page 53-54.

reportedly travelled to Rome and received a donation of £20,000 from Mussolini.³⁵⁵ Mosley consistently denied the charge he had ever received funds from Italian fascist organisations;³⁵⁶ nevertheless, in January, Count Dino Grandi, the Italian ambassador, wrote to Mussolini, 'Mosley has asked me to express his gratitude for your sending of a considerable sum which I have arranged to hand over to him today.'³⁵⁷ Two months later, Grandi insisted Mussolini had paid Mosley 3.5 million lire (£60,000) a year in monthly instalments of 300,000 lire. According to Special Branch, foreign subsidies were transferred to a secret account opened in July 1933 at the Charing Cross branch of the Westminster Bank. The various sums ranged included £9,500 in 1933, £77,800 in 1934, £86,000 in 1935, £43,300 in 1936 and petered out the following year with £7,600.³⁵⁸ Each poured in from a Swiss bank in multiple European currencies. Further donations are believed to have been made by Lord Nuffield, Captain Gordon-Canning, Wyndham Portal and Sir Alliot Verdon Roe and Mosley confessed he had spent over £100,000 of his own money on the movement.³⁵⁹

For the first six months of 1934, the BUF were publicly endorsed by the press tycoon, Lord Rothermere. He controlled a significant amount of the British Press including the *Daily Mail*, *Sunday Dispatch*, *Evening News*, and an array of local newspapers. *The Daily Mail* enthused the BUF and alluded to it as the 'Party of Youth'.³⁶⁰ On 15 January 1934, the *Daily Mail* published 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts', an article which signified the beginning of the Rothermere Period. The article lauded the Blackshirts as "the first organised effort of the younger generation to break this stranglehold which senile politicians have so long maintained in our public affairs".³⁶¹ Readers were urged to "seek out the nearest branch of

³⁵⁵ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 152

³⁵⁶ Secret Home Office report of an Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against the Order of Internment of Sir Oswald Mosley under Defence Regulation 18B. The meeting was held at 6 Burlington House on 2 July 1940. Page 54.

³⁵⁷ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 150.

³⁵⁸ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 153.

³⁵⁹ Pugh. M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!'*. Page 153.

³⁶⁰ Viscount Rothermere. (1934, January 15). Hurrah for the Blackshirts! *Daily Mail*. Page 10.

³⁶¹ Viscount Rothermere. (1934, January 15). Hurrah for the Blackshirts! *Daily Mail*. Page 10.

the Blackshirts and make themselves acquainted with their aims and plans” providing they “would like to see their own country develop that spirit of patriotic pride and service which has transformed Germany and Italy.”³⁶² *The Sunday Dispatch* was subsequently changed into the house journal for the BUF and tried to engage readers with the happenings of the movement by discussing ‘What the Blackshirts Are Doing,’ and publishing biographies on leading personnel. In April, the *Dispatch* offered free tickets to the upcoming rally at Olympia and weekly £1 prizes to readers who submitted the most-worthy answer to ‘Why I Like the Blackshirts’.³⁶³ The Rothermere Press hugely benefitted the BUF; M. Pugh insists it ‘made fascism so topical that even the hostile newspapers could not afford to ignore the subject.’³⁶⁴ R. R. Bellamy, the former National Inspector of the BUF, boasted, ‘we could sense at once the more favourable attitude of the general public.’³⁶⁵

Around a thousand recruits were said to have flocked to the London Headquarters each week during this period. For a brief period, the prospect of gaining power in Britain seemed attainable to BUF members. The seemingly boundless optimism enjoyed by the BUF would begin to wither as Lord Rothermere ended his support for the organisation in July 1934. His retreat was surely down to the BUF’s growing association with violence and antisemitism. Amid questioning under Defence Regulation 18b, Mosley admitted, “I previously quarrelled that summer [1934] because he saw this coming and publicly demanded that I should adopt the Conservative policy and should not develop antisemitism.”³⁶⁶

The Adoption of Antisemitism

³⁶² Viscount Rothermere. (1934, January 15). Hurrah for the Blackshirts! *Daily Mail*. Page 10.

³⁶³ (1934, April 22). *The Sunday Dispatch*. Page 34.

³⁶⁴ Pugh. M. (2006). ‘Hurrah for the Blackshirts!’. Page 151.

³⁶⁵ Bellamy, R. R. (2019). *We Marched With Mosley*. Sanctuary Press. Page 198.

³⁶⁶ Secret Home Office report of an Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against the Order of Internment of Sir Oswald Mosley under Defence Regulation 18B. The meeting was held at 6 Burlington House on 2 July 1940. Page 50.

Historians have remained unanimous in their assertion Mosley and the BUF were rabidly antisemitic. It is widely assumed the BUF adopted antisemitism as an official policy in September 1934. Mosley's flagrant anti-Jewish rhetoric at the BUF rallies at Hyde Park, Belle Vue and Albert Hall in autumn 1934 confirmed antisemitism was a defining feature of the organisation. The progressively more explicit and scathing anti-Jewish content of Mosley's speeches clarified the party's fascist ideology and antisemitism were intertwined.³⁶⁷ Between 1934 and 1937, the BUF embarked on a formidable period of antisemitic agitation, after which it declined rapidly and capitulated in 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Belle Vue Rally on 29 September 1934, according to H. Pussard, 'marked the turn towards a more violent antisemitism by Oswald Mosley in his speech.'³⁶⁸ Mosley remarked, "look at the mobilisation of Jews from Cheetham Hill road." He relayed his party's conspiratorial worldview; "what they call today the will of the people is nothing but the organised corruption of the press, cinema and Parliament which is called democracy, but which is ruled by alien Jewish finance – the same finance which has hired alien mobs to yell here tonight." Cheetham, just over a mile north-east of the centre of Manchester was, at this time, a stronghold of the Jewish working-class in Manchester, many of whom were first generation immigrants.³⁶⁹ Furthermore, the BUF's headquarters were located on Northumberland and Tyson Street in Salford, places mostly populated by Jews.³⁷⁰ Evidently, the BUF staged meetings and rallies in the Jewish strongholds of Greater Manchester with the intention of provoking local Jews.

³⁶⁷ Tilles, D. (2015). *British Fascist Antisemitism*. Page 80.

³⁶⁸ Pussard, H. (2004). The Blackshirts at Belle Vue: Fascist Theatre at a North-West Pleasure Ground. In J. V. Gottlieb, & T. P. Linehan (Eds.) *The Culture of Fascism*. (pp. 116-128). I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. Page 177.

³⁶⁹ Barrett, N. (1998). The Threat of the British Union of Fascists in Manchester. *Jewish Culture and History*, 1(2), 56-73. Page 56.

³⁷⁰ Gerwitz, S. (2012). *Anti-Fascist Activity in Manchester's Jewish Community in the 1930s*. AFA Archives Files. Page 22.

Though the BUF did not fully embrace antisemitism until 1934, it was an ideological foundation of the movement evident as early as 1933 throughout several editions of BUF publications. On November 10, 1933, the *Fascist Week*, an official organ of the BUF, published an article entitled 'Britain as Dump for German Jews,' and scapegoated Jewish immigrants for the rise in unemployment.³⁷¹ German Jews were slammed for 'taking advantage of public sentimentality to steal jobs from Britishers who are quite capable of filling them efficiently.' In 1933, the number of unemployed reached three million, constituting 23% of the population. Among the millions of unemployed were mass numbers of Jews who found it increasingly difficult to gain employment as dozens of businesses publicised 'every man on our pay list is a British-born Christian,' and other advertisements stated, 'applicants must be first-class workers, of refined manners and appearance, and gentiles.'

The BUF's publications in 1933 hammered home the fallacy Jewish immigrants were exacerbating unemployment against the backdrop of a severe economic crisis and trade depression. This fallacy was also driven by the precursor movement, the BBL, who scapegoated Jews for driving natives from their jobs and homes in the East End at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The BUF's antisemitism was also a reaction to the fear Britain was amid a period of unprecedented decline, a notion which had been sweeping amongst right-wingers since the late nineteenth century. Publications represented all Jews in Britain as a single clan disloyal to national interests and different to British people. *The Blackshirt* maintained, 'Fascists have always contended that Jews could not be Englishmen and that the Jewish outlook was international and not British.'³⁷² Ultimately, Jews were identified as the main counterforce against British interests, and said to sponsor Bolshevism, communism and socialism, all of which were catalysts of national decline.³⁷³ Evidently, BUF publications began portraying

³⁷¹ (1933, November 10). *Fascist Week*. No. 1.

³⁷² (1935, January 18). *The Blackshirt*. No. 81. Page 8.

³⁷³ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 92.

Jews in a conspiratorial framework as early as 1933 and Jews were scapegoated for the alarming unemployment rate and the growth of Bolshevism, communism and socialism which were believed to be evidence of significant and perhaps irreversible national decline.

The BUF's antisemitic worldview was compounded by the notion that 'international Jewish finance' exerted a crippling hold on the global economy and democratic system in Britain.³⁷⁴

This made the antisemitism of the BUF more coherent and developed opposed to the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the BBL and the BF. The two precursor movements asserted the press were entirely and directly under Jewish control, but such extravagant claims were easily refutable. On the other hand, the BUF relayed their antisemitic line through more coherent and complex conspiracy theories. The BUF did not claim Jews owned the press but controlled it by threatening to boycott funds and advertisements of the newspapers unless they promoted Jewish interests. *The Blackshirt* insisted 'no great Press at present can support Fascism without being broken and ruined by this alien.'³⁷⁵ Any refusal of such a claim rested only with the denial of the press controllers. Similarly, the BUF insisted the political parties served Jewish interests, that way it was not necessary to identify or expose many Jewish MPs to validate the claim. Mosley spoke of 'the organised corruption of the Press, cinema and Parliament, which is called democracy but is ruled by alien Jewish finance.'³⁷⁶ *The Blackshirt* also stressed Jews controlled 'every great organ for educating the public mind.'³⁷⁷ The party's antisemitic line forced the public to speculate and reverse the true extent of Jewish influence in Britain, without ever knowing it.

The question of why the BUF adopted antisemitism remains in question. Perhaps antisemitism was integrated into the BUF's policy because of the latent prejudice inherent within the party and within Mosley's thought or it may have been merely a reaction to the

³⁷⁴ (1936, August 22). *The Blackshirt*.

³⁷⁵ (1934, September 18). *The Manchester Guardian*.

³⁷⁶ Triumphant Close to Belle Vue Victory. (1934, October 5). *The Blackshirt*. Page 1.

³⁷⁷ (1934, November 2). *The Blackshirt*. Page 2.

sustained Jewish opposition the movement faced. When questioned under Defence Regulation 18b on 2 July 1940, Mosley insisted, "I was compelled to look at the Jewish problem by their opposition to us and, having looked at the Jewish problem I developed what is called antisemitism." He added, "we [the BUF] were violently attacked by certain Jewish interests... You can look at the Police Court records for the sixth months before I first attacked them and see the actual physical attacks on Blackshirts in the streets and you will find that about 50 per cent of the convictions are of those with Jewish names."³⁷⁸

A.W. Gottens of the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) believed Mosley was 'an out and out supporter of Jews,' but he 'begun to realise the menace of Jewry when he saw how the party was always attacked by them.' The 'rank and file', Gottens believed, 'literally forced the issue,' for if Mosley continued to insist 'antisemitism is no issue of Fascism' in 1935, then a 'gigantic split' would have occurred.³⁷⁹

Nevertheless, the notion the rank-and-file membership of the BUF forced Mosley to integrate antisemitism into his policy is unconvincing. Supporters and members of the BUF, especially those of lower-middle and working-class origin felt alienated by the BUF's sustained antisemitic line. In 1937, at an open-air meeting in the centre of Leeds given by William Joyce, a 'middle-aged' Yorkshireman was reportedly disgusted at Joyce's flagrant antisemitic rhetoric and bemoaned, "I had come here especially to hear what your party could do to help the wool trade but all I have had to listen to is a lot of silly crap-trap about Jews."³⁸⁰

Several historians believe antisemitism was not inherent in the leadership of the BUF, rather it was incorporated into the policy to appease members and drive recruitment. D. Renton is

³⁷⁸ Secret Home Office report of an Advisory Committee to consider Appeals against the Order of Internment of Sir Oswald Mosley under Defence Regulation 18B. The meeting was held at 6 Burlington House on 2 July 1940. Page 50.

³⁷⁹ A letter written by A.W. Gottens of the Imperial Fascist League to Mr. Roberts, presumably a Special Branch Officer, dated 19/11/1940.

³⁸⁰ Bellamy, R. R. (2019). *We Marched with Mosley*. Page 147.

convinced the 'overwhelming majority of ordinary members' were equally as antisemitic as the leadership of the party.³⁸¹ Robert Skidelsky, in his sympathetic biography of Mosley in 1975, asserts Jews themselves were to blame for the antisemitism of the BUF; 'What started to change was the attitude of Jews themselves, and they must take a large sum of the blame for what subsequently happened.'³⁸² Skidelsky continues, 'a Jewish malaise at this time was to be obsessed with fascism.'³⁸³ Skidelsky believed Mosley deserved a fair biography written with detachment but his reluctance to acknowledge Mosley and the majority of the leadership drove antisemitism to forefront of BUF policy, severely undermines his work.³⁸⁴ D. Tilles, on the other hand, believes antisemitism was an 'integral element' of Mosley's thought from the very beginning.³⁸⁵ He insists antisemitism was an 'authentic, integrated and central aspect of the programme and ideology,' and claims antisemitism had 'always been intended to play a role in BUF policy.'³⁸⁶ S. Gerwitz, in her study of anti-fascist activity in Manchester's Jewish Community between 1933 and 1939, insists 'Jews fought back against their victimisation at the hands of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.'³⁸⁷ The provocative and threatening nature of BUF activities staged in the Jewish Quarters of Greater Manchester such as Cheetham forced Jews to mobilise and retaliate for fear of one's own safety. Indeed, Mosley was at the forefront of the escalation of anti-Jewish rhetoric beginning in late 1933. He penned the infamous 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?' article in November and gave rabidly antisemitic speeches at Hyde Park, Belle Vue and Albert Hall.³⁸⁸ The notion the BUF's official endorsement of antisemitism was driven by anybody other than the leadership of the party is inconceivable.

³⁸¹ Renton, D. (2000). *Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Britain in the 1940s*. Palgrave Macmillan. Page 14.

³⁸² Skidelsky, R. (1975). *Oswald Mosley*. Page 381.

³⁸³ Skidelsky, R. (1975). *Oswald Mosley*. Page 381.

³⁸⁴ Skidelsky, R. (1975). *Oswald Mosley*. Page 16.

³⁸⁵ Tilles, D. (2015). *British Fascist Antisemitism*. Page 77.

³⁸⁶ Tilles, D. (2015). *British Fascist Antisemitism*. Page 75.

³⁸⁷ Gerwitz, S. (2012). *Anti-Fascist Activity*. Page 17.

³⁸⁸ Tilles, D. (2015). *British Fascist Antisemitism*. Page 78.

Anti-Fascist Responses

The BUF faced substantial and sustained Jewish and communist opposition throughout the 1930s. The anti-fascist responses to the BUF have elicited an abundance of historical attention. The events of Olympia and the Battle of Cable Street have dominated contemporary understandings of anti-fascism in Britain before the Second World War. The latter is understood as the culmination of anti-fascism in this period. The notion anti-fascist organisations were provoked into existence by the BUF alone is longstanding. It is generally accepted the proto-fascist and fascist organisations which predated the BUF were far too insignificant to provoke nor warrant any organised responses. A reappraisal is necessary for the BF faced various forms of opposition and even provoked multiple organised anti-fascist responses in the 1920s. N. Copsey observed the 'marked failure by historians to even consider the possibilities of antagonism towards the precursors of the BUF given that Britain's early fascist organisations have been dismissed by historians as irrelevancies.'³⁸⁹

The BF's inaugural meeting on 7 October 1923 was disrupted by communists and resulted in pandemonium, the two following meetings in November were also disrupted. Furthermore, the BF elicited two organised initiatives. The PDF and the NUCF, though only skeleton organisations, proclaimed an anti-fascist identity and were dedicated to combating the rise of the BF. Their existence alone proves organised responses to fascism in Britain began almost a decade before the birth of the BUF. Nevertheless, the organised responses to the BUF were far more developed and substantial. This was, however, a result of the precedent set by the PDF and NUCF. Both initiatives proved domestic fascism could be combated through official channels, either through propaganda or direct action, therefore, there was some experience in fighting fascism for anti-fascists in the 1930s to draw from.

There were multiple outlets of the Jewish press which provided sustained and layered opposition to the BUF, particularly after the movement endorsed antisemitism from 1934.

³⁸⁹ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 5.

Unsurprisingly, the Jewish Chronicle was the most prominent critic of Mosley and the BUF. It insisted, ‘for months the [BUF] have been sowing the seeds of antisemitic hate in East London.’³⁹⁰ It also shunned Mosley for fanning ‘the flame of hatred from which the Jews had had to suffer,’ and insisted he was ‘trying to utilise the very same methods as had been utilised in Germany by inflaming British men and women against the Jews as a minority people, simply to suit his own political ends.’³⁹¹

The Jewish Labour Council openly denounced Mosley too. In 1935, it likened his use of antisemitism to Hitler in a damning pamphlet. “In his speeches at the Albert Hall, Olympia, Leicester, and elsewhere, Mosley has endeavoured to outdo Hitler in denouncing the Jewish people.”³⁹² *The Workers Circle* suggested, “The example of Hitlerism has provided them with a lead in the vilest forms of Jew-baiting and anti-Jewish hysteria, and no pains have been spared in a deliberate attempt to convince the British public that the Jews are responsible for all the evils of the present day.”³⁹³ The Jewish Press slammed Mosley for his cynical opportunism. Indeed, he exploited longstanding racial and religious prejudices at a time of mass employment and poverty. By exclaiming, “the Jews are to blame,” and “the foreigners are the cause of your misery”, Mosley and his party exploited the bitterness and disparity of many victimised workers in Britain, as a result, the struggle of social emancipation and economic security became side-tracked as a racial issue.

There is a notable theme running throughout the Jewish Chronicle, the Jewish Labour Council and the Workers Circle’s denunciations of the BUF. The Jewish Press were keen to emphasise Mosley’s admiration for Hitler, and the sincere imitation. Certainly, the

³⁹⁰ The People Said “No!”. (1936, October 9). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 22.

³⁹¹ ‘Protests Against Brutal Treatment of Jews.’ (1934, July 6). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 20.

³⁹² The Workers’ Circle. (1935). *Sir Oswald Mosley and the Jews* [Pamphlet]. Jewish Labour Council. Page 1. Retrieved from Jewish Labour Council 1935-1961 Collection at Warwick Digital Collections. 240/R/3/60/1.

³⁹³ The Workers’ Circle. (1935). *Sir Oswald Mosley and the Jews* [Pamphlet]. Jewish Labour Council. Page 1.

paramilitary nature of the BUF, their heavily choreographed rallies, the emblem resembling the colours of the Swastika and the leadership cult, all exposed by the Jewish Press, were uncanny indications of the BUF's deliberate imitation of the Nazis.³⁹⁴ Furthermore, there is evidence Mosley not only admired Hitler but revelled at the prospect of Hitler invading Britain after the outbreak of the Second World War. Between June and July 1938, Mosley 'entered into close association' with the Nazis and willingly received Nazi propaganda. Furthermore, in May 1940, Special Branch were informed Mosley and his close associates frequently discussed 'what was to be done after the Nazis had conquered Britain,' and were informed they 'fervently claim Hitler as their Fuhrer and await with eagerness the day of his landing here.'³⁹⁵ Therefore, the BUF's imitation of the Nazis was deliberate and sincere; Mosley was keen to establish an affinity with Hitler and modelled much of the appearance and policy of his party upon the Nazis. Yet, the association with the Nazis proved incredibly damaging for the movement. The Night of the Long Knives in July 1934 resulted in a decrease of 90 per cent of the fifty thousand BUF members, according to R. Paxton.³⁹⁶ The admiration of the Nazis was alien to the British electorate; only small circles of right-wingers held a fondness for Hitler throughout the 1930s.

There were also numbers of Jewish anti-fascists, typically acting alone or in small groups, who combated the BUF throughout the 1930s. These pockets usually deployed violent tactics and clashed with fascists during and after BUF rallies. *The Blackshirt* reported several instances of attacks on Blackshirts committed by gangs of Jewish assailants in 1934; "An Ilford Fascist, returning home from the local branch recently, was waylaid as brutally attacked by a gang of Jews...He was badly injured about the face, and sustained dislocation

³⁹⁴ Gerwitz, S. (2012). *Anti-Fascist Activity*. Page 22.

³⁹⁵ Special Branch report of the Metropolitan Police dated 27 May 1940. No. 1. An informant named Mrs. Ruby Wickenden contacted the Metropolitan Police with information on Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists. The caller was formerly employed by Dr. Norman Haire, the family physician of Sir Oswald Mosley, who frequently used to tell her of the suspicious goings-on at Sir Oswald Mosley's house.

³⁹⁶ Paxton, R. (2004). *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Alfred A. Knopf. Page 75.

of the jaw."³⁹⁷ Furthermore, the *Blackshirt* claimed, 'the Jews make up 0.6 per cent of the population, yet guilty of 50 per cent of the attacks upon Fascists!'³⁹⁸

The contemporary left also formulated significant opposition to the BUF. M. Newman has drawn our attention to the nature of anti-fascism adopted by the contemporary left in the 1930s.³⁹⁹ The CPGB were committed by thwarting domestic fascism through direct action and militancy, whereas the Labour Party were committed to counteracting the BUF through lawful and democratic methods. The Labour Party were steadfastly assured the BUF, or any other fascist movement would not attain power in Britain. It believed the political system and culture in Britain was too deeply rooted in democratic tradition to succumb to the threat of fascism. In Italy and Germany, the countries where fascist dictatorships had consolidated power, there was mass unemployment and severe economic depression, and the Labour Party believed these conditions were susceptible to fascism but if economic recovery was guaranteed in Britain, then the threat of fascism would be ameliorated. Labour were adamant a dictatorship of the left was equally as catastrophic as one of the right, therefore, it was keen to not identify with the CPGB and coupled communism and fascism under the general umbrella of 'dictatorship', the rationale being 'dictatorship' and 'extremism' on one side of the political spectrum always provoked the other. Herbert Morrison, in 1933, warned against any association with the Communist Party; "If we ourselves flirt with a dictatorship of the left...what are we doing? We are preparing a political psychology which, if we justify one form of dictatorship, gives an equally moral justification for a dictatorship in another direction."⁴⁰⁰ In 1936, in response to the CPGB's plea for a united front against fascism, the National Council of Labour published a bitterly anti-communism pamphlet, 'The British

³⁹⁷ (1934, October 26). *The Blackshirt*. No. 79. Page 1.

³⁹⁸ (1934, November 2). *The Blackshirt*. No. 80. Page 2.

³⁹⁹ Newman, M. (1978). 'Democracy versus Dictatorship: Labour's Role in the Struggle against British Fascism, 1933-1936. *History Workshop*, (5), 66-88. Page 72.

⁴⁰⁰ Morrison, H. (1933). *The Labour Party Annual Report 1933*. The Labour Party. Page 219.

Labour Movement and Communist – An Exposure of Communist Manoeuvres.⁴⁰¹ Walter Citrine, the individual understood to be mostly responsible for the pamphlet, addressed the TUC the same year and stressed, “The TUC stands for the principle of democracy against dictatorship, and it is not ready to make qualifications between the dictatorship of the so-called proletariat...and the dictatorship of Fascists.” Most importantly, Citrine affirmed, “Let us be very careful to make clear to the public at large that our principles are fundamentally different from those advanced by the Communist Party.”⁴⁰² In reply, the CPGB published the pamphlet, ‘Democracy and Fascism,’ authored by Rajani Palme Dutt. He deemed the Labour Party’s stance against fascism as disgraceful and foolish. Dutt insisted, ‘The line of the Labour Party is the line of German Social Democracy, the line of bidding workers trust in capitalist ‘democracy’, which has led to the disaster of the working class in Germany and the victory of Fascism.’⁴⁰³

The CPGB’s alarmist opposition to domestic fascism was hardened by the Nazi acquisition of power in Germany. It mistakenly believed the situation in Britain from 1933 onwards mirrored that in Germany in the immediate years preceding Hitler’s consolidation of power. According to Dutt, the German Social Democratic Party had facilitated the Nazi victory by refusing to adopt militancy and mass action and Labour’s position mirrored the party at fault in Germany, therefore, Britain would also surrender to fascism.⁴⁰⁴ Of course, this was not the case. By committing unreservedly to constitutionalism and democracy, Labour ensured the existing liberal-democratic consensus in Britain was not challenged, therefore, any space for illiberal and anti-democratic organisations such as the BUF was minimised.⁴⁰⁵ The inter-war climate in Italy and Germany was markedly different; here, a frail liberal consensus was

⁴⁰¹ National Council of Labour. (1936). *The British Labour Movement and Communist – An Exposure of Communist Manoeuvres* [Pamphlet]. National Council of Labour.

⁴⁰² Trade Union Congress. (1937). *The Labour Movement and Fascism*. TUC Annual Report 1936. Page 435.

⁴⁰³ Rajani Palme Dutt. (1933). *Democracy and Fascism* [Pamphlet]. The Communist Party of Great Britain. Page 7.

⁴⁰⁴ Rajani Palme Dutt. (1933). *Democracy and Fascism* [Pamphlet]. Page 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 17.

shattered by a dire socio-economic crisis, thus, extremist ideologies and violent politics such as fascism became more socially acceptable and desired.⁴⁰⁶ Undoubtedly, the Nazi acquisition of power in Germany propelled anti-fascist responses in Britain, and certainly, hardened the CPGB's approach to the BUF. This explains why the anti-fascist opposition the BUF faced was far more substantial and radical than the mild opposition faced by the BF.

The CPGB maintained only working-class militancy and direct action could eradicate the menace of domestic fascism. As the leadership of the Labour Party claimed the Public Order Act diminished the BUF's appeal, the communists asserted the Battle of Cable Street alone had primarily halted the growth of the BUF. In the days preceding 4 October 1936, the BUF announced their intention of marching through the East End but around 77,000 people signed a petition demanding a prevention of the march.⁴⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the Home Secretary pledged to not interfere for the Government did not wish to infringe the freedom of speech. Consequently, thousands of anti-fascists proceeded with their plans to prevent the march abiding by the slogan of the Spanish Republicans defending Madrid – 'They Shall Not Pass.'⁴⁰⁸ By 2:00pm, an estimated 50,000 protesters had gathered to prevent the entry of the fascists into the East End, and at least 100,000 additional anti-fascist protesters awaited. Furthermore, several barricades were erected on Cable Street, yet the police endeavoured to clear the route with repeated baton charges.⁴⁰⁹ By 3:40pm, however, Sir Phillip Game, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, urged the 3,000 Blackshirts to abandon their march and escorted them back to the Embankment.⁴¹⁰ One may hastily conclude the Battle of Cable Street was a defiant and decisive thwart of fascism, however, most of the fighting was between the police and the anti-fascist protesters. Also, the BUF's antisemitic agitation in the East End was not dampened by the affair for large and enthusiastic audiences turned

⁴⁰⁶ Copsey, N. (2000). *Anti-Fascism in Britain*. Page 17.

⁴⁰⁷ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'*. Page 227.

⁴⁰⁸ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'*. Page 227.

⁴⁰⁹ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'*. Page 227.

⁴¹⁰ Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'*. Page 227.

out for BUF meetings in Stepney, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Stoke Newington in the following weeks. The Battle of Cable Street momentarily boosted the BUF's popularity. According to Special Branch, BUF membership in London had swelled by 2,000.⁴¹¹ The most important consequence of the Battle of Cable Street, however, was the Public Order Act which came into force on 1 January 1937. The Act prohibited the wearing of uniforms in connection with political objects and the maintenance by persons of associations of military or similar character; and to make further provision for the preservation of public order on the occasions of public processions and meetings in public places.⁴¹² The Labour Party held an unwavering support for the Public Order Act evidencing their belief that the enemies of democracy were 'extremism' and 'dictatorship', and the most effective anti-fascist policy was the affirmation of democratic beliefs and principles and the avoidance of any association with the Communist Party.⁴¹³ As early as 1934, the Labour Party were pushing for legislation against the militarisation of politics, specifically the BUF, with the belief the ongoing fascist provocation would result in polarisation, violence and the development of a left-wing counterforce which would weaken the democratic order as it had done in Germany.

The contemporary left posed a fragmented and disjointed opposition to the BUF. The Labour Party were repeatedly dismissive of the fascist threat posed by the BF but were persistent in their policy towards the BUF. Labour was wholeheartedly committed to eradicating the threat of the BUF by upholding democratic beliefs and principles. The CPGB, on the other hand, believed militancy and direct action were the only methods to thwart domestic fascism. Despite the repeated calls for a united front by the CPGB, the Labour Party were adamant any association with the far-left would compromise their claim of commitment to democracy. Nevertheless, as K. Hodgson insists the 'persistence and widespread' nature of the anti-fascism of the contemporary left were crucial to ensuring the doomed fate of the BUF.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Linehan, T. (2000). *British Fascism*. Page 107.

⁴¹² Pugh, M. (2006). *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts'*. Page 173.

⁴¹³ Newman, M. (1978). 'Democracy versus Dictatorship'. Page 72.

⁴¹⁴ Hodgson, K. (2010). *Fighting Fascism: The British Left and the Rise of Fascism*. Page 136.

Conclusion

The BUF posed a more significant threat than any other far-right organisation in Britain before the Second World War. For the first six months of 1934, the BUF enjoyed a notable period of branch expansion and membership surges. The party also reaped the benefits of multiple generous donors, most notably Benito Mussolini. The BUF also permeated the centre of right-wing politics in Britain in this brief period. For the first six months of 1934, Lord Rothermere publicly endorsed the BUF through the *Daily Mail*, *Sunday Dispatch* and *Evening News*, as a result, the party gained the sympathy of several Conservative MPs who made up the January Club. Lord Rothermere severed his ties with the BUF in July 1934 as antisemitism ascended to the forefront of the party's policy and outlook. The retreat of Lord Rothermere and several Tory MPs proves a degree of anti-immigration rhetoric gains moderate right-wing support in Britain, yet once antisemitism is exploited, this support inevitably withers. The antisemitism of the BUF was, by no means, a response to appease the party's supporters, rather it was driven by Mosley. The BUF altered a more layered and tenable form of antisemitism than the BBL and the BF.

As the most prominent fascist party in Britain in this period, it is unsurprising the BUF provoked the most ardent opposition. The CPGB were wedded to the notion militancy and direct action was the only way to thwart domestic fascism. The Labour Party, however, had a far more methodical and thus successful approach to opposing fascism. Indeed, the contemporary left were significantly divided in their opposition to the BUF, nevertheless, it was arguably the widespread nature of the opposition and their different approaches which significantly dampened the BUF's appeal.

The BUF's economic agenda was informed by key aspects of socialism and modelled on the Corporate State implemented by the Italian fascists. The party were intent on applying corporate principles to all spheres of industrial life. Mosley's party stands alone from the two

precursor movements in this sense. The BBL did not have an economic plan, and the BF, even though it claimed to merge all classes through 'patriotic socialism', professed an unwavering resentment for socialism and of course, communism and Bolshevism. Following the adoption of antisemitism and increasing militarised demonstrations in the second half of 1934, the BUF were increasingly associated with the Nazis which proved incredibly damaging. The increasing association with the Nazis leading up to 1939 meant the BUF were viewed as a violent foreign movement which significantly weakened its appeal. The culture of liberalism and parliamentary democracy in Britain, as well as the movements' failures, prevented it from gaining mass electoral support. Ultimately, the BUF were borne out of the 1929-1931 economic crisis. Its policy was a reaction to the distress of staple industries, the decrease in export levels, high unemployment and more generally, the ailing economic state of Britain that was perceived by many right-wingers in the 1930s. The BUF had an obsessive preoccupation with community and economic decline which is what unites the party with the BBL and the BF.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

Fascism in Britain between 1900-1939 should not be interpreted as continuous, nor the three movements as consecutive manifestations of the same phenomenon. This thesis has identified the relationship between the BBL, the BF and the BUF. It has explored the overarching themes and ideological similarities shared by all three movements. The BBL, BF and BUF were intensely nationalist, imperialist, anti-communist and antisemitic. The movements had an obsessive preoccupation with the notion Britain was suffering alarming and perhaps, irreversible decline and were dedicated to restoring the 'superiority' of Britain and the empire. For all three movements, the nation and empire were in danger and threatened by external enemies as well as those within. The notion that Jews, who were deemed as the proprietors of communism, were agents of foreign, subversive powers intent on destroying Britain was central to each of the three movements' antisemitic rhetoric. The movements were opposed to immigration and the figure of the Jew as the internal communist plotter fuelled the movements' restrictionist stances on immigration.

The BBL were not, however, a fascist movement. It was a small-scale localised initiative dedicated exclusively to restricting immigration to Britain, especially Ashkenazi Jews. The BBL were crucial in forcing the first piece of legislation on immigration restriction in Britain. It lacked the ideological substance that the BF and BUF had. There is no evidence to suggest the BBL embraced a national corporatist economic structure, nor urged it for the expansion of the British Empire. It did not support the creation of an authoritarian state either, and it did not have a charismatic leader to idolise such as Mosley, Mussolini or Hitler. It is the absence of these archetypal fascist features which mean the BBL cannot be deemed as a fascist movement. It was an antisemitic movement, and its public displays were militarised, choreographed and provocative meaning it should be appropriately described as proto-fascist.

The BBL had a unique appeal because of its restrictionist agenda. It was able to attract the support of local working-people because it promised to halt immigration levels and guarantee employment and better standards of living. It was also able to gain the support of Conservative Party MPs who deemed immigration a pressing issue. These MPs also turned to the BBL because the Conservative Party's fortunes and popularity were wavering. The BBL were not an ideological precursor to the BF or the BUF. It did, however, pave the way for the BUF's anti-immigration stance and antisemitic agitation in the East End. The BBL proved there was a strong cultural tradition of anti-Jewish hostility in the East End which could be manipulated for political purposes.⁴¹⁵ In November 1936, Alexander Raven-Thomas, the Director of Policy of the BUF, confronted Captain William Stanley Shaw, the founder of the BBL, to discuss immigration policy; Raven-Thomas was convinced the two movements shared the same desire to halt the immigration of Jews to Britain and minimise their influence.⁴¹⁶ Both movements upheld a popular restrictionist line on immigration, but the adoption of antisemitism was damaging for both. Indeed, the BBL and the BUF prove anti-immigration rhetoric had the potential to draw support from the Conservative Party, as well as the upper, middle and working classes in Britain; but there existed an unofficial line of "respectable" anti-immigration rhetoric which could not be crossed without losing Conservative Party support and alienating most working-, middle- and upper-class voters in Britain before the Second World War. The BBL, in its first year, drew a notable degree of support and sympathy from East End Tory MPs such as Samuel Forde Ridley of Bethnal Green Southwest and Harry Simon of Limehouse. Yet, once the BBL endorsed antisemitism at the People's Palace Meeting and provided a platform for obsessional antisemites such as Arnold White, many Tory MPs rebuked their association with the movement. The BUF also lost support following the adoption of antisemitism. Initially, it gained the support of several disillusioned Tories disgruntled with the National Government leading up to July 1934. As the movement became increasingly antisemitic in the second half of 1934, many Tory MPs

⁴¹⁵ Thurlow, R. (1998). *Fascism in Britain*. Page 11.

⁴¹⁶ Fascist Director of Policy Speaks. (1936, November 27). *The Jewish Chronicle*. Page 18.

withdrew, as did Lord Rothermere. Indeed, proto-fascist and fascist movements gained respectable support through opposition to immigration between 1900-1939, but as these movements intensified their anti-immigration stance by deploying antisemitism, they immediately lost support.

From 1934, the BUF embarked on a series of relentless antisemitic campaigns. Its rallies and public demonstrations were militarised, choreographed and provocative, particularly in Jewish areas such as the East End and Cheetham in Greater Manchester. BUF members paraded the areas chanting antisemitic slurs, just like battalions of BBL members in the East End had paraded through areas of the East End with high Jewish population with antisemitic chants and banners. Both movements attempted to drum up unrest between the isolated communities of the East End. Nevertheless, the BUF modelled their public demonstrations on the spectacular rallies and public demonstrations held by the Nazis in the 1930s, rather than the BBL, a small-scale localised initiative. Nazi public demonstrations were characterised by the great theatrical flair of Hitler and numbers of flag-bearing and drumbeating supporters, which displayed Nazi power and passion.⁴¹⁷ Certainly, BUF rallies were modelled on the bombastic choreography of the Nazis rather than the precursor movement, the influence of which did not stretch into the 1920s or 1930s.

The BF, on the other hand, were an ultra-conservative and imperialist response to the rise of communism and Bolshevism and the advent of fascism in Italy under Mussolini. Ultimately, the BF cannot be judged as a direct predecessor of the BUF, rather the existence and nature of the organisation proves there was discontinuity in the history of British fascism throughout the 1920s and 1930s.⁴¹⁸ Lintorn-Orman's organisation had an equivocal identification with fascism; the BF did not develop a coherent fascist programme until the 1930s by committing to a corporatist economic structure, staunch imperialism and overt antisemitism and

⁴¹⁷ McDonough, F. (2012). *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party*. Taylor & Francis Group.

⁴¹⁸ Gottlieb, J. V. (2003). *Feminine Fascism*. Page 12.

xenophobia. In the 1920s, the BF were a proto-fascist movement and its imperialist, nationalist, ultra-conservative agenda showed only the beginnings of the fascist policy it developed in the following decade. The BF are a very notable movement in the history of proto-fascism and fascism in Britain because it instigated the first wave of organised anti-fascist responses. This disproves the widely held assumption that organised anti-fascist responses only arose following the creation of the BUF in 1932. Indeed, the opposition the BUF faced was far more substantial and effective, particularly that of the CPGB, but organised anti-fascist responses manifested in Britain in the early 1920s, a decade before than has been previously acknowledged.

Throughout the 1920s, the BF marketed itself as an imperial solution to the perceived impending crisis and decline of Britain and the empire. The movement tapped into middle and upper-class fears about the rise of left-wing ideologies in Britain and Europe. It agitated against the perceived threat these doctrines posed to traditional values and morals, as well as domestic industry. The BF arose in May 1923, only six months after Mussolini's March on Rome. Indeed, Italian fascism was an important impetus for the foundation of the movement. The fear of an international communist revolution from Russia was an equally important inspiration. The favourable reception of Italian fascism in Britain was, to a large extent, because of the perceived threat of the Bolshevik Revolution. Since 1917, many right-wingers in Britain were alarmed at the prospect of communist and Bolshevik influence growing throughout Europe taking advantage of political and economic instability and labour militancy. Mussolini's seizure of power was understood to have provided an ideological alternative and solution for disillusioned right-wing anti-communists in Britain such as Lintorn-Orman and General D. Blakeney. Britain was, however, not as vulnerable or susceptible to fascism as Italy was. The BF's conspiratorial worldview and the fear of communism and Bolshevism was typical of the fascist movements throughout Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. It was a notably effective weapon in Germany and occupied an important place in the rhetoric of the Nazis, but this message had little impact in Britain. Furthermore,

by the time BF was founded the prospect of an international communist revolution was minimal and the fear was far less profound. By the mid-1920s, international relations had become more stable, as had the political scene in Russia and the CPGB never threatened to attract mass electorate support. The BF perceived the increasing levels of trade union and labour militancy and 'direct action' throughout the 1920s as indications that an international communist threat remained, but this did not resonate with the British electorate, especially following the General Strike in 1926.

The BF is unique in the history of fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s because of its female founder-ship and leadership. Fascist movements throughout Europe in the interwar period were defined by their charismatic and authoritarian male leaders and patriarchal attitudes, particularly the suppression of feminist movements. The BUF, though its most appealing asset was Mosley, and the membership was disproportionately male, it also involved a significant number of women in its activities. The involvement of women in BF and the BUF contradict conventional assumptions about fascism as an anti-feminist movement dedicated to confining women to domestic servitude and motherhood. Fascism appealed to numbers of right-wing anti-communist women such as Lintorn-Orman because it appeared as a distinctly modern movement which offered increased visibility and opportunities for politicised women, and indeed, a departure from traditional values.

The BUF were by far the largest and most programmatic fascist movement in Britain between 1900-1939. Between its beginning in September 1932 until July 1934, the movement posed a certain threat and attractive alternative to conventional politics. It had a far more wide-reaching appeal than the precursor movements. By January 1934, it had cemented crucial support from Tory MPs and of course, Lord Rothermere who marketed fascism as a modern and attractive phenomenon and greatly increased the appeal of the BUF. It attracted support because of its commitment to restoring and upholding Britain's perceived 'superiority' and expanding the British Empire at the time when the fortunes of the

Conservative Party wavered. The BUF also captured the support of workers and the unemployed in towns and cities in the north-west such as Leeds and Manchester because of its commitment to reviving staple industries by stopping foreign imports and minimising immigration. Mosley looked upon the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany for inspiration, but as the leader, he was the BUF's most appealing asset. He was a powerful and captivating speaker with theatrical flair which, alongside the BUF's funding and policy, is what set it apart from the precursor movements and made it more accessible and appealing.

Mosley planned to implement a national corporatist economic structure modelled on the Corporate State introduced by Mussolini in Italy in 1925. It must be noted that Mussolini donated to the BUF for several years because Mosley sought to implement a Corporate State, therefore, Italian fascism was an inspiration, as well as an incentive for the BUF's economic policy. Mosley was also inspired by the Nazis' focus on the spiritual regeneration of the German youth, and he envisaged the BUF as dynamic, progressive and distinctly modern. Mosley was, however, anxious to present the BUF as British rather than merely an import of a foreign ideology. Nevertheless, the BUF struggled with its association with continental fascism; the association with the Nazis proved particularly damaging throughout the 1930s. Hitler was appointed German Chancellor in January 1933, only four months after the formation of the BUF and his decision to abandon the Disarmament Convention, repudiate the Treaty of Versailles and withdraw from the League of Nations alarmed opinion in Britain. Indeed, there were several politicians who initially sympathised with Hitler but as the excesses of Nazis increased throughout the decade, especially the ruthless treatment of minorities and Hitler's intent on war regardless of peace agreements and appeasement, fascism became less 'respectable' and increasingly viewed as alien in Britain. Mosley's provocative and inflammatory speeches at Olympia led to the assertion that the BUF were imitating the Nazis and the adoption of antisemitism and association with violence led to further, more damaging charges of imitation for the BUF. Following Olympia, the BUF plunged into decline for the rest of the 1930s. The majority of respectable support were

alarmed by the BUF's imitation of the Nazis, especially the adoption of antisemitism and fostered the notion fascism was a foreign conspiracy, an alien ideology, and an unduly violent movement. Furthermore, the militarist techniques of the movement alarmed the authorities who promptly intervened with the Public Order Act.

The political culture in Britain, as well as the failures of the three movements, prevented proto-fascism and fascism from gaining mass electoral support like it had across Europe between the wars. There were considerable differences in the political cultures and the impacts of the Great War and the Great Depression between Britain and the nations where fascism prevailed. Britain was victorious in the Great War, as a result, national pride and faith in parliamentary democracy remained. Furthermore, the Great Depression left three million people unemployed, and industry and exports plunged, but by the time the BUF were founded, the economy was recovering, and unemployment was decreasing. Indeed, there was profound fear of the perceived threat of the left and the international implications of the Russian Revolution, but by the early 1920s the prospect of an international communist revolution was improbable. The political culture in Britain between 1900-1939 remained strongly influenced by liberal values which prevented the spread of extremist politics, including fascism and communism. Indeed, respect for parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and association and tolerance for racial and religious minorities are hallmarks of Britain's political culture and provided a deterrent to fascism between 1900-1939.

There is a widely held assumption that fascism did not resonate with the British electorate before the Second World War. Indeed, fascism did not pose a significant and sustained threat to conventional politics in the 1920s or 1930s. This is the first comparative study of the BBL, BF and BUF and it has evidenced that proto-fascist ideologies and movements, namely the BBL, existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is evident that proto-fascism was far more attractive to the British electorate between 1900-1939 than fascism. There were aspects of proto-fascism that attracted voters of all classes irrespective of political

alignments such as ultra-nationalism and opposition to immigration, but fascism was less appealing. This was because several aspects of fascism, namely antisemitism and militarised public demonstrations, were viewed as indifferent to the political culture of liberalism and tolerance in Britain. Indeed, fascism did not gain a footing in Britain predominantly because of the culture of liberalism, but the ideological foundations of the phenomenon were present decades before the foundation of the BUF in 1932. Therefore, proto-fascism enjoyed a longer and far more successful history in Britain than is usually recognised. Nevertheless, fascism had comparatively limited success. Indeed, as this comparative study has shown, fascism did briefly attract significant support amongst the middle and upper classes, as well as disaffected workers and the unemployed, but it was viewed predominantly as a phenomenon only of Italian or German politics which minimised its appeal. Ultimately, fascist movements did not have the potential to gain mass electoral support between 1900-1939 because of the commitment to parliamentary democracy in Britain and the prevalent notion that fascism was distinctly “un-British.”

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