

BLACKSHIRTS TORN: INSIDE THE BRITISH UNION
OF FASCISTS, 1932-1940

by

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ABSTRACT

Sir Oswald Mosley was one of the most gifted political minds of his generation. Perhaps he could have become prime minister, either with the Conservative or Labour Party. However, his political career took a less conventional course. In 1931 he deserted Labour to form the ill-fated New Party. The following year, he abandoned conventional politics altogether and founded the British Union of Fascists. Although the BUF experienced initial success, by the autumn of 1934, the party began fading into insignificance. Employing British Home Office papers as a principle source, the following thesis will explore how Mosley attempted to reverse the party's decline. Specific attention will be given to hitherto largely unexamined areas of the BUF's history--namely the factional conflicts which beset the party for most of its history, and the specific strategies Mosley developed to ameliorate them. The picture that emerges from a detailed examination of the BUF's internal history is that of a party which was plagued by dissension, led by a man detached from political reality, lost in delusions of grandeur.

DEDICATION

For my parents

ONWARD! BLACKSHIRTS!

1st Verse.

Hark! the sound of many voices
Echoes through the vale of ages.
Britain listens and rejoices,
Gazing on Tradition's pages.
Patriots: your cry is heeded!
Heroes: death was not in vain!
We to your place have succeeded,
Britain shall be great again!

Chorus

Onward! Blackshirts! form your legions,
Keep the flag for ever high.
For the weal and pride of Britain
Stand we fast to fight or die!

2nd Verse

Crush the tyranny of traitors:
Vested power and Marxian lie!
Moscow-rented agitators,
Strife and chaos we defy:
Ends the conflicts of the classes,
Barriers and divisions fall;
We've a message for the masses
For the common good of all.

Chorus

3rd Verse

We will build a " Greater Britain".
Hail the standard, lift it high!
What though we ourselves be smitten,
This, our Faith can never die!...
Courage! Unity! and Strength!
Shout till Europe hears our wonder,
"Britain shall be ours at length!"

Chorus

Words by E.D Randall.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE RISE OF OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE ANATOMY OF A FASCIST PARTY

The history of the British Union of Fascists has attracted and continues to attract significant scholarly attention. Published in 1961, Colin Cross' The Fascists in Britain, was one of the first comprehensive studies of British Fascism, and, as far as its treatment of the BUF is concerned, is still one of the foremost works in the field. Robert Skidelsky's biography of Sir Oswald Mosley, Oswald Mosley(1975) though controversial by reason of its sympathetic treatment of the BUF leader, is a detailed and informative account. Richard Griffiths, Fellow Travellers of the Right(1980), is an interesting discussion not only of the BUF, but also of pro-German activity in Britain between the wars. The works by Mosley's son, Nicholas, Rules of the Game(1981), and Beyond the Pale(1983), too, must be considered valuable contributions to the subject--the latter especially so, for Mosley was able to employ his father's papers as a principle source in its composition. There are of course other good monographs and articles on the topic, but the works by Cross, Skidelsky, Griffiths, and Mosley must be considered the seminal works of the field. But for all of their merit, they provide only brief glimpses at the internal conflicts which plagued the BUF for most of its history. This is, of course, not the fault of the aforementioned historians; for they wrote their books without access to the sources which reveal the most about the inner life of the BUF, the Home Office Files dealing with the activities of the party.

Beginning in 1983, these were released to the public in four batches, and Richard Thurlow made extensive use of them in his lucidly written monograph, Fascism in Britain(1987), the standard text in the field. Thurlow sheds light on previously unknown facts about the BUF. However, since Fascism in Britain is a survey of British fascism, it does not examine the internal politics of the BUF in great detail.

To attempt to do so using is the purpose of the following thesis. In keeping with the spirit of "history from below", detailed attention will be paid to the problems that plagued the BUF at its "grass roots" as well as its upper echelon. The following work will,

however, concentrate on the history of the BUF from the "top-down". For the BUF was much more than simply a party which Oswald Mosley founded and led. It, was, as will be argued in the pages which follow, of profound psychological importance to him. To understand the BUF--both the reasons for its emergence and the course of its history--one must study its leader.

To find the roots of Mosley's fascism, one must look back to his emergence from the landed aristocracy of Northern England.[1] Born in 1896, the son of second cousins, he was the eldest of three children. His father was something of a reckless playboy, an insatiable philanderer who was rather indiscreet about his adulterous adventures. He left the family in 1901 after his wife discovered his drawer full of love letters from other women. Following the elder Mosley's departure, young Oswald's time was divided between his pious mother, Maud, who lived at the comparatively modest Belton Hall near Market Drayton in Shropshire, and his imposing paternal grandfather, who resided at the stately Rolleston Hall, near Burton on Trent. At Rolleston, Oswald and his two brothers enjoyed a life-style most boys could only dream about. They spent their leisure hours hunting, fishing, shooting, and steeplechasing. The affluence of the Rolleston estate was of course no substitute for the presence of a father. Assuming the place of the elder Mosley at such an early age doubtless spawned the traits that characterized Oswald for his whole life--a fiercely independent nature, dogged determination, self assurance, and an insatiable hunger to prove himself.

He would certainly display these attributes at his first school, West-Downs, where he arrived at the age of nine, and stayed until moving on to Winchester and Sandhurst. Having no enthusiasm for study, Mosley was consumed by a passion for individual sports, mostly of a combative nature.[2] He triumphed in boxing and fencing; and his competitive spirit was also displayed in unsanctioned fist-fights. Military training at Sandhurst channelled his raw aggression into the disciplined aggression of a soldier. Mosley enthusiastically greeted the outbreak of war.[3] In 1914 he was commissioned into the 16th Lancers, but anxious that he might never see action, left it to join the Royal Flying Corps where he spent a year in the observer's seat before training as a pilot. He injured his leg in a crash landing subsequent to earning his wings. In characteristic

fashion, he was showing off his aerobatic skills to his mother. In 1915, after his recovery, he rejoined his regiment in the trenches, but nearly lost the improperly healed limb to infection in 1916. He was left with a permanent limp and one leg an inch and a half shorter than the other.

Following his convalescence, Mosley spent the two remaining years of the war in the Ministry of Munitions Office before taking a job in the Foreign Office.[4] This was a period of awakening for him, in several respects. He embarked on an intense program of self education, reading history and politics voraciously. He considered attending university, but was beckoned by other prospects. Sustained by the resources of his recently deceased grandfather, he took a flat in Grosvenor Square and promptly made up for lost time. In the process of building his reputation as a consummate playboy by having affairs with the wealthy, married, and older hostesses of British high society, he was introduced to the world of politics. Through one of his lovers, Maxine Elliot, a celebrated hostess, he became acquainted with Britain's most influential statesmen, most notably F.E. Smith, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. Mosley soon acquired a reputation as a brilliant and witty conversationalist; and his political potential did not escape the Conservative and Liberal Party Whips who were soon persuading him to run for parliament.[5] He decided to enter the 1918 election as a Conservative for the Harrow Riding of Middlesex.

Mosley's entry into politics was certainly not a whimsical enthusiasm. The idea that his working class comrades who survived the horrors of the Great War might not receive even the modest rewards of a decent home and a living wage troubled him deeply. The prospect that their sacrifice had been in vain offended his sense of order and justice[6].

He saw politics as the means by which he could help make "a land fit for heroes" a reality. For him, creating a new Britain doubtless meant restoring the paternalistic values of an older one. Such values were embodied in the semi-feudal Rolleston estate, which he so romantically describes in his autobiography.[7] It arguably became his microcosmic model for a new paternalistic and socialistic society--a truly humane state, a *Volksgemeinschaft*, which tends to the needs of all its members. [8]

Therefore, in an approach reminiscent of Joseph Chamberlain's, Mosley ran his first campaign on a platform of "socialistic imperialism", the idea that the British Empire should be developed for the good of the British people rather than simply as an imperial possession. Aspects of his proposed program included public control of utilities, slum clearance, improvements to education, and the granting of small landholdings to veterans. Mosley won the election by a huge margin, 14 000 to 3000 votes, and became at the age of twenty-two, the first member of his generation to enter parliament. He walked into the House of Commons as an impatient, outspoken, visionary. Whether it concerned domestic or foreign affairs, this radical patriot took a progressive stance on almost every issue of importance, and was not in the least bit intimidated by seasoned statesmen like Winston Churchill, with whom he developed a great parliamentary rivalry.[9]

In August 1920, Mosley married Cynthia Curzon, the handsome daughter of Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon [10]. Within two months, however, his politics had alienated him from his father-in-law[11]. Mosley's round denunciation of Lloyd George's employment of the Black and Tans to combat the IRA brought about harsh criticism from his colleagues in the National Coalition; consequently, on November 3, 1920, he crossed the floor and took a seat behind the Labour benches as an independent.[12] The hostility which he endured only served to deepen his distrust of the old parties, and harden his belief that a new political force was on the horizon.[13] He tried unsuccessfully to form a centre party in opposition to the Lloyd George coalition. In the November 1922 election which saw the departure of Lloyd George and the emergence of a Conservative Government, he held his seat as an independent. At the time, he advocated free trade [14], and in his successful campaign for the 6th, December, 1923 election, he opposed Prime Minister Baldwin's proposed protectionist policy.[15] He also went about improving how he delivered his ideas[16]. He took lessons in voice production, dropped the falsetto which tended to slip into a shrill monotone, and became a speaker of considerable force and charisma--perhaps the best in modern British history.[17]

Mosley must have realized that he would be destined for political obscurity if he remained unaligned with any of the major parties. He watched the Labour Party govern for three months, was impressed by its performance, and after some hesitation joined it.

As a Labourite, he developed the economic theory that would constitute the bed-rock of his fascist program. He became familiar with Keynes's ideas, and in his association with the Independent Labour Party(ILP)--a branch of the Labour Party which professed a purer brand of socialism--broke completely away from orthodox economic thinking. He formed a close political partnership with John Strachey who had joined the Labour Party five years before him. In 1925, the two men co-authored a radical treatise, Revolution by Reason, which embodied the basic principles of Mosley's later fascist economic theory. They argued that poverty was created by a lack of demand, and that the government should therefore increase wages to increase purchasing power.[18] Inflation would be obviated by tight government control and an increase in production. Prices would be kept low by ensuring that demand never surpassed supply. An economic council invested with great power would oversee the entire process. [19]

In the October, 1924 general election which saw the Conservatives return to power, Mosley lost a well-fought contest with Neville Chamberlain for the Ladywood constituency in Birmingham. Following his defeat, he spent his time travelling, first to India and then the United States where he did some fishing with Franklin Roosevelt. He was greatly impressed by American industry.[20] The workings of the Ford Motor Company, in particular, led him to the conclusion that "Mass production for a large and assured home market is the industrial key"--an observation which doubtless influenced his later proposition that Britain pursue a policy of autarchy. As well, the American Federal Reserve Board, the regulatory agency for cash and credit, greatly impressed him. He notes in his autobiography that one half of his economic thinking can be indebted to Keynes, the other half to the operation of the American Federal Reserve Board. [21]

Mosley's next opportunity to return to parliament came when infirmity forced the MP for the Smethwick constituency to resign his seat. In the ensuing by-election, the conservative press painted Mosley as a wealthy and insincere socialist. His ne'er do well father--doubtless not for altruistic reasons--made a point of warning the working class against being taken in by a man who lived on the fat of the land and never did a day's work in his life. Despite the bad publicity, Mosley emerged victorious. He returned to the House convinced that Britain was on the verge of collapse. But caught between the

Conservatives who marked him as a class traitor and Labourites who did not accept him as one of their own, he spent an increased amount of time promulgating his views to more receptive audiences outside of parliament, particularly in the communities of the north and midlands.[22] He became well practiced in the art of populist oratory, and doubtless came to believe that he had a special connection with the proletariat.

Oswald Mosley--now "Sir," following his father's death--reached the pinnacle of his political success when Labour once again formed a government in 1929. He was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which was a distinct achievement for a man of thirty-two with no prior cabinet experience. His task was to work with J.H. Thomas, Lord Privy Seal, on a committee of four men assigned to solve the unemployment problem. The unemployment committee was a farce since any truly significant measures it wished to implement required the cooperation of the treasury, headed by Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, a man whose financial thinking ran more along conservative than socialist lines.

While Snowden remained unwilling to loosen the treasury's purse strings, Britain's high unemployment rate continued to climb. Mosley responded to the crisis by submitting the Mosley Memorandum to cabinet in January, 1930, somewhat brashly ignoring the fact that he had not been appointed to rearrange the government's entire economic policy. The Mosley Memorandum was a reiteration of the ideas presented in Revolution by Reason with the additional propositions of a protected domestic market and public work schemes.[23] The proposal was closely scrutinized by Snowden's treasury officials before being rejected by Cabinet in March, 1930. Mosley would resign his post on the 20th of May to be replaced by a future Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. His future in the Labour Party itself was now uncertain. When it held its conference in October, party delegates voted on whether or not the Mosley Memorandum should be submitted to the Labour Party's National Executive. Mosley gave a spirited speech, but to no avail. He lost the vote by a narrow margin. While most politicians would doubtless have regarded the narrow defeat as a moral victory, indicative of future success in the party, Mosley regarded it as a major loss, and dismissed the Labour Party as a great

disappointment: " I had come to the deliberate conclusion that in real crisis Labour would always betray its principles and the people who had trusted it." [24]

When unemployment reached a staggering two and a half million, he submitted to the House for signature a reiteration of the Mosley Memorandum with the additional proposal that five cabinet ministers without portfolio should be given sweeping powers of legislation to ameliorate the nation's economic woes. [25] Noted signatories of the Mosley Manifesto included Aneurin Bevan, John Strachey , W.J Brown and Cynthia Mosley--members of Mosley's " New Labour Group". But the Manifesto was altogether too revolutionary for Westminster; most of its signatories were inexperienced Labour backbenchers.

1931 was a desperate year. The Labour Government seemed unable to deal with the rapidly climbing unemployment rate. In the face of governmental impotence, Mosley, tremendously confident, decided to strike out on his own and actualize the modernistic political force he had envisaged from the beginning of his career. He was encouraged in this regard by William Morris, motor car manufacturer, who gave him a 50,000 pound donation. [26] The New Party, formed around a core of seven dissident Labour M.P's, was, however, to be a great disappointment; for it did not attract the working class support Mosley had hoped for. He had, after all, been expelled from the Labour Party on the grounds of "gross disloyalty" after forming the New Party.[27] Socialist opponents branded him as a traitor, persistently heckled New Party speakers, and young Tory radicals, presumably attracted by his strong pro-empire position, became his principle supporters. Thus the New Party drifted to the radical right. [28]

Its first electoral test came in April, 1931, only two months after its inception. Allan Young stood as the New Party candidate in the Aston-Under Lyne by-election. Despite a strong showing by both the Labour Party and the New Party, the Tory candidate emerged victorious. A group of belligerent Labourites, angry at Mosley for apparently splitting the socialist vote, gathered outside the town hall where the election results were announced and vociferously denounced him as a traitor. Mosley, standing on the steps of the building, eyeing the throng, commented to Strachey that this was the crowd that had prevented anyone doing anything in England since the war.

Anti-New Party protest reached a violent peak when Mosley was struck on the head with a stone and attacked with a life-preserver while speaking in Glasgow in September, 1931.[29] Shortly thereafter he proposed that a network of clubs be established to train a disciplined defence force of stewards. Although such a network never materialized in the New Party guise, a defence force dedicated to physical training and political education (the New Party Youth Movement, the "Biff Boys") was founded. While Mosley's increasingly authoritarian approach attracted toughs like boxer, "Kid" Lewis, to the movement, it drove away most of the New Party's intellectuals like Strachey and Allen Young. When Strachey drafted a paper favouring trade with Russia, and Mosley refused to accept it, he and Young resigned.[30] Strachey and Young correctly observed that Mosley was moving toward fascism. In the summer of 1931, his close associate, Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, noted in a diary entry that he "is very interested in Hitlerism and has made a close study of it." [31]

The October, 27, 1931 general election was a disaster for the New Party; every candidate was soundly defeated. Mosley was of course quick to blame his party's complete failure on the socialist opposition which he claimed "mobbed us out of existence".[32] To a degree, he was correct; for the New Party's main medium of advertisement was meetings, and militant Labourites persistently heckled New Party speakers. Anti-New Party heckling was, however, very much a secondary cause of the election debacle. Mosley clearly over-estimated his party's appeal, incorrectly surmising that the New Party's success would be found in the MacDonald-Conservative-Liberal Coalition's failure to present British voters with a constructive program. In fact, the National Government's manifestos were identical to the central planks of Mosley's platform, minus his proposed general power's bill. MacDonald, too, proposed a protected home market and a more pragmatic approach to Government[33]. The British electorate thus had no reason to vote for the unfamiliar New Party.

Mosley, unable to accept defeat, remained absolutely convinced that he held the answer to the nation's woes, and evidently believed that if only he were given a fair hearing, the British public would also be convinced. In his mind, the only way to get a fair hearing was by employing more extreme methods. In a December conversation with

Bruce Lockhart, he "talked a good deal about the necessity for militant organisation against communism, said that when the crash came the man who would control the streets would win." [34] For a model of militant organisation he looked to the successful "modern movements" in Italy and Germany, where he had travelled with Harold Nicholson in late January, 1932. [35] Mosley was granted an interview with Benito Mussolini before moving on to Munich where he met with high ranking members of the Nazi Party--but not with Hitler. Mussolini undoubtedly had the greatest impact on him. Spellbound by the apparent successes of Fascist Italy, Mosley returned from his trip, and went about composing the Greater Britain, a forty-thousand word treatise combining his radical economic theory (the British Empire would be made into a *Zollverein* subject to government control) with his vision of the ideal authoritarian government and corporate state.

The Greater Britain was published on October 1st, 1932, the very same day Mosley launched the British Union of Fascists in a flag unfurling ceremony in the former New Party Offices. The BUF was not, however, the first fascist party in Britain. Rotha Linton Orman, a rather unstable personality, had formed the British Fascisti in 1923. There were also two closely associated fascist groups characterized by their virulent anti-Semitism: the Britons, formed by Henry Hamilton Beamish in 1918, and the Imperial Fascist League, formed in 1928, and headed by a former veterinary surgeon, Arnold Leese. Mosley approached the BF with a merger offer. Orman, suspecting that he had communist leanings, declined, but two BF members, Neil Francis-Hawkins, and E.G Mandeville Roe, broke ranks with Orman and joined Mosley. [36] Attempts to bring the IFL on side failed miserably. Leese believed that Mosley's wife was part Jewish, and that Mosley himself was an agent employed by Jews to sabotage British fascism. Mosley regarded Leese as an anti-Semitic crank, and in 1933 BUF members attacked an IFL meeting, dragged Leese, and threw him into the street. [37] An unofficial BUF assault group also destroyed the offices of another incipient fascist organization, the British United Fascists. [38]

The British Union of Fascists, founded by thirty-two members and organized along military lines, would be the largest fascist party in British history. [39] Oswald Mosley

was its undisputed leader. Second in command was former Labour MP and New Party member, Director-General, Dr Robert Forgan, MD. He was responsible for keeping the party on a sound financial basis and making outside contacts. Third in charge was Chief of Staff, Ian Hope Dundas, who had given up a naval commission to join the BUF. His main duty was supervising headquarters personnel. Archibald G Findlay served as his deputy.

Other members of the BUF's administration included Major George John Harold Tabor, secretary-general and deputy director of publicity; Captain Charles Cecil Courtney, head of the legal department; Major Cleghorn, in charge of provincial branches organisation; George A. Phister, head of the foreign relations and overseas department; Mosley's mother, Maud, in charge of the woman's section; and B.J. Taylor, head of the Intelligence department. Taylor also happened to be an undercover MI5 agent whose real name was James McGuirk Hughs.[40]

Mosley claimed that the *raison d'être* for the paramilitary nature of the BUF was to ensure his freedom of speech at meetings. The fascist defence force, the mature form of the New Party Youth Movement, was developed expressly for this purpose. Sant was its head. Its elite division, "I Squad", undoubtedly modelled after the Nazi SS, was trained in boxing and judo, and in addition to the standard blackshirt, wore breeches and leather boots. With armoured vans at their disposal, members could be mobilized at a moment's notice to rescue their fellow Blackshirts. I Squad served as Mosley's personal force of bodyguards, and was forbidden from using weapons. Its commander was physical fitness fanatic and former insurance agent, Eric Hamilton Piercy. Neil Francis-Hawkins, formerly a surgical instruments salesman, served as his adjutant.

The party also had a vibrant political and propagandist wing. F.M Box, formerly of the Conservative Central Office, was in charge of political work. Bill Risdon, former New Party member, was first director of propaganda.

Philosopher, Alexander Raven Thomson was the BUF's leading intellectual. He had written a work on Oswald Spengler, and specialized in economic theory. As chief of the research department, he spent his time expanding and refining Mosley's ideas. In 1935 he published, The Coming Corporate State.

William Joyce was a director of the research department and one of the party's principle, and best, speakers. Born in America and raised in Ireland, he received his undergraduate degree from the University of London. He came to the BUF by way of Orman's British Fascists. While working as a BF steward in 1924, he suffered a ghastly wound that left him with an ugly facial scar. He was a vitriolic anti-Semite, and claimed that the laceration was the work of a Jew.

The BUF also had some capable journalists on staff. Rex Tremlett served as deputy director of publications and editor-in-chief of the BUF's publications, Fascist Week, and the Blackshirt. John Beckett, a former ILP M.P for Peckham, joined the BUF in March 1934, and became editor of the fascist weekly, Action, from 1936 to 1937.

A.K. Chesterton, decorated first world war veteran, journalist, and former public relations officer, was the BUF's best polemicist, in spite of the fact that he was an inveterate drunkard. He would write a biography of Mosley, Oswald Mosley: Portrait of a Leader.

W.E.D Allan, an ex-Tory buccaneer, did some writing for the BUF, his most notable work being, Oswald Mosley and British Fascism. He also became--and this is particularly relevant to the present work--an MI5 mole.[41]

In the early phase of its history, BUF propaganda, as exemplified in a pamphlet by Allen, Fascism in Relation to British History and Character, posited a well articulated solution to the social and economic problems created by the capitalist system and liberal democracy. According to Allen, capitalism is "unnational and international", a system which has given rise to the "demoralising effects of the mechanistic conditions of life".[42] Such a grim system arose as a consequence of the political extinction of Britain's natural rulers, the land-owning class. The landed aristocracy lost their status as Britain's leaders to the bourgeoisie when industry superseded agriculture as the nation's principle means of production. A corporate government would reverse the defeat, and end the alienation created by capitalism, not by destroying it, but by completely subordinating the interests of capital to the interests of the state. Britain's traditional values would thus be restored, and people's lives would again be given meaning and purpose.

It is almost impossible to measure the extent to which theoretical analyses of such a kind attracted people to the movement. Those most swayed by BUF philosophy would probably be young idealists, yearning for a more equitable society; politically unaffiliated members of the working class, attracted by the BUF's anti-capitalist position; and aristocrats, craving for a restoration of lost status.

The majority of people who joined or supported the BUF probably did so for other reasons. Unemployment, which reached a staggering 3 million by 1933, can best account for the BUF's sudden growth. The party's action-oriented, yet in its own way conservative approach would have appealed to members of the middle class dissatisfied with established parties, but reluctant to support leftist radicalism. The majority of the BUF's middle class members and supporters were probably motivated to join or back the movement because they thought that it was simply an ultra-conservative party. Conservatives, disillusioned with the National Government, and fearful of a possible Labour government led by left wing extremists, may have seen Mosley as the best preserver of the *status quo*.^[43] Ruffians would have signed on for a good fight, and ex-soldiers would have joined for the party's military nature and strong nationalism. Anti-Semites would have been drawn to the party for its outward similarity to the German Nazi Party. Some BUF members were only attracted to the BUF for opportunistic reasons. National and regional headquarters contained attractive amenities, including sleeping quarters (only at national headquarters), canteens, and exercise facilities. It was, moreover, not difficult to become a full-time member and go on the BUF payroll.^[44]

A rapid influx of recruits into the BUF during its first ten months necessitated that its headquarters be moved from 12 Grosvenor Place to what was formerly Whiteland's Teacher's Training college at King's Road, Chelsea. Housing between 50 and 200 Blackshirts, National Headquarters at Chelsea, the "Black House", combined an administrative headquarters and political education centre with a military style barracks and social club. It would also serve as a fortress in the event of a communist revolution.^[45] There was a woman's section operating out of 12 Lower Grosvenor Place, which was also headquarters for the youth section. Nation-wide, the BUF was organized into areas and regions, branches, sub branches, and groups. New recruits to the

BUF paid a membership fee of one shilling per month if employed, fourpence if not [46], and they were expected to purchase their own black shirt for seven shillings and sixpence.[47] The main duties of active members were selling the party's publications and canvassing. Members were forbidden from communicating with the German National Socialist Party outside of the BUF's foreign relations and overseas department.[48]

Unfortunately, the exact size or composition of BUF membership prior to 1934, when Home Office reports on the BUF were first compiled, is unknown. It is probably safe to conclude that the party was of a heterogeneous character, heavily middle class but attracting support from all classes. In June, 1934, the party's strongest areas of support were London, Lancashire, and East Anglia. There were also scraps of interest in the midlands, particularly Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, and Wolverhampton. Outside of these areas the party attracted but spasmodic support.[49] By June 1934, there were five provincial regional headquarters, three London regional headquarters, thirty-eight London branches, and one hundred provincial branches. In Europe there were thirteen branches: nine Italian, three German, and one French.[50] These foreign branches were evidently composed of British members and maintained their national independence. By August, 1934, BUF membership peaked at an estimated fifty-thousand.[51] The sudden dilation in membership was not all positive. The influx of new recruits placed strain on the BUF's budget. In March, 1934, Ian Hope Dundas instructed the party's various departments to reduce their staff, and twelve paid officials were given one week's notice. In order to control expenditure more effectively, a treasury department was created, composed of Forgan, Dundas, and Tabor. [52]

Maintaining the BUF as a potential mass party required a sizeable financial outlay indeed. Mosley gave the BUF a total of £100,000 and was the party's single largest British contributor. But if the Blackshirts were ever to make a serious run at obtaining power something more was required other than membership subscriptions, revenue from the sales of party literature, and Mosley's money. The party also needed generous donations and mainstream support. This necessitated the marketing of fascism as a respectable ideology--a branch of conservatism. In January 1934, Forgan and non-BUF members, Major Francis Yeats-Brown, Sir Donald Makgill, and Captain Luttmann

Johnson, formed the January Club, a social club dedicated to wining and dining influential people who would be disinclined to join the Blackshirts but might nevertheless be interested in supporting fascism. In 1934, several hundred people participated in these get-togethers.[53] Besides Mosley, the BUF's greatest British backer was publisher, Lord Rothermere who, like Mosley, was a strong proponent of empire protection. It would seem that he regarded the BUF as a conservative pressure group. Mosley maintained that Rothermere, who in January 1934 pledged to support the BUF in his Daily Mail, was attracted to the party by its strong pro rearmament position.[54] According to a pamphlet which was prepared and issued by the Labour Research Department, "Who Backs Mosley", other noteworthy contributors included Lord Inchcape, Lord Nuffield (William Morris), Sir A.V. Roe, Baron Tollemache, Air Commodore Chemier, Vincent C. Vickers, Lord Lloyd, Sir Charles Petrie, and the Earl of Glasgow. MI5, however, could not confirm the correctness of this list.[55] That Benito Mussolini provided his British fascist counterpart with generous contributions is beyond doubt, though no evidence exists showing that Hitler was financing the BUF.[56]

Mosley also intended to raise funds through a capitalist venture, "New Epoch Products". Registered on the 12th of May, 1934, the company was established to manufacture, import, and sell personal and household products as well as publish books, magazines and journals.[57] A factory at Eagle Wharf Road, Shoreditch, was purchased to manufacture cigarettes. New Epoch Products was, however, a stillborn enterprise.

In the coming years the BUF would exploit regional discontent to garner support. The first example of this tactic was seen in early 1934, in the so called, "Tithe War".[58] East Anglian farmers, unable to sell their yield, could not afford to pay tithes, and were consequently having their equipment and livestock expropriated. Mosley instructed his fascists to help farmers by building obstructions and trenches on farmland, so as to prevent equipment and livestock from being removed by bailiffs. Several fascists were arrested.

The emergence of the BUF and the potential trouble it could cause did not escape the attention of the government. Home Office officials, Police Commissioner Trenchard, two MI5 members, and the Head of Special Branch, Scotland Yard, Superintendent Canning,

met at the Home Office on November 23, 1933 to discuss what policy the government should pursue in dealing with the BUF.[59] They agreed that Special Branch and MI5 agents—specifically those employed by its most secret outpost, Maxwell Knight's Department B5(b)—should begin the immediate surveillance of the BUF. Special Branch and MI5 data would be analyzed by MI5 and then given to the under secretaries of state at the Home Office, Sir Russell Scott(1932-1938), and Sir Alexander Maxwell(1938-1948). The government's concern was well founded, for BUF meetings would be marked by vigorous, sometimes violent, protests on the part of anti-fascists, and stern responses by fascist stewards.[60]

The party's most successful meeting was held at Albert Hall, April 22, 1934, before an audience of 9,500.[61] The doors opened at 7:15. BUF stewards, positioned at frequent intervals throughout the building, carefully scrutinized tickets. The audience joined in the singing of fascist songs before Mosley entered the building at 8:00 p.m, greeted with great enthusiasm and preceded by fascist flag bearers. The fascist leader, dressed in all black, his silver belt-buckle gleaming, walked down the gangway toward the rostrum to deliver an uninterrupted speech before fielding the audience's written questions. The meeting concluded with the singing of "Up the Blackshirts". Ordered and disciplined, the Albert Hall meeting was not surprisingly praised in the Daily Mail; it was also favourably reviewed in Beaverbrook's, Daily Express:

As a spectacle it was an impressive sight.. The raucous presentment of Sir Oswald's voice began to crash round the hall.Unmusical as it was through the microphone, the voice was weaving its spell.the peroration was perfect. Sir Oswald, his voice rising and falling, talked of the makers of the Empire, of the Constitution and history.[62]

On the heels of the Albert Hall triumph, B.U.F members must have been eagerly awaiting the meeting scheduled for the Olympia Sports Arena at Hammersmith, London

on June 7th; for many influential people planned to attend, including diplomats, journalists, and big businessmen. Anti-fascists were certainly looking forward to it. Having suffered an ignominious loss in a recent by-election, the Communist Party doubtless saw the Olympia meeting as a splendid chance to steal the spotlight from Mosley and show-case itself as fascism's most effective opponent.[63] Protesters thus planned demonstrations for inside and outside the building.

Mosley knew full well that there would be trouble at Olympia; the Police Commissioner was cognizant of the Communist Party's plans to disrupt the meeting and informed the fascist leader about the coming protest. He asked him if he would like a police presence inside the building [64], but Mosley declined, ostensibly because the police had prevented his stewards from doing their duty at a Manchester meeting in March, 1933.[65] An alternative interpretation is that he demurred because he actually welcomed protest--he saw a high profile meeting with expected communist trouble as a glorious opportunity to show the establishment the need for, and capability of, his fascist defence force. After all, it was a BUF tenet that in the event of a communist revolution, the Blackshirts, who Mosley claimed only ever intended to arrive at power constitutionally, would prove to be the only force capable of meeting "violence against the state by violence on behalf of the nation".[66] Arguably, the BUF leader did not want to belie this rather immodest assertion at such a high profile meeting by depending on the police to protect him from a few protesting communists.

Olympia was one of the bloodiest meetings in British political history, and was undoubtedly the turning point in the history of the BUF.[67] The hall was filled with about 12,000 spectators by the time Mosley made his way to the rostrum, preceded by fifty-six Blackshirt standard bearers. He began his speech by emphasizing that he intended to have an orderly meeting, but was immediately met by the cry "Fascism means murder; Down with Mosley". Throughout the course of his speech, he was barely able to string together fifty words without being interrupted. One observer later argued that Mosley could have quite easily drowned out the hecklers by turning up the volume of the amplifiers.[68] Instead, at each interruption, he stopped speaking, and stood with his arms akimbo until the stewards forcibly removed the protester. He made a point of telling the

audience that they could see for themselves the necessity for a fascist defence force, and that there had been no freedom of speech in the country prior to its formation. Those removed from the hall were the recipients of some rough treatment in the stairs and corridors. Some of those ejected were seen bleeding from the face; some were debagged and thrown into the street. Events took a potentially fatal turn when several protestors took to the rafters, eagerly pursued by Neil Francis-Hawkins. The meeting ended at 10:50 p.m, following the singing of the national anthem. Question period was cancelled. In total, twenty-three protesters were arrested; three were charged with carrying weapons.

Despite the protest, Mosley was able to give his speech, and in this sense Olympia was a victory for him--but it was a pyrrhic one. For it was the behaviour of the Blackshirts at Olympia, not their communist opponents, which was scrutinized by the establishment. Most Conservatives were of the opinion that Mosley had deliberately provoked interruption, and they were less than convinced that a fascist defence force was a legitimate or necessary bulwark against communist agitation. Several Tory M.P's in attendance were appalled at the behaviour of the BUF stewards, and walked out of the meeting in disgust. Three of them, W.J. Anstruther-Gray, J. Scrymgeour-Wedderburn, and T.J. O'Connor wrote a joint letter to the Times in which they commented, " These methods of securing freedom of speech may have been effective, but they are highly unusual in England, and constitute in our opinion a deplorable outrage in Public Order." [69] In a separate letter W.J. Anstruther-Gray said, " I fail to see the necessity for this brutality, which is so foreign to the British race...Something must be done to prevent a reoccurrence of last night's disgusting behaviour". [70] Geoffrey Loyd, M.P and Parliamentary Private Secretary to Stanley Baldwin stated that, " The Blackshirts behaved like bullies and cads." [71] Not surprisingly, Labour and Liberal MP's offered Mosley no sympathy. Lloyd George was one of the few prominent voices that defended the behaviour of the fascist stewards.

As a consequence of the Olympia meeting, the British Government more closely examined the potential threat the British Union of Fascists posed to public order. The Secretary of State, Sir John Gilmour, was in charge of regulating Britain's public order

policy. On June 11, he announced to the House of Commons the government's position on fascist stewarding:

I am not concerned to-day to apportion blame between the fascists and the communists. It is the function of the Government to preserve law and order. They would be failing in their duty if they allowed any faction, whether of the Right or the Left to disturb the public peace, and they are certainly not prepared to allow their responsibility for the maintenance and preservation of our free institutions to be usurped by any private and irresponsible body, no matter what may be their avowed aim or objects.[72]

But reluctant to infringe on civil liberties, the British Government did not pass a stricter public order policy until 1936. In the meantime, it employed subtler means in attempting to control the BUF. On June 11th, Anstruther-Grey warned the House that the events of Olympia could be repeated at the BUF meeting scheduled for August 5th, at White City, a larger facility. The Metropolitan Police precluded this possibility, however, by persuading the chairman of the White City board to demand that Mosley pay an exorbitantly high bond for the booking of the hall.[73] This strategy worked; the meeting was cancelled. The government also subtly limited the BUF's exposure by discouraging the media from giving it unnecessary publicity.[74]

The events at Olympia also had serious implications for Mosley's public image. In light of Hitler's "Night of the Long Knives" on June 30th, the Olympia meeting took on a more sinister aspect. Combined with Mosley's public approval of the ghastly Roehm purge[75], the fascist violence at Olympia, would give the impression that a British fascist state would be no less savage than its European counterparts. Alone, the striking similarities between the BUF and the National Socialist Party and Italian Fascist Party--the marches, the black shirts, the leather boots, the fascist salute, the moustached leader thundering on--made it difficult to deny that the BUF was anything other than an

"Anglicized version of Italian Corporatism and Nazi Chauvinism".[76] While the truculent face of the BUF may have appealed to the group of recruits who arrived to the Blackhouse in the wake of Olympia, it would seem that most Britons, even those who may have admired the German *Fuehrer* and the Italian *Duce* from afar, were of a rather conservative temperament, and would not have been eager to see the extreme methods of the continental dictators come to Britain.

Lord Rothermere took the lead in abandoning the BUF ship. Apparently disturbed by the party's anti-Jewish sentiment, he made it clear in the pages of the Daily Mail that he could support Mosley only if he dropped fascism.[77] Mosley refused, and thereby threw away what was probably his last chance of becoming a real force in British politics. For it was undoubtedly his appeal as a conservative agitator standing for "sound commonsense Conservative doctrine", [78] as Rothermere had portrayed him in the Daily Mail, which brought him his greatest public support. That the BUF's membership reached its pinnacle of 50, 000 with Rothermere's sponsorship is the best evidence supporting such a conclusion.[79]

Mosley's stubborn refusal to abandon fascism was in keeping with the defiant posture he had assumed from the beginning of his career. If conservative opinion could not be swayed, he was not going to pander to it, regardless of the possible negative ramifications. He was about as willing to modifying his fascist program to suit the tastes of the conservative establishment as he had been willing to compromise with the Labour Party. More than defiant obstinacy motivated Mosley's attachment to fascism, however. He would have liked the historical record to stand as saying that he "created a real military organisation after the failure of the New Party, as the only way to defeat the highly organised communist guerrillas", and thereby allow him to get his message across.[80] But he could, quite obviously, have had bodyguards and stewards--even a highly organized force of them--without having Blackshirts. Thus his affinity for the paramilitary nature of the BUF clearly went beyond the issue of ensuring his freedom of speech.

In his autobiography, Mosley recalls his years of military service nostalgically as a time when men were bonded by a sense of intimacy and purpose.[81] The BUF, with its

regimentation, comradeship, siege mentality, and battles with opponents at the meetings, recreated the spirit of the trenches, and recalled a tremendously meaningful time in his life.[82] It also gave him a measure of assurance that his fallen wartime comrades had not died in vain. More than venerate the war dead, the BUF celebrated the spirit of 1914 as that which would carry the nation to greater heights.[83] The psychological comfort, the sense of stability and meaning, which Mosley derived from the paramilitary nature of the BUF was not something he could easily forsake, especially in light of his wife's untimely death the previous year.[84]

Mosley's attachment to fascism was also motivated by a great deal of self-indulgence. He had always been an egotistical politician, unwavering in the conviction that he --and only he--held the key to utopia. When he became a fascist leader, and cult figure, his egoism soared to new heights. He withdrew from political reality, and came to view the plight of his nation through a mythical lens: not simply a political struggle, his was an epic one. Not simply a politician, he was the hero who would pull the nation back from the brink of an imminent disaster, a "looming menace not only in economics, but in national psychology".[85] In his mind, Britain faced more than economic decline; it also faced cultural death.[86]

Mosley's dark vision of the nation's future was of course an outgrowth of his long standing belief that Britain would suffer economically and socially unless it developed a more proactive financial policy; but his view was also influenced by his reading of Oswald Spengler, who, in Decline of the West, interprets civilization in biological terms. Spengler's belief that Western Civilization was near the end of its life-cycle provided Mosley with more than an explanation for the troubles of his age; it also served an important psychological function: imminent national collapse was the all threatening enemy he needed to fashion himself as champion of the nation.

Unlike Spengler, Mosley postulated that national decline could be reversed by modern science, guided by a new heroic spirit of vitality.[87] This new consciousness, "modern caesarism," would combine the Christian doctrines of service and self-abnegation with the vigorous spirit of the Nietzschean superman. Modern caesarism, unlike historic caesarism, would not be embodied by a single man, but manifested by "the will and

ability of the disciplined thousands who comprise a fascist movement". Thus Mosley referred to it as "collective caesarism". This was, however, an intellectual veil covering a dictatorial ambition. "Collective Caesarism" would be collective only insofar as the "disciplined thousands" collectively followed Mosley. As leader of his party, and head of the caesarian body (a position he never once brought into question) he assigned himself the heroic lead role in the epic of Britain's national recovery. He admitted this in so many words in the 1934 revised edition of the Greater Britain: "Leadership in Fascism may be an individual or team, but undoubtedly single leadership in practice proves the more effective instrument. The Leader must be prepared to shoulder absolute responsibility." [88] Mosley's attachment to the role of leader and saviour would determine the course that his fascist party took in the coming years.

NOTES

[1] The Mosleys were hatters and clothiers who amassed a considerable fortune through some very astute real estate purchases--especially the manorial rights of Manchester. See Colin Cross, The Fascists in Britain (London: Barrie and Barkliff, 1961), p.9. For a detailed examination of Mosley's life, consult his biography by Robert Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London: Macmillan, 1975). Some might say that Skidelsky paints an overly-sympathetic picture of Mosley--particularly during the BUF period. Nevertheless, he provides a richly detailed narrative of Mosley's early career.

[2] Soon after arriving at Winchester, Mosley displayed an aptitude for boxing, and went on to claim the light heavyweight championship. As well, he proved to be a prodigious swordsman, winning the school fencing championship in both sabre and foil at the age of fifteen--an unprecedented feat. The fact that he returned to the sport in the 1930's to represent Britain internationally (his last competition being the international championships in 1937) attests to his natural athletic ability. He also enjoyed riding and foxhunting (not surprising for a man of his background), and while on a fencing tour of France, acquired a taste for pistol duelling. On more than one unsanctioned occasion at Sandhurst, he eagerly proved that he was no sluggard with his fists; knocking someone senseless was his favourite method of resolving disputes. Perhaps his greatest display of youthful machismo was the bare-knuckled bout he had with his estranged father in the Rolleston ballroom. He danced merrily about the elder Oswald Mosley, snapping his head back with straight lefts, before ending the affair with a "merry handshake" instead of a knockout punch. See Oswald Mosley, My Life (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1968), pp. 23-43.

[3] For a full description of Mosley's war experiences--particularly his recollection of the Second Battle of Ypres and Loos--see My Life, pp. 43-71. Also see the work by his son, Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game: Sir Oswald and Cynthia Mosley, 1896-1933 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982) pp. 6-8. Robert Skidelsky, pp. 61-75.

[4] For interesting accounts of Mosley's post-war "gaining of experience", see Oswald Mosley, My Life, pp. 71-88. Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 7-9; Robert Skidelsky, pp. 66-69.

[5] Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, p.8.

[6] As Mosley recalls, "But we had thought that a decent home and living wage could be provided for our companions, who survived the war, because it seemed so relatively easy to do. Yet they had to wait until after a second world war for the precarious possession of a living wage, and many of them still waiting for the decent homes. It was the slow realisation that the old world could not or would not give these elementary things, and

was heading instead towards further and possibly irretrievable disaster which finally brought the choice between purpose and the normal way of life which could have given me not only security but much happiness." See My Life, p. 73.

[7] Such idealization is evidenced by his autobiography. He writes of the Rolleston estate: " Rolleston was remote from the world, a remarkable truly feudal survival...Farms, the garden, shooting and the large well stocked cellars satisfied most needs; the same wagon which took out produce a few miles to Burton on Trent would return well loaded with a variety of the best beer. There was little reason to go outside the charmed circle and we children never did." Concerning his relationship with the people on the estate, he comments, "Again in feudal fashion the warmest and most intimate friendships developed between us and these people, so characteristic of traditional England, not only in their daily occupations, but in the strong bonds of mutual sympathy in life's events, birth, marriage, death, occasions both sad and festive; this was really a classless society." He cites his exposure to the feudal ambience of Rolleston as one of the experiences which helped him, " in the days of class to become classless man." see *ibid*, p.11. The feudal aristocrat would come to play a significant role in BUF folklore. Much in the same way Hitler idealized the Aryan race and Mussolini idealized the Roman Empire as historical exemplars, the BUF regarded the feudal aristocrat as " the great leader and artist of the medieval world who--as was natural--achieved his finest manifestations during the Renaissance, when his own background of the feudal world was already in the Shadows." BUF intellectual W.E.D Allen (A.K.A, James Drennan) theorized that with the emergence of capitalism and the ascendancy of the hitherto unimportant trading class, the aristocrat disappeared, with the exception of a few instances. In Allen's view, Britain undoubtedly suffered for it. See B.U.F.Oswald Mosley and British Fascism (Albemarle Street, John Murray), p. 29-30.

[8] " Radical Paternalism" would be the most fitting term describing Mosley's political philosophy. His commitment to a paternalistic form of government saw its most mature expression in fascism.

[9] Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 26-27. Skidelsky, pp.77-92.

[10] Curzon gave his guarded consent to his daughter's marriage to Mosley. For a full discussion of Mosley's courtship, see especially, Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 12-24, Oswald Mosley, My Life, pp.111-120.

[11] *ibid*, pp.26-27. Skidelsky, pp.77-92.

[12] For Mosley's stance on the Irish issue, see Skidelsky, pp.130-163; Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 27-28; and Colin Cross, pp. 14-15.

[13] Cross, pp. 14-15.

[14] Skidelsky, pp. 112-114. Oswald Mosley, p. 167.

[15] Skidelsky, p.110. Cross, p.16.

[16] Oswald Mosley, p. 90.

[17] Cross, pp. 16-17.

[18] Oswald Mosley, p.181.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, pp. 194-209.

[21] Ibid, p.207. Skidelsky, p.163.

[22] Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, p. 90.

[23] For a good, concise, description of the Mosley Memorandum, see Cross, pp. 36-37, 43-44, 51.

[24] Ibid, p. 41. Oswald Mosley, p.262.

[25] Cross, pp. 43-46. Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 169-170, 183.

[26] Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, p.170.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Oswald Mosley, My Life, pp.283-286. Richard Griffiths, Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany(London: Constable, 1980), p.33.

[29] Richard Thurlow, Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985(Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.95.

[30] Upon leaving the New Party, Strachey wrote to Mosley, "It is quite clear to me that your whole outlook is becoming more conservative; already you regard any other outlook as a pathological. Allan young wrote, " From the beginning I have been aware of the dangers implicit in a movement such as ours. These dangers could only have been avoided by a leadership above suspicion as far as working class interests were concerned. You have not given us that leadership but rather have provided grounds for the suspicion

that the party would become increasingly Hitlerist, Fascist, and ultimately, anti-working class." As cited in Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, pp. 189-190.

[31] Quoted from an entry for August 30th, 1931. Robert Bruce Lockhart, The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, ed. Kenneth Young, (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.182.

[32] Oswald Mosley, pp.287-315.

[33] Nicholas Mosley, Rules of the Game, p. 286.

[34] Bruce Lockhart, Diary, 4 December, 1931.

[35] Nicholson was a New Party member who ended his association with Mosley upon returning from their continental tour.

[36] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p.96.

[37] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale: Oswald Mosley and Family: 1933-1980 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983), p.13.

[38] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 39.

[39] The following description of the personnel of the BUF is based on Special Branch's report for 1 May, 1934: PRO HO 144/20142/117-118. Also see Colin Cross, pp. 67-93.

[40] According to the information found in the Aubrey Lees personal file (PRO HO 283/45), as cited in Thurlow, Richard, "State Management of the BUF in the 1930's." The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition. Ed. Mike Cronin. London. Macmillan Press, 1996,p.48.

[41] Maxwell Knight recruited Allan as an MI5 mole. Allan apparently played an important role in obtaining funds from Italian sources for the BUF and in Mosley's air-time commercial radio project with Hitler, 1938-39. According to Nicholas Mosley, the BUF leader was perfectly aware that Allan was an MI5 spy. In an obvious attempt to discredit him, Mosley claimed that Allan was a "Walter Mitty" figure who greatly exaggerated his own role in the BUF. See Anthony Masters, The Man Who Was M: The Life of Maxwell Knight. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 136-139.

[42] W.E.D Allen. Fascism in Relation to British History and Character(London, BUF Publications, 1933), p.3.

[43] Cross, p. 94.

[44] Ibid., p.88.

[45] Ibid. Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p.99.

[46] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 41.

[47] Ibid.

[48] MI5 Report. 18 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20141/302. Members of the BUF were forbidden to join any foreign political movement.

[49] PRO HO 144/20140/294-322 as cited in G.C Webber, "Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists," Journal of Contemporary History, 19 (1984), 582.

[50] MI5 Report. 18 June, 1943. PRO HO 144/20141/302.

[51] MI5 Report. 1 August, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/110.

[52] Special Branch Report. 9 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/ 20142/298.

[53] MI5 Report. 1 August, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/110. Notable attenders of the January Club included, Lord Lloyd, Lord Midleton, Lord William Scott, Lord Erskine, Wing Commander Sir Louis Greig, " Fruity" Metcalf--a close friend of the Prince of Wales, Lord Francis Hill, Lord Iddesligh, Lord and Lady Russell of Liverpool, Sir Thomas Roberts, Sir Philip Magnus, Charles G Bruce, Colonel Ivan Guthrie, and a host of others. See Griffiths, p.52.

[54] MI5 speculated that Rothermere saw the BUF as a "stick with which to beat the Government to drive it on to greater activity. 18 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20141/297. In his autobiography, Mosley recalled that, " It was the combination of blackshirt success and our strong advocacy of national rearmament in what appeared to him a period of flabby surrender on all front which attracted him, rather than our social policies, of which he seemed to be almost unaware." Mosley also maintains that Rothermere also made some financial contributions to the movement. He recalls, "in fact, Lord Rothermere did not give much money directly, and what he gave he insisted on handing to me personally as a gift to the party." See My Life, p.345.

[55] MI5 Report. 9 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/217.

[56] In the early 1980's, historian David Irving discovered the Italian ambassador's letters which prove that Mussolini donated at least £40, 000 to the BUF between 1933 and 1934. This confirmed beyond doubt what had been long suspected. In 1946, Home

Secretary, Chuter Ede, announced to the House the existence of letters which show that Mosley received £60,000 a year from Mussolini between 1933 and 1935. See Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 30-34.

Elaborate steps were taken to conceal these contributions. The money was initially deposited in a Swiss bank account; the remittances were then sent to a secret account at the Charing Cross Branch of the Westminster Bank, registered in the names of W.E.D Allen, Ian Hope Dundas and Major Tabor. See PRO HO 283/10/9 as cited in Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 137. Mosley denied knowledge about any of this, claiming that he had nothing whatever to do with the financial side of the party.

The figure supplied by Ede conflicts with the estimate given by Allen to MI5, which states that Mussolini supplied Mosley with £30,000 a year until 1936, and then 1000 a month. Allen's estimate is probably too low. For MI5 concluded that in the mid-1930's the BUF was kept afloat only by Mussolini's money. See PRO 45/25385/38.9, as cited in Fascism in Britain, p. 138. As Thurlow points out, such a conclusion would be supported by "the fact that the total amounts deposited in the Charing Cross accounts were close to the published income of the movement in 1934 and 1935". See *ibid*. These amounts, all in foreign currencies, were £77,800 and £86,000 respectively. Furthermore, in March 1936, Special Branch estimated that the cost of maintaining the movement to be in the range of 45,000 pounds per annum. See Special Branch Report. 23 March, 1936. HO 144/20147/378. The record for the Charing Cross account for 1936 indicated a total of £43,320.

This decreased, but nonetheless substantial, amount would support the argument that Mussolini had reduced rather than cut off funding to Mosley in the summer of 1935. There is other evidence in favour of this interpretation. If *Il Duce* had stopped contributing entirely, Mosley would probably not have been able to maintain his professional staff. See Fascism in Britain, p. 138. Moreover, in October 1935, Director-General, F.M Box, reportedly claimed that Rome was dictating Mosley's policy, and that "he who pays the piper calls the tune." See Special Branch Report. 23 October, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/12-13. Mosley also maintained that his friendship with Mussolini did not end until 1936. See Oswald Mosley, My Life, p. 363. That Mussolini probably ceased contributing to the BUF in 1937 would be indicated by the fact that Mosley had to lay off one-hundred and one staff members (including Joyce and Chesterton) in 1937, due to a "sudden financial crisis." See *ibid*, p. 311. Such a financial crisis is reflected in the record of the Charing Cross account for 1937: £7,630. See Thurlow, Fascism in Britain p. 137.

[57] Special Branch Report. 3 July, 1934. PRO HO 144/20141/13-15.

[58] Cross, p. 107. Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp.48-49.

[59] PRO HO 45/25386/54-59, as cited in Thurlow, Richard, "State Management of the BUF in the 1930's." The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for

Political Recognition. Ed. Mike Cronin. London. Macmillan Press, 1996, pp. 29-52. Also see Masters, The Man Who Was M.

[60] Skidelsky, pp.353-363, and Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 10-12. For example, in December, 1932, at Battersea Town Hall, fifty hecklers used bottles and chairs in an attempt to silence Mosley; they were dealt with promptly by the BUF defence force. At Stoke, Mosley was personally challenged to a fist fight, jumped down from the stage, and a melee ensued.

[61] Special Branch Report. 23 April, 1934. PRO HO 144/20140/134-138.

[62] " 6000 Cheering Blackshirts: Sir O Mosley in an Albert Hall Spectacle." Daily Express, 23 April 1934.

[63] Special Branch Report. 7 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20140/59.

[64] Mr John Gilmour's statement to the House. 11 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20140/41.

[65] Skidelsky, p. 376.

[66] Allen, Oswald Mosley and British Fascism p. 247.

[67] The following account of the events at Olympia is, for the most part, based on the information compiled by Special Branch. 7 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20140/29-31. Also see Skidelsky, pp. 370-378; Cross, pp. 109-116; Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 57-66. Oswald Mosley's thoughts concerning Olympia are also quite interesting. See My Life, pp. 296-300, 307, 313, 337-338.

[68] An observation made by Geoffrey Lloyd, Baldwin's private secretary. See Skidelsky, p. 370.

[69] Cross, p. 112. Also see Thurlow, " State Management of the BUF in the 1930's", pp. 32-33 concerning the establishment's reaction to the Olympia meeting.

[70] Cross, p. 113.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Mr John Gilmour's statement to the House. 11 June, 1934. PRO HO 144/20141/45

[73] Stevenson, John, " The BUF, the Metropolitan Police and Public Order." British Fascism. Ed Kenneth Lun and Richard Thurlow. London. Croom Helm, 1980, p. 146.

[74] Thurlow, " State Management of the BUF in the 1930's," p. 35.

[75] Cross, p. 116.

[76] Leo Rosten, " The Rise of Oswald Mosley," Harper's, 493(1934), 492.

[77] It is unlikely that Rothermere's break with the BUF was motivated by disgust with the Roehm purge; for MI5 reported that his paper maintained a friendly attitude to the acts "of the dictatorship in Germany" following the "Night of the Long Knives." See MI5 Report 1 August, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/112. There is evidence to suggest that Rothermere maintained an association with Mosley after the summer of 1934. On the 26th of January, 1934, the Home Office reported that Lord Lloyd, member of the Parliamentary Conservative Party, approached Rothermere about joining the BUF. See Special Branch Report. 26 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/173. In the same month, the Daily Mail gave the BUF leader positive publicity by documenting his Lancashire campaign. MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/123. Thus, it would appear that Rothermere had been a BUF sympathizer who perhaps publically criticized Mosley out of self interest. This would support Mosley's claim that the press baron withdrew his support as a result of pressure put on him by a significant advertiser in the Daily Mail.

[78] Daily Mail, 2 May, 1934. As Cited in Griffiths, p. 54.

[79] MI5 Report. 1 August, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/107-122.

[80] Oswald Mosley, My Life, p.303.

[81] Ibid., pp. 306-307.

[82] As Mosley wrote in his autobiography, " This was the most complete companionship I have ever known, except in the old regular army in time of war, more complete even than my early days in the Labour Party, when I enjoyed every night the warm hospitality of a different working class home." See My Life, p. 306.

[83] Such a belief is communicated in a fascist marching song by E.D Randall:

Comrades: the voices of the dead battalions
Of those who fell that Britain might be great,
join in our song, for they still march in spirit with us
And urge us on to gain the fascist state!

[84] In April 1933, Cynthia--"Cimmie"--accompanied Mosley on an official visit to Rome. In May, she contracted appendicitis, then a fatal case of peritonitis. Mosley was greatly saddened by her death. Although he was in the midst of a torrid love affair with Diana Guinness, he had no intention of leaving his wife. Following her death, he fully devoted himself to the fascist cause; his time was almost completely occupied by work at the office and by speaking tours. See, Mosley, Rules of the Game.

[85] Oswald Mosley, p. 331.

[86] In a pamphlet, Creed of a Fascist Revolutionary, (Great Smith Street: BUF Publications, 1936), A.K Chesterton ominously describes the process of national decay: "While these inert " Progressives" fiddle and temporise and fight their sham battles in and out of Parliament, Great Britain--once so proud and virile and majestic--crumbles into dissolution, her foundations eaten away by financial and commercial lust, her superstructure shaken by political ineptitude, cowardice and graft, her morale destroyed by the spiritual discords of class-war, and her ancient grandeur assailed by all the forces of decay which appear when there is no anti-toxin of courageous and constructive effort to keep the people in a state of exercise and health.",p. 6

[87] Oswald Mosley, " The Philosophy of Fascism," Fascist Quarterly, I/I(1935), 35-36. As cited in Fascism, ed. Roger Griffin(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.173-174.

[88] Cross, p.87.

CHAPTER TWO. DECLINE AND DISSENTION: AUTUMN, 1934-WINTER, 1935

By August and September, 1934, the BUF had lost momentum, especially in the counties of Yorkshire and Devonshire, the cities of Birmingham and London, and the towns of Bournemouth and Bedford. It had ceased to make progress anywhere or with any segment of the population.[1] The negative publicity incurred by the BUF in the wake of Olympia, and the withdrawal of the positive publicity given to the party by Rothermere's Daily Mail were now being made manifest. But the BUF's reversal of fortune must also be viewed within the context of national economic recovery.[2] As British industry focused on the domestic market, production increased and wages rose.[3] Emerging prosperity meant that middle class Britons, who had been the BUF's primary backers, had little reason to remain with, support, or join a fascist party whose *raison d'etre* was to rescue the country from an economic crisis which appeared increasingly unlikely.[4]

As membership began to decrease, Mosley also sustained some heavy public defeats. The September 9th meeting at Hyde Park was meant to be a fascist show of strength, but was instead a display of the BUF's feebleness.[5] As a young boy, Mosley's son, Nicholas, viewed the spectacle from the top of the Cumberland Hotel. He comments that because the police forbade the use of loudspeakers, it was unlikely that much of his father's message was heard.[6] The Manchester meeting on the 29th of September was an equally pathetic affair.[7] The 800 Blackshirts in attendance were enclosed by wooden barriers in a police cordon, and the benches which the BUF supplied for the public were empty for the most part. Of the 2500 spectators in attendance one-quarter were protesting communists.[8]

As if membership losses, and a public loss of face were not enough, in the autumn of 1934, the party became torn by dissension. The movement in Bristol had split completely.[9] Dissatisfaction in the Paddington branch resulted in the resignation of several officers.[10] Manchester and Birmingham were reported as being rife with

discord.[11] At National Headquarters itself, the atmosphere was poisoned by mistrust, suspicion, and betrayal.[12] Spying and tattling on each other with the hope of currying favour with the leader was a popular activity among the headquarters staff.

Around early October Mosley learned of an alleged conspiracy at the Black House involving Charles J. Bradford of the industrial propaganda department, William Barry, headquarters speaker, and the receptionist Frederick William Knowles.[13] Mosley ordered his staff to drop all differences(the exact nature of which are not outlined in the Intelligence report), and made a call for redoubled loyalty. He also set up a court martial consisting of the head of the defence force, Eric Piercy, Neil Francis-Hawkins, and B.J. Taylor, head of BUF Intelligence, to try Bradford and Knowles for conspiring with Barry, and other fascists, Marcantonio, Clark, and Clouston, to split the BUF.[14] They were also charged with uttering threats against Deputy Chief of Staff, Archibald, G Findlay. Evidence was presented showing that Bradford and Knowles planned to seize National Headquarters, and then demand that Mosley dismiss certain officers. Bradford was found guilty for threatening the Deputy Chief of Staff while under the influence of drink and for attempting to approach the leader without going through official channels. He was suspended for three months and it was suggested that Knowles be severely reprimanded.[15]

It was no coincidence that internal dissension became acute during the onset of economic recovery. The BUF was formed to meet Mosley's predicted crisis in capitalism- to succeed where the established parties would fail. But with no imminent crisis, the party had no direction, no visible purpose. In the absence of national catastrophe and consequential breakdown of order, the guerilla war against communists which many members doubtless itched for was out of the question. With no external enemy to fight, fascist aggressions became inwardly focussed against internal ones.

As the party stagnated, it also began feeling the negative effects of having grown too quickly. In late autumn or early winter, the BUF conducted a review of personnel which revealed that the party consisted largely of ex-Communist Party and National Unemployment Worker's Movement members who had joined for purely opportunistic reasons.[16] The report concluded that recruits of this nature drove away a better type of

applicant. While the accuracy of this report cannot be verified, former BUF officials, Nellie Driver and Reynall Bellamy, cited unmotivated and difficult members as a central problem;[17] and numerous examples throughout this thesis will show that the BUF attracted more than its fair share of lackadaisical and destructive recruits.[18] Less than beneficial members had filled the BUF's ranks because the organization simply did not possess an administration capable of sifting and controlling the legion of recruits attracted to the party earlier in the year.[19] More promising ones were improperly utilized and often left in disgust.[20] Compounding this problem was the social club atmosphere prevalent at national and regional headquarters, which gave parasitic members little incentive to leave.

Ultimately, the blame for this state of affairs must rest with the leader himself. It was, after all, his decision to adopt a model of organization which was all too inviting to blackguards, idlers, and crackpots. He may have been a brilliant orator and articulate theorist, but his administrative skills were clearly wanting. Evidently seeing his role as a leader and not as a manager, he adopted an off-handed approach to administration. It would seem that most of his energy was directed toward his speaking engagements. Giving an average of 300 speeches a year between 1933 and 1937,[21] he would have had little time to supervise the daily workings of the party. This detachment was compounded by his somewhat naive view of human nature. It would appear that he assumed that anyone who joined the BUF would be selflessly committed to the fascist cause. He was far too trusting, was not the best judge of character,[22] and, in typical fascist fashion, invested too much faith in will-power. And, of course, Mosley's tendency to view the plight of his party in fantastical rather realistic terms made him less than an ideal political tactician.

In early September, he was reported to be suffering from acute depression.[23] Frustrated with the misfire of the Hyde Park meeting, he was contemplating a drastic move of some kind [24]. As it turned out, this drastic move was the propagation of an anti-Jewish line[25]--something he had officially eschewed for the first two years of the BUF's existence. [26]

During the party's formative period he had ordered that nothing in BUF speeches should be presented which could be interpreted as anti-Semitic, and during 1933 made a strenuous effort to dissociate himself from Nazi anti-Semitism.[27] He commented to the Yorkshire Post that Hitler had made his greatest mistake by attacking Jews.[28] Such words, however, failed to convince those British Jews who saw Mosley as another Hitler, and some began launching protests and attacks against the Blackshirts.[29]

Jewish objection to the BUF was not, however, simply a matter of guilt by association. Even if Mosley forbade its expression, anti-Semitism existed within the BUF's ranks from the outset. [30] William Joyce displayed his obsessive anti-Semitism in his speeches and articles; [31] and Mosley himself had written an unsigned article for the Blackshirt titled, "Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?".[32] Physical attacks against Jews by the BUF were not uncommon in the Cheetham area of Manchester as early as 1933.[33] Furthermore, Jews were completely excluded from membership in the BUF by April 1934 on account of the "physical opposition on the part of a certain section of Jews toward the movement." [34]

Mosley may have barred Jewish entry into the BUF in the spring of 1934, but an anti-Jewish line did not become a central plank of his platform until the movement ebbed in the autumn. That reality was beginning to spoil his fascist dream would be indicated by his aforementioned depression. When national collapse became a distant prospect, he required another crisis to justify the retention of a siege mentality and leadership cult. An alleged Jewish conspiracy was just such a crisis. [35]

Mosley's new anti-Semitic line also doubtless reflected the influence of radical anti-Semites--the likes of Chesterton, Joyce, and Beckett--at the party's inner core. In particular, Joyce, Mosley's closest friend in the BUF, accrued increasing power.[36] The fact that he had his sights set on Ian Hope Dundas' position as chief of staff, [37] and had a central role to play in the departure of Phister from the BUF's foreign relations department attests to this.[38] Joyce's crude, chauvinistic style contrasted sharply with his leader's intellectual approach, but by suppressing him, Mosley risked alienating, perhaps losing, a man of considerable energy and drive, as well as those members who sympathized with him.[39]

Political anti-Semitism did inject some life into the floundering movement. The Albert Hall meeting in late October, 1934, at which Mosley pledged to take up the challenge made to him by organized Jewry, was followed by increased recruitment at National Headquarters[40]. As will be shown later on in this thesis, beginning in 1936, anti-semitism would bring the BUF great gains in the East End of London.

Although Mosley's espousal of an anti-Jewish line would have pleased the likes of Joyce and Chesterton, Director-General, Robert Forgan, disagreed with it.[41] But his relationship with Mosley became strained for other reasons as well. Upon returning after illness sometime in mid to late June, 1934, Mosley found that the BUF's expenditure was twice its income. He concluded that Forgan was incapable of placing the party on a sound financial basis.[42] It was also noted that he made some bad choices in his selection of subordinate officers. Thus Forgan became a scapegoat. To get him away from headquarters, Mosley sent him to Scotland, ostensibly to inspect branches there.[43] The duties of director of organization were assumed by F.M Box, although Forgan apparently kept the title.[44] In early September, Forgan returned to London without Mosley's knowledge, and was reportedly having doubts about his leader's sanity.[45]

The immediate cause of Forgan's parting with Mosley most likely concerned his mishandling of a generous contribution by a BUF sympathiser, one Mr Scrimgeor, connected with the firm of J&A Scrimgeor, stockbrokers.[46] In July, he gave Forgan a cheque for £250, which he should have immediately deposited into the movement's Newcastle account, but instead, he kept it. Mosley learnt of the donation near the end of September, and made inquiries as to its whereabouts. Shortly thereafter, Forgan announced the existence of the cheque to Mosley and asked him for instructions as to its disposal: a disclosure which Mosley concluded was made only in light of his query. Dr Forgan resigned his position, was given a farewell dinner, and permanently left the BUF in early October, 1934. F.M Box then officially became the party's second director of organization.

As more recruits arrived at Blackhouse in the late autumn of 1934, the party also attracted more backers in the north-west.[47] Beginning in November, the BUF made a concerted effort to win support from desperate cotton operatives and unemployed

workers in Lancashire by capitalizing on the failure of trade unions and established parties to amend the problems created by a depressed cotton market. What they proposed--shorter working hours, higher wages, and 100 percent trade unionism--differed from a socialist solution only insofar as it was cast within the context of the Corporate State.[48] Mosley also promised that his fascist government would exclude Japanese cotton products from Empire markets, and would shut down competing Indian mills. He would also deal with the "Jewish" Capitalists who invested in foreign markets.[49] The BUF's message was well received by unemployed cotton workers[50].

It should be stressed, though, that any gains the BUF made in London and the north-west were minimized by the larger trend of national membership decline. Though membership tallies were not presented by Special Branch in its 17 October report, the party's overall loss of popularity would be indicated by the decreased sales of the Blackshirt, from 23,000 copies in October to 19,000 in November.[51]

The January Club was reported to be less active at the end of the year, which reflected a further loss of interest in the BUF on the part of the conservative establishment. One meeting was held in December, which nobody of note attended; and Major Yeats Brown dropped out, unimpressed by Mosley and apparently no longer believing in dictatorship.[52]

In late 1934, the party continued to suffer qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Troublesome recruits continued to cause problems at National Headquarters. On the 3rd of December, a number of expelled members forced their way into the Black House to have drinks, and threatened Deputy Chief of Staff, Archibald G Findlay.[53] National headquarters also remained rife with dissension. Acrimony developed between I Squad and the rest of the defence force. Members of I Squad claimed that the head of the Defence force, Sant, was working for the British Intelligence service.[54] Moreover, Mosley was deeply worried about a scandal brewing involving Eric Piercy, head of I Squad, and William Joyce's wife. The two become more than friends, and Mrs Joyce would soon be bearing Piercy's child. To avoid public embarrassment, Mosley appointed Piercy as Chief Inspector of Branches, and thereby got him away from headquarters.[55]

F.W Knowles, the receptionist involved in Bradford's subversion plot, took over as head of I Squad.[56]

In December, the BUF's local branches were in desperate shape. Liverpool was the only one which was financially sound, but was reported to be politically inactive.[57] Its sub-branches were social clubs rather than centres for political work. The district organizer for Stoke absconded with party funds.[58] The Southampton branch was doing quite badly.[59] There was much dissension in the Newcastle branch.[60] Membership and political activity in Leeds were declining.[61] The party had split completely in the Gloucestershire area.[62] Branches in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton were reported to be in deplorable states. The detailed reports made by BUF intelligence on their conditions provide valuable case studies about the problems which beset the party at the local level. [63]

In early December, BUF National Headquarters received a report that Birmingham's District Organizer, J.R Hill, threatened that he and his followers would seize the branch unless his demand for a pay increase was met.[64] National Headquarters sent Major Cleghorn, the Assistant Director of Political Organization, and P Taylor, head of BUF Intelligence, to investigate the matter.[65] Hill denied the allegation, claiming that Revett, the area organizer for Stafford and Warwick with whom he was engaged in a strictly personal feud, had sent an unjustly critical report on him to National Headquarters. Hill told Cleghorn that branch members knew nothing of the personal feud between himself and Revett. He did complain, however, that his salary was insufficient to maintain both himself and his estranged wife, and said that he would have to give up active work for the BUF unless the party paid him £4 per week. He also argued that keeping the branch in order was simply too much for one man. Because he lacked trustworthy assistants, it was impossible to leave branch headquarters to carry out development work in Birmingham. He claimed that more promising subordinates would leave for other branches or National Headquarters as soon as he had trained them. The movement in Birmingham thus floundered. Its membership amounted to 88 paying members; 35 of which were active.[66]

If Hill's account is credible, it provides a vivid illustration of how undisciplined rank-and-file members, and a lack of support from National Headquarters created problems for branch leaders. It is, however, unlikely that his story was entirely accurate. He stated that he had contributed £100 of his own money to the movement, but "refused to state any claim to substantiate this and stated emphatically that he did not want repayment of this money, but kept insisting that he required an increase in salary".[67] It is doubtful that a financially struggling man hungry for a raise would not pursue reimbursement of £100--a prodigious sum for an industrial worker. Moreover, as revealed by an auditor's report, he lied about reducing the branch's debt. Cleghorn concluded that Hill was hardly the type of man suitable for leadership, but he would have to remain since there was no one more qualified to replace him.[68]

The BUF's condition in Birmingham was better than in Coventry and Wolverhampton, which Cleghorn and Taylor also visited in December.[69] Upon arriving at Coventry, Cleghorn and Taylor found branch office empty, save for one lowly fascist, Mr MacDonald, who arrived ten minutes after they did. He could not account for the leader's absence, and explained that he had once been the officer in charge but had to resign the position due to the BUF's inability to pay him. The Wolverhampton Branch was beset by legal problems. Its leader, Whitehouse(a former member of the Communist Party) and several of its members were well known to the police. According to the local inspector whom Cleghorn contacted beforehand, the branch was being used as an unlicensed lodging house and was morally dubious. It was raided in September for violating licensing and gaming laws. Whitehouse did not mention this to Cleghorn, assuring him that the branch had friendly relations with the police and that it strictly observed licensing laws. Whitehouse also said that he and one orderly lived on the premises, that the bar was closed at 10 o'clock, and that women left the premises at 10:30. He also assured Cleghorn that he was very busy with canvassing work. Upon examining the canvassing cards himself, however, Cleghorn surmised that "the cards were merely entered up to give the impression that results were being obtained." [70] He further concluded that the application forms which Whitehouse produced to show that the branch was producing good results were fraudulent. This was unlikely an isolated case. Nellie

Driver maintains that " Many reports from Districts were carefully "cooked," and that "Some of the District Leaders gave him [Mosley] exaggerated ideas about the progress of the Movement".[71] National Headquarters was probably being gravely misled about the movement's progress at the grass roots.

That conditions at Birmingham, Coventry, and Wolverhampton were allowed to deteriorate so badly indicates that the BUF lacked the quality personnel or bureaucracy to support a nation-wide party. Without adequate supervision from above, branch leaders could easily turn their headquarters into petty-criminal fiefdoms. Director-General, F.M. Box, correctly observed that the party lacked quality area administrators to superintend branch officers, and advised Mosley to close down all area headquarters.[72] He suggested that, in their place, a system of visiting inspectors should be established. These officers would periodically spend a day or two at each branch and report on its condition. Box opined, however, that the party lacked suitable personnel to act as inspectors.

Mosley's director-general was evidently one of the few men in the party capable of giving him sound advice. The same could be said about Major General Fuller, who had joined the BUF in the late summer of 1934, and brought with him some impressive credentials: retired from the army in 1933, he had been chief of staff to the British Tank Corps and military assistant to the chief of the Imperial General Staff. Through the BUF he hoped to actualize the military reforms he was unable bring about while in the army.[73] He wrote for the BUF press, and in one of his articles for the Blackshirt, " Earl Haig--the man of Bronze", argued that an archaic military system drove the British Army into the swamps of Passchendale.[74] Though eccentric, and eventually anti-Semitic, he was a methodical and articulate ex-soldier whose theories about tank strategy were ahead of their time. His stature undoubtedly impressed the BUF leader. Back in August, Mosley asked him to produce a report on the BUF, commenting, " You can help us immensely, not only in our Organization, but in the development of our policy, and I would very much like to have your detailed criticism of it." [75]

Fuller submitted his report to Mosley in October.[76] He expressed confidence in the party's potential, but observed that the BUF could succeed only if radical changes were made. He argued that unless the party were given some much needed discipline and a

clear-cut, obtainable, objective to strive for, it would split into hostile factions or disintegrate altogether. Winning parliamentary seats was the objective Fuller had in mind, and to this end he urged that the paramilitary aspects of the BUF be toned down considerably. Unlike Mosley, Fuller appreciated the conservative nature of British political culture, and correctly pointed out that the Blackshirts were counter-productive: "in a revolutionary country they would be right, but in a conservative country they are wrong".[77] He advised that a defence force should be inconspicuous as possible and limited to its original purpose--maintaining free speech. He suggested that the party be realigned so that the leader be made less solitary and more approachable; that a triumvirate be established; and that general organization be separated from political organization. Mosley evidently let Fuller's report sit on his desk until late 1934 or early 1935, when the general's prediction appeared to be coming true.

The party became divided into four opposing factions, the leaders of which had their own ideas about how it should best be organized and which policy it should pursue.[78]

The first was led by F.M Box, Fuller, and Cleghorn. This group wanted the BUF to become an orthodox political party whose ultimate goal is winning election seats. They advocated getting rid of the paramilitary aspects--the marches, etc--and argued that the Blackshirt element should be reduced to defensive work. Moreover, they were against baiting Jews. They did not, however, advocate Fuller's earlier suggestion that the BUF contest seats in the next election--the party was simply not ready for that. They argued that to field candidates prematurely and lose badly would have a negative effect on public opinion. Instead, the party should spend at least four years building up a strong electoral machine before contesting an election. They predicted that the National Government would go down to defeat and a Labour Government would take over. The BUF would then be able to make great gains with the conservative-reactionary element.

In stark contrast to the Fuller-Box-Cleghorn group was the faction led by Eric Piercy, head of I Squad. This group believed that the BUF was essentially a paramilitary organization, and was determined that it should remain as such. Therefore, as many parades and marches should be held as possible, and "drastic" action should be taken against communists and other anti-fascists.

The third, and least influential, faction of the party was sympathetic to one, Mr E. Brown, and other expelled members. Its leaders made no pretensions about what they felt the BUF's true purpose was: baiting Jews and communists.

The fourth group was led by the bitter anti-Semites William Joyce and A.K Chesterton. It also included Alexander Raven Thomson. Like the Box-Fuller-Cleghorn group, it wanted the BUF to contest seats in a general election, but at the earliest possible opportunity so as to give the party much needed exposure. This faction felt that the paramilitary aspects of the BUF should remain, but not be overdone. They argued that meetings and propaganda were by far the better way of drawing people to the movement. Like the Fuller-Box Cleghorn group the Joyce-Chesterton faction believed that the party required a thorough expunging of its "undesirable element".

Clearly, Fuller, Box, and Cleghorn best perceived the problems facing the BUF, and posited the best strategy to pursue. They realized that as long as the BUF retained the Blackshirt element, it would always be relegated to the political fringe in Britain. And this was not simply a hunch. It had been reported to Box that businessmen approached in the various districts refused to have anything to do with the BUF as long as the paramilitary aspect remained.[79] The Box-Fuller-Cleghorn group also correctly observed that the party could not be transformed into a political contender overnight.

Mosley would apply some of Fuller and Box's suggestions, but he did not take their advice to heart. For his ulterior agenda was maintaining the BUF intact as a party which would indulge his fascist fantasy, which of course meant keeping the Blackshirts--his private army--in the forefront. Had this been otherwise, he would have completely dropped "Blackshirtism", which was by now a proven political liability except in limited quarters.

For Mosley, creating an electoral machine in early 1935 was a matter of necessity. Preparing the party to contest seats could preclude its disintegration by keeping the political wing intact. With the BUF in a slump, Mosley could not allow the likes of Joyce, Chesterton, Raven Thomson or Fuller--those men who thirsted for an election fight--to leave. Moreover, preparing for an election would, as Fuller suggested, give the party some much needed direction.

In early 1935, Mosley posited a reorganization scheme which it would appear was designed to satisfy both the paramilitary and political factions of the party. His program of reform involved splitting the party into two sections. Much in the same way the German National Socialist Party was, in its formative period, divided into the SA(Storm Troops) and Political Organization(PO),[80] the BUF would be comprised of the Blackshirts and the political wing.[81] The Blackshirts, constituting the paramilitary side of the party(there would no longer be a defence force as such) would be responsible for stewarding meetings, door to door canvassing, and selling newspapers. Ian Hope Dundas was appointed as its head, with Neil Francis-Hawkins serving as his second in comand. As per Box's advice, the area system was abolished to be replaced by a system of visiting inspectors located at National Headquarters.

The political wing of the BUF would be responsible for preparing the party to contest elections. F.M Box was appointed head of Political Organization, with Wilfred Risdon and T.L Butler as his deputies. As was the case with the Blackshirts, area inspectors located at National headquarters would oversee developments at the regional level. Eric Piercy was appointed chief inspector of branches. P. Atherly and Major Cleghorn were also appointed as inspectors.

In addition to altering the structure of the party in early 1935, Mosley also reshuffled his staff.[82] William Joyce was put in charge of propaganda; John Beckett, national canvassing; John Thompson, accounts; A.K. Chesterton, press propaganda; George Phister, research; Fuller, coordination; and Raven Thomson, policy. W.J. Leaper was appointed editor of the Blackshirt.

The impact of Mosley's realignment of the BUF will be explored in the next chapter.

NOTES

[1] MI5 Report. 8 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/215.

[2] For a good brief discussion of Britain's emergence from the depression see Alfred F Havinghurst, Twentieth Century Britain (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 35-37. Britain's economic recovery during the 1930's should, however, not be overstated. It was probably the middle class which benefited most from recovery. Unemployment continued to be a serious problem, but more so at a regional rather than national level. This would account for the BUF's modest success in Lancashire, which suffered at the hands of a depressed cotton market.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Although it can be safely concluded that at the height of its success in 1934, the BUF was heavily middle class, it would be erroneous to assert that it was exclusively so; for it did attract support from all classes. G.C Webber, "Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists," Journal of Contemporary History, 19 (1984), 591.

[5] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 20-22, pp. 81-82.

[6] Ibid, p. 82.

[7] MI5 Report. 8 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/224.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Special Branch Report. PRO HO 144/20142/240.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Special Branch Report. PRO HO 144/20142/240.PRO HO 144/20142/240.

[13] Special Branch Report. 10 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/241.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Special Branch Report. 17 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/314.

[16] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/242. PRO HO 144/20144/238.

[17] Driver asserts that men who led scandalous lives rose to high positions in the party and "did more damage to the movement than a cartload of communists, and turned away decent supporters." See Nellie Driver's unpublished autobiography, From the Shadows of Exile (n.p:n.p,n.d) p. 31. Bellamy writes, "Genuine people who had been attracted by the program and policy, felt that they could no longer be associated with the types that congregated at district headquarters, and either refrained from enrolling or, having joined, soon faded out. In these spots nothing remained but a bad odour, still lingering there three or four years later. See Reynall Bellamy's unpublished autobiography, Marching with Mosley, (n.p:n.p,n.d) as cited in Stuart, Rawnsley, "The Membership of the British Union of Fascists". British Fascism. Ed. Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow. London: Croom Helm, 1980, p. 154.

[18] Two early examples of such members included one Mr Bennett and George Dent. Bennett was Home County Organizer for the BUF who was dismissed for allowing an expelled member to have a paid position in the party, and for juggling with funds. See Special Branch Report. 10 October, PRO HO 144/20142/240. Dent was the District Area Officer for Manchester. He resigned his post in March 1934 and became attached to National Headquarters. He was a known trouble-maker whom the party was anxious to get rid of. He would be arrested at the Albert Hall meeting on the 28th of October for insulting behaviour. See Special Branch Report. PRO HO 144/20142/107.

[19] An observation made by General Fuller in his October report to Mosley, as cited in Nicholas Mosley's, Beyond the Pale, p. 89.

[20] For example, Rex Tremlett, editor of the Blackshirt, resigned his post, refusing to work with "cads, thieves and swine," any longer. See Special Branch Report PRO HO/20142/240.

[21] Skidelsky, p. 335.

[22] Driver, p.31.

[23] MI5 Report. 8 October, 1934. HO 144/20142/266.

[24] Ibid.

[25] An interpretation posited by MI5. MI5 Report. 14 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/269.

[26] Thurlow, p. 104.

[27] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 27-28.

[28] Ibid, p.28.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Thurlow, pp. 104-105.

[31] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp.77-78.

[32] Skidelsky, p. 384.

[33] Rawnsley, p.163.

[34] Ian Hope Dundas' comments to the Jewish Chronicle, 2 February, 1939. As cited in Skidelsky, p. 385.

[35] The idea that Jews opposed Mosley in an organized manner before 1936 is unlikely. As Vernon Bogdanor points out, " In fact organized Jewry was not involved in attempts to break up Fascist meetings. The British Board of Deputies wisely advised Jews to stay away from Fascist meetings so as not to provoke violence." see Vernon Bogdanor, " A Deeply Flawed Hero: On Skidelsky's Biography of Mosley." Encounter, 44(1975), 71.

[36] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 76.

[37] Special Branch Report. 27 June, 1934. HO 144/20141/84.

[38] MI5 Report. 8 October. PRO HO 144/20142/221. See chapter three of this thesis for the specific details of the closing down of the BUF's foreign relations department.

[39] According to Cross, at all levels of the BUF, there was considerable pressure for the open espousal of an anti-Jewish line, p. 123.

[40] MI5 Report. 14 December 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/262. On 28 October, 1934 at the Albert Hall Mosley said, " I have encountered things in this country which I did not dream existed in Britain. One of them is the power of organised Jewry which is today mobilised against Fascism....Today we do not attack Jews on racial or religious grounds; we take up the challenge they have thrown down because they fight against Fascism and against Britain....Tonight we take up that challenge: they will it: let them have it!" As cited in Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p.85.

[41] Cross, p. 124.

[42] Special Branch Report. 16 July, 1935. HO 144/20145/223.

[43] Special Branch Report. 10 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/243.

[44] Special Branch's 27th June, 1934 report that "F.M Box is now Director of Organisation, British Union of Fascists," PRO HO 144/20141/84 should be viewed in light of the report for October 10th which said that " Dr Forgan's position has been a nominal one only and T.M.BOX[sic] has been the virtual deputy for Sir Oswald Mosley", PRO HO 144/20142/243. It is probably safe to conclude that the report meant to say that Box had assumed the role of director of organisation in Forgan's absence.

[45] Special Branch Report. 10 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/243; and MI5 Report. 8 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/226.

[46] Special Branch Report. 11 April, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/74-76.

[47] David Mayall, " Rescued from the Shadows of Exile: Nellie Driver, Autobiography and the British Union of Fascists", Immigrants and Minorities, 8 (1989), 19-39.

[48] Ibid, pp.26-27.

[49] Cross, p. 132.

[50] Rawnsley, p.160.

[51] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/242.

[52] MI5 Report. 14 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/267.

[53] Special Branch Report. 6 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/276.

[54] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/242.

[55] Special Branch Report. 26 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/173. This personal matter doubtless exacerbated the growing tension between the political and paramilitary sections of the party, which will be dealt with later in this thesis.

[56] MI5 Report. 14 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/264.

[57] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/242.

[58] Ibid. Stoke's branch headquarters was noted by A.K. Chesterton to be "part thieves kitchen and part bawdy house". Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p.90.

[59] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/242

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/237-241.

[64] Special Branch Report. 6 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/277.

[65] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/237-241.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/238.

[68] Ibid., p. 239.

[69] Ibid.,p. 239-241.

[70] Ibid.,p. 241.

[71] Driver, p.30.

[72] Special Branch Report. 6 December, 1934. HO 144/20144/276.

[73] Anthony John Trythall, " Boney" Fuller: The Intellectual General: 1878-1966 (London: Cassell, 1977), p. 181.

[74] MI5 Report. 14 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/266.

[75] Trythall, pp. 181-182.

[76] He did so before the Albert Hall meeting. Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 88.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Special Branch Report. 17 December, 1934. PRO HO 144/20144/233-236.

[79] Ibid.,p. 235.

[80] Joachim C Fest. Hitler (Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1975), p.244.

[81] Special Branch Report. 26 January, 1935.PRO HO 144/20144/172.

[82] Ibid., p.173. For a complete list of Mosley's administrative staff in Spring, 1935 see Special Branch Report. 12 March, 1935. PRO 144/20144/134.

CHAPTER THREE.

REORGANIZATION AND RESENTMENT: WINTER- SPRING,1935

Mosley spent January 1935 continuing the apparently promising Lancashire campaign begun last November: he spoke in Blackburn, Stockport, Darwen, Accrington, Earlstown, Oldham, Ormskirk, Lancaster, and Manchester.[1] His efforts in the north-west did not, however, bear their expected fruit--in spite of the fact that the Rothermere press had once again given the BUF much needed exposure by documenting the campaign. In fact, the party was reported to be having difficulties in Lancashire. In January, a BUF inspector from National Headquarters was sent to investigate why the area appeared to be so languid.[2]

Upon inspection, he found Liverpool's central headquarters located at Duke street to be in rough shape. The building itself was in shambles: panes of glass were missing from windows, the washroom was filthy, and paper was peeling from damp walls. Branch membership in early December was reported to be 159, but due to slipshod record keeping, membership tallies for January were unavailable, though a drop in local support can be inferred by the branch's reduced sales of BUF literature. The district leader's personal associates and a few ex-BF members, who had joined for mostly social reasons--ie, having drinks--comprised branch membership. Some had signed on because they were homeless and the branch headquarters offered them warmth and shelter. Collins, the branch leader, blamed National Headquarters for the branch's poor condition, claiming that his superiors in Chelsea offered him no advice or direction, and vetoed his constructive suggestion that a central city branch be established to attract support among the business class. He also said that National Headquarters sabotaged his effort to form a fascist seamen's club. The inspector, thinking that there was much more that Collins could be doing to bolster support in the region, recommended that he should infiltrate

Seaforth's and Wallasey's trade union branches. It was also suggested that in order to keep the party in the public eye, more marches should be organized, and more letters and articles should be submitted to the local press.

Not all branches in the region were as lackadaisical as Liverpool's central one. For example, the inspector's report noted that the Seaforth branch, while small (it had one hundred and fifty members) was financially sound. Its members were quite keen and often held meetings and propaganda drives. The Vauxhall branch was located in one of Liverpool's worst slums, and while its building left much to be desired, it produced encouraging canvassing results--assuming they were legitimate. Of four-hundred people queried, only ten expressed hostility to the BUF.

Such results support the prevailing historical view of the demographics of BUF support in north-west England. The movement in Lancashire and its surrounding counties, which accounted for forty percent of the BUF's total membership in 1935, drew its largest support not from the middle classes, but from the working class, specifically, employed and unemployed cotton workers.[3] In 1972, Mosley himself claimed that the BUF's total membership was ninety-percent working class.[4] The proletarian character of the BUF in Lancashire is certainly reflected in the inspector's report.[5] For example, in Vauxhall, membership was made up almost entirely of nineteen and twenty year olds of the "illiterate type", motivated to join the BUF by their poor standard of living. In Seaforth, where membership was composed entirely of industrial workers, there was a noted lack of recruiting in the affluent residential districts of Waterloo. Similarly, the party had limited appeal in Wallasey, also a more prosperous area. Its membership accounted to eighty-five men and thirty-five women.

As was the case in the rest of the country, the BUF in the north was destined for obscurity without significant middle class backing. Despite the support of Lancashire's non-unionized cotton workers, the working class was not the base upon which the party could build mass appeal; for, not surprisingly, the BUF had made next to no headway in recruiting members from the unionized working class. As Stuart Rawnsley has concluded, the "working class recruit was typically one who had not been educated into

trade union or Labour Party membership." [6] The preponderance of such working class recruits in the BUF's ranks likely even kept the middle classes away from the party. The aforementioned inspector certainly thought that such was the case in Liverpool: " the question of the " mingling of classes" arises. It is quite true that Liverpool people are very snobbish, and it is thus true that business people, especially the younger elements, would not associate freely with the present type of member." [7] Lack of middle class support meant a limited infusion of capital into the branches, which in turn meant that regional headquarters would continue to be modest dwellings, located in poorer areas, and uninviting to the middle class. [8]

The BUF itself exacerbated the problem. The inspector's report noted that BUF branches made little or no effort to elicit the support of business or industrial interests in the region. [9] This was not only because branch leaders were corrupt, lacked motivation, or suffered from inadequate assistance from their superiors, but also because many BUF members likely identified the party as a socialist organization which had little to gain from co-operating with capitalists. After all, by this time Mosley was regarded as a political outlaw by most conservatives, was positing a socialist remedy to Lancashire's ills, and throughout the country was promoting the BUF as a classless organization--a champion of the worker and enemy of exploitive capitalism. [10] Anti-capitalist sentiment is certainly reflected in a BUF pamphlet, Ten Points of Fascist Policy:

But the land of Britain shall be neither the play-ground of the few nor the spoil of the speculator. British credit shall be used for British Industry and the money system shall serve Producers and Consumers rather than Financiers and Gamblers. The misuse of credit will be a criminal offence. [11]

Some party members even regarded the BUF as a means to establish a communist dictatorship. While not referring to Lancashire specifically, MI5 reported that there were

revolutionary socialists in the party's ranks who planned to wait until the BUF destroyed the constitution and established a dictatorship before they took off " the fascist glove to disclose the socialist fist." [12] In one notable case, an entire branch of the Communist Party defected to the BUF. Obviously, this was a rare instance.[13]

Religion also proved to hold the movement back in the north-west. Stuart Rawnsley has concluded that the disproportionately high number of Roman Catholics in the BUF gave rise to much internal strife.[14] Branch leaders in Manchester, Bolton, Blackburn, Hull, and North Leeds were Catholics, and some non-Catholics felt that religion was determining promotion in the party. Liverpool's separate Catholic and Protestant branches shows the extent to which the BUF in the north-west was divided by religion. In her autobiography, Nellie Driver attests to how religion divided the party in the north. She recalls a "violently Orange" elderly couple who vowed to resign from the Nelson branch if and when the first Catholic joined it.[15] However, she also notes that religious conflict extended beyond that which occurred between Catholics and Protestants: " How could we possibly get on with the Cause when Mormon clashed with Pacifist, Catholic with ex-Communist, Methodist with C. of E. and anti-vivisectionist with Christadelphian? " [16]

Thus it would appear that issues concerning class, religion, and the party's ever present administrative ineptitudes and financial stringency assured that the BUF would not be succesful in Lancashire, which was a depressed area, more receptive to Mosley's message than most regions. Despite the discouraging picture of things there, Mosley remained confident of the movement's success in the north-west. At a meeting he held with Joyce, Beckett and Taylor, it was decided that, beginning with Lancashire's textile workers, union members who belonged to the BUF should immediately begin forming fascist "cells" in their unions.[17]

While Mosley sought to increase support in the north-west, the BUF implemented his reorganization plan, which included injecting much needed discipline into the party. In early January, Ian Hope Dundas issued standing orders, "compiled to regulate the routine and conduct of all" at National Headquarters.[18] Some of the orders, such as those prohibiting gambling and restricting where private telephone calls could be made, were obviously designed to stamp out improper conduct and ensure that the party would not be

a vehicle for private business. Others were evidently issued with the aim of eradicating factionalism and petty back-biting. For example, members were ordered to refrain from criticizing the organization or any of its officers, and to pay their fellow fascists due respect. It would seem that most of the ordinances were designed to make headquarters more like a military barracks and less like a social club. To this end, a clean and tidy atmosphere was to be maintained, uniforms were to be worn during designated hours, and strict regulations were placed on smoking and the consumption of alcohol. In addition to addressing general deportment, Hope Dundas' orders specifically delineated the role of the executive officer, the officer of the guard, and the guards.

In February, National Headquarters more specifically outlined how the Blackshirts, the paramilitary wing of the party, was to be organized.[19] It was ordered that no less than six members could constitute a unit; no less than thirty a section; and no less than 150 a company. Five companies would form a "fasces" consisting of 750 men. Such multiplication would continue to the very top of the organization headed by Ian Hope Dundas, and above him, Mosley. The privilege of wearing a black shirt would henceforward only be granted to members pledging two nights of service per week.[20] Only those units giving five nights a week of service would be accorded I Squad status. It was also announced that two administrative posts of equal rank would be created at the district level: district officer and district treasurer. The former would be responsible for organization and canvassing, sale of party literature, and the administration of political organization until Political Organization was functioning in the district on a permanent basis. The latter would be in charge of discipline as well as financial matters.

As would be expected, Mosley's attempt to rehabilitate the BUF was not well received by those members who liked things exactly as they were. Since he was instituting his reform program on Fuller's advice, the general became a widely hated figure in the party. In mid January it was reported that he was friendless in the BUF,[21] save for his association with Mosley, whose own popularity was decreased by his close association with a man regarded by many at headquarters as an outsider bent on taking over.[22]

Fuller's unpopularity was matched by that of F.M Box, head of Political Organization, who first gained enemies in the party when he stood in for Robert Forgan as director-

general in June 1934. Much to the dismay of the defence force, he had ordered that the next member who engaged in street fighting would be expelled from the party.[23] This was the order which apparently initiated the rivalry between the paramilitary and political section of the BUF, which itself had its share of members who were not particularly fond of Box. In early January, John Beckett, William Joyce's close associate, was spreading stories to the effect that the BUF was finished and Box was entirely to blame. It was alleged that Beckett was organizing a delegation of members to visit Mosley, and demand that he dismiss Box.[24] However, no reports indicate that such a plan ever materialized.

In the middle of the month, Box was engaged in a serious argument with the leader himself.[25] He vehemently objected to Mosley's appointment of one Miss Mary Richardson to take charge of part of the Lancashire area. Mosley's mother also protested.[26] Why the two so strongly opposed Richardson's appointment is unknown, but their disagreement with Mosley was serious enough to provoke Box to write out his resignation. Lady Mosley contemplated leaving the movement over the matter.

She was not, however, an ally of Box; for Political Organization had severely angered the women's section. Lady Mosley complained that Cleghorn, Box's close associate, had insulted members in the north, causing many resignations, and a consequential closure of branches.[27]

Box's staying on must have been a definite disappointment to members of the Joyce-Chesterton faction, who were reported to be constantly opposing and agitating him.[28] The paramilitary wing also continued to be strongly dissatisfied with Box. Members of I Squad were resigning in droves because he was not allowing them to parade in uniform as much as they would have liked. By March, membership in the defence force's elite division would not exceed fifteen.[29]

There were of course other malcontents in the party. The rank and file at National Headquarters were certainly not shy about expressing their displeasure to administration. On Sunday, January 15th, they refused to do cleaning and painting on the grounds that they were not paid to work on Sundays.[30] Discontented local officers also continued to be a problem. J.R Hill, leader for Birmingham, was still demanding a salary raise, and Risdon was allegedly organizing a subversion plot in Lancashire. [31] Angry over having

been passed over for promotion in favour of people who had more recently arrived to the party, he was apparently providing Mosley with deceptive, overly optimistic reports on the movement's progress in Lancashire. He was also planning to enlist the help of leading Lancashire fascists to disrupt the movement there unless Mosley dismissed certain officers at National Headquarters. Special Branch cited Risdon's threat as the reason why Mosley sent Richardson to the north.

Also in January, National Headquarters sent a special commission of inquiry to investigate a personal dispute between the district organizer for West Sussex, Charles Henry Bentinck Budd, and a member of the Worthington branch, Jones.[32] Budd threatened to kill Jones, who had apparently run off with Budd's wife. Jones called the police, had Budd arrested, and was in turn suspended by the BUF for causing the arrest of a senior officer. Budd, who had employed the "24 Hour Detective Agency"(composed of ex-BUF members) to follow Jones, claimed that the latter was a foreign communist spy who was plotting to have him declared insane. Budd was not surprisingly regarded as a wild and unstable character by the more respectable element in the Worthington Branch. For the time being, he was removed from his post.

As characters of questionable mental stability were causing trouble from within the party, they were also creating problems from without it. William Joyce and an entourage visited the house of W. Brown, an expelled member of the BUF, who had been charged and sentenced for his part in an attack on the offices of the Daily Worker. [33] National Headquarters had received word that Brown and some of his fellow BUF expatriates had been approached by one "Captain" Blacker, a man who had visited Germany posing as a representative of the BUF. Blacker was a former rank and file member of the BUF who had been in the habit of claiming that he was third in command. He was now planning on showing German propaganda films in Britain, and wanted to employ Brown and his friends as stewards in cinemas. Joyce warned the men not to get involved in this caper, as it would be very upsetting to the German government.

More serious worry was doubtless caused by Mosley's old nemesis, Arnold Leese. In January, the fact that BUF members were defecting to the rabidly anti-semitic IFL was giving rise to much anxiety in the party.[34] The IFL was also spreading the rumour that

Mosley was planning on leaving the BUF, and that Lord Lloyd would be taking over as leader. It was also reported that Rushbrook of the IFL was planning to visit Manchester, Glasgow, Leicester, Southampton, Plymouth, and Bristol with the aim of bringing disgruntled BUF and ex-BUF members on side.[35] In early March, Special Branch reported that General Fuller--who had by now written an anti-Semitic article--was in frequent contact and on very friendly terms with Arnold Leese's chief assistant, Michael Hay, a former BUF member who had been expelled from the party for sodomy.[36]

By the end of February, the BUF's popularity sank to a new low. Manchester, with a membership of 1500, was the only area holding its ground, which was probably owing to Mosley's special attention there. All others continued to slide downhill; membership generally declined and sales of the Blackshirt dropped.[37] Some BUF members were thoroughly dissatisfied with their leader--for example, those in Islington and Streatham, who claimed that Mosley was only out for his own gain. And his own mother had evidently got over any reservations she had about disgracing her son by leaving the movement: in March it was reported that she would be leaving the party shortly.[38] BUF administrators in Scotland were also less than satisfied with their leader. They were currently receiving 500 pounds a year and were now demanding 3000 pounds as a minimum annual allotment.[39] Mosley responded to their grumbling by discharging them, asserting that they were unnecessary to the buildup of a healthy movement in Scotland.

Such sternness was markedly absent, however, when it came to handling the incessant drunkard, A.K Chesterton. In early April Chesterton, chronically inebriated, was sent to the Royal Bethlem Hospital for treatment.[40] Despite the new ordinances concerning proper deportment, Mosley would not entertain the suggestion of dismissing or demoting the man he regarded as his ablest propagandist.

But Chesterton's insobriety was the least of the BUF's problems. Mosley's revitalization scheme had so far failed to reverse the party's fortunes. If anything, it worsened them. For in early March it was reported that officers in various parts of the country were interpreting his orders differently, and that reorganization was proceeding chaotically.[41] Dauntless, though, he expressed satisfaction with the movement's

progress in Lancashire, and also felt that the foundations of a good organization had been laid in Yorkshire and the North-East counties.[42] While this may have been wishful thinking, the party's popularity increased slightly. Sales of the Blackshirt increased from 12, 000 out of 19,000 copies in March to 17,000 out of 20, 000 in April. This was probably made possible by its price being reduced from two to one penny per copy.[43]

Although the BUF was about as far away from seizing power as a party could ever be, it was still capable of worrying the British Government. In late March, under-secretary in the Home Office, Sir Russell Scott, expressed concern about the existence of fascist "cells" in the civil service. It was reported to him that one Mr William Rogers, an employee in the Treasury Solicitor's Department, was the organizer of the Queens gate sub-branch of the BUF.[44] There is no definite proof substantiating the existence of cells in the civil service; however, in May, Mosley claimed to know that certain members of the national government were urging that an election be called so as to exploit the patriotic sentiment created by the Jubilee celebrations.[45]

Such information would not accord the BUF an advantage in the last British pre-war general election. Even Mosley realized that the party was incapable of contesting seats in a general election in the near future, and told members of the BUF's research directory that it would not be doing so. Ever the optimist, Mosley cast the BUF's failure to create an electoral machine in a positive light. At a meeting of the research directory, he argued that the BUF was growing faster in Britain than the National Socialist Party had in Germany; but as yet, simply did not possess the apparatus to contest a general election. Instead, the BUF would take advantage of the upcoming election by launching an intensive campaign of meetings. Following the election, it would focus on contesting by-elections in preparation for the " grand fight" in 1937 or 1938, when the British people, ravaged by economic depression, would be ready to turn to fascism. Mosley also declared his amazement about the silent support for the BUF on the part of the middle and industrial classes, especially in Yorkshire.[46]

But where such support was manifested is a mystery. By May, the movement was barely keeping its head above water.[47] Lancashire appeared to be the only active area: Bradford, Sheffield, and Huddersfield, while small and barely active, were holding their

ground. Little or no productive activity was taking place in Liverpool, which remained plagued by poor organization and weak personnel. By June its central branch would be £250 in debt, and nearly inactive.[48] Hull was reported to be developing rival factions.[49] The Leeds branch, too, was deeply divided; its membership shrank to twenty. The party in Cardiff and South Wales, run by a small shopkeeper, was marked by a total absence of support on the part of professionals or industrial workers.[50]

Matters were more serious in the London branches, which were reported to be in a state of decay. Much of the blame for this apparently rested with one B.D.E Donovan, "O.C London Command", a rather arrogant man whose leadership qualities were wanting.[51] Outer West London, which reported many resignations, was doing quite badly, as was North-East London.[52] Members there were seriously dissatisfied because they were forbidden to attack the British Union of Democrats, an organization made up of a number of ex-BUF officers.[53] Adding to this pathetic state of affairs was the fact that the IFL was succeeding in its mission of drawing disgruntled members away from the BUF who did not think that their party was sufficiently anti-Semitic.[54]

By the late spring of 1935, the BUF had become nothing short of a political burlesque. But before discussing the party's plight in the summer of 1935, another area of BUF history which was important to the party's future should be examined--its foreign relations.

* * * * *

In the absence of substantial financial domestic support for the BUF, Benito Mussolini became Mosley's principal backer. In fact, he probably kept the movement alive financially.[55] Presumably, he was investing in the BUF to establish a strong pro-Italian voice in Britain, which of course meant that Mosley had to pursue a policy pleasing to *Il Duce*. It certainly meant avoiding offending him--something which certain members of the BUF risked doing in the summer of 1934. In July, Austrian Nazis assassinated Austrian Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfus. Mussolini, who Mosley visited around the time, was furious, and contemplated war with Germany.[56] He would not have been pleased

to learn that the BUF's foreign relations department was reported to be engaged in intrigues with Austrian Nazis. Mosley wisely disbanded the department, and reassigned its head, George Phister, to the research department [57].

Mosley was not, however, going to strain himself to please *Il Duce*. That he regarded himself as Mussolini's equal--not employee--was seen in his attitude toward the Montreux meeting, a gathering of Europe's fascist leaders, excluding Hitler and Mussolini, in Switzerland to discuss establishing a kind of fascist international under an Italian umbrella. M. Eugenie Coselchi, president of the "*Comites pour l'universalité de Rome*", and directly responsible to Mussolini[58], convened the meeting, and in his opening address explained that while fascism was not international, European peace would be realized when each state adopted corporatism.[59] The Peace of Rome would then be re-established as a beacon of world harmony. Mosley was not very impressed by the idea. He reportedly told a BUF member that, like the German National Socialist Party, the BUF was an intensely nationalist movement.[60] He therefore had no intention of attending a conference interested in Italian fascism which aspired to be international in spirit[61]--a somewhat arrogant line to take considering that Mosley met Mussolini in Rome on the 9th of January, 1935 to obtain a rather handsome donation.[62]

Mosley's absence at Montreux did not go unnoticed by *Il Duce*. If the dissension reported at the meeting between Northern and Southern Europeans[63] is any indication, the fascist parties of Europe began choosing sides in a potential war between Italy and Germany. In late January, 1935, Mussolini sent the Italian Minister in Norway, Mr Rodollo, to visit Mosley to inquire into his non-appearance.[64] The exact nature of the ensuing discussions is a matter of speculation. If not made explicitly aware of any concerns Mussolini may have had about him *vis a vis* Germany, Mosley likely interpreted Rodollo's visit as an expression of dissatisfaction on the part of the Italian dictator.[65] For in March, the BUF appeared to distance itself from the German National Socialist Party, as would be indicated by a circular issued to Nazi organizations and German government departments. It expressed displeasure about Mosley's failure to congratulate the Germans on the occasion of the return of the Saar to the Reich on March 1st.[66] It also described an unfavourable report given by a Nazi official who said that he received a

poor reception from Mosley in England. The circular was also censorious of Lady Mosley's criticism of Hitler in the French Press. She reportedly said that "Hitler was the greatest enemy to the BUF since the people in this country would not join on account of the brutal methods in Germany." [67] The circular went on to say that Major General Fuller and W.E.D. Allen, the BUF representatives who planned on visiting Germany, were not welcome by the German Cabinet, and that Nazi organizations and German government departments were forbidden to give the BUF any information. [68]

George Phister obtained a copy of this document and immediately began communicating with high ranking Nazi officials, inquiring into the "cold" manner in which Fuller and Allen were greeted in Germany. [69] Mosley discovered this and suspended Phister for six months without pay for violating the order forbidding communication with Nazis. [70]

In the meantime, it would appear that Mussolini was growing less than pleased with his English investment. In March, Count Grandi, the Italian ambassador in London, wrote to him, commenting, "with a tenth of what you give Mosley...I feel I could produce results ten times better." [71] Mussolini evidently heeded his ambassador's words, and reduced funding to the BUF by the summer of 1935. [72] Mosley probably became aware that he would be receiving smaller contributions in the spring of 1935--likely March. For in the middle of the month, Mosley sent Ian Hope Dundas, Chief of Staff, to Rome, ostensibly to establish a more intimate relationship with the Italian Fascist Party. [73] Presumably, Hope Dundas' real objective was to convince Mussolini to reconsider reducing contributions to the BUF. He failed in this. [74] For twelve days after his return, Special Branch discovered that Mosley planned a major expenditure cut. It was reported that the "British Union of Fascists has practically decided to take over accommodation in Sanctuary Buildings, Westminster S.W. for its new headquarters", much less expensive premises. [75]

In April there was a sudden improvement in relations between the BUF and Nazi Germany. As Mosley recalls, the Ribbentrop bureau organised a secret meeting between himself and Hitler. [76] Meeting for the first time in Hitler's flat in Munich, the two spoke through an interpreter for about an hour before having lunch. Hitler sat in his chair, pale,

appearing exhausted until Mosley expressed the view that war between Britain and Germany would be a terrible disaster. Hitler then came to life, launching " with much vigour into some of his main themes".[77] He " wanted assurances from England and Western Europe that they would not jump on his back in the event of a clash between Germany and Russia."[78] Mosley said that if he ever came to power, he would leave Germany alone. Hitler went on to say that as the two leading land and naval powers, Germany and Britain would be the two pillars of world stability. The British fascist leader opined that "there was no point on the entire globe at which British and German interests clashed "--an outlook which Mosley would maintain, even when the author of Britain's appeasement policy resigned himself to the fact that war between Germany and Britain was inevitable.

NOTES

- [1] MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/122.
- [2] Special Branch Report. 28 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/167-171.
- [3] G.C Webber, p. 591.
- [4] Sir Oswald Mosley, interview, Firing Line, PBS, London, 25 March, 1972.
- [5] Special Branch Report. 28 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/167-171.
- [6] Rawnsley, p. 160.
- [7] Special Branch Report. 28 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/168. In reference to Seaforth, the inspector also noted that a lack of recruiting from the nearby residential districts of Waterloo was " again probably due to snobbery." Ibid., p. 170.
- [8] As Nellie Driver recalls, " The movement was so financially poor that districts had to get headquarters at cheap rents. They were generally up many flights of stairs, dimly lit, stale smelling and in the poorest quarters.", p. 34.
- [9] Special Branch Report. 28 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/171.
- [10] David Mayall, " Rescued from the Shadows of Exile," p.26.
- [11] Ten Points of Fascist Policy: Forward to the Greater Britain (N.P,N.P,N.D).
- [12] MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/124.
- [13] Rawnsley, p. 161.
- [14] Ibid., pp. 161-162.
- [15] Driver, p. 21.

[16] Ibid., p.23.

[17] Special Branch Report. 28 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/164.

[18] Special Branch Report. 7 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/212.

[19] Special Branch Report. 22 February, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/153-161.

[20] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 91.

[21] Special Branch Report. 18 January, 1935. PRO HO 144.20144/184.

[22] MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/126. See also, Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 89.

[23] Special Branch Report. PRO HO 144/20142/314.

[24] Special Branch Report. 26 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/173.

[25] Special Branch Report. 18 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/183.

[26] Richardson had spent three years in prison for suffragette activities. Cross, p. 98. For more about female membership in the BUF see Martin Durham, "Women and the British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940," Immigrants and Minorities, 8(1989), 3-18.

[27] Special Branch Report. 14 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/196.

[28] Special Branch Report. 18 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/182.

[29] Special Branch Report. 5 March, 1935. PRO HO/144/20144/142.

- [30] Special Branch Report. 18 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/182.
- [31] Ibid., pp. 183-184.
- [32] Special Branch Report. 11 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/207-210.
- [33] Ibid., p. 208.
- [34] Special Branch Report. 14 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/198.
- [35] Special Branch Report. 29 January, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/172.
- [36] Special Branch Report. 6 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/43.
- [37] MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/123-124.
- [38] Special Branch Report. 5 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/142.
- [39] Special Branch Report. 19 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/105-106.
- [40] Special Branch report. 11 April, 1935. PRO HO/20144/74.
- [41] Special Branch Report. 5 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/42.
- [42] Special Branch Report. 19 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/106.
- [43] Special Branch Report. 11 April, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/79.
- [44] Letter from Sir Russell Scott to Sir Warren Fisher. 26 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/100.
- [45] Special Branch Report. 27 May, 1935. PRO HO

144/20144/31-32.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Special Branch Report. 9 May, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/46-48.

[48] Special Branch Report. 20 June, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/269.

[49] Special Branch Report. 9 May, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/46-48.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] See footnote 56 of Chapter One.

[56] Mosley, My Life, p. 359.

[57] Special Branch Report. 6 September, 1934. PRO 144/20144/127. At the beginning of August, MI5 reported that " One Richard Von Sradiot has acted as liason between the Nazi Bureau for Austrian affairs at Munich and the British Union of Fascists. In the course of discussions he has advised Dr Phister and his colleagues of their mistake in having made contact with Prince Starhemberg and the Dollfuss brand of Fascism. He is arranging for closer contact between the British Union of Fascists and the Austrian Nazis". See MI5 Report. 1 August, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/111. It would appear that German Nazis preferred conferring with Phister rather than with Mosley. Otto Benes, the Nazi leader in London regarded Mosley as a political adventurer of no great standing, and felt that Phister, Hope Dundas, and Raven Thomson were more worthy of recognition. See MI5 Report. 8 October, 1934. PRO HO 144/20142/221. In his 8 June, 1934 diary entry, Bruce Lockhart noted, " Hitler's people are not keen on Tom [Oswald].", Bruce Lockhart, Diary, p. 297.

[58] The Montreux meeting probably convened in mid January, 1935. According to the French Paper Le Franciste, the following parties were represented at Montreux. As cited in MI5 Report. 16 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/128:

Austria: Heimwehr delegate, M. Rinaldi.
 Belgium: National Legion delegate, Mr. Hoornaert.
 Ligue Nationale Cooperative du Travail, M
 Somville.
 Denmark: Nationalkorpset delegate, M. Thomas Damsgaard
 Schmidt.
 France: La Francisme delegate, Marcel Bucard.
 Greece: National Socialist Party, Georges Mercouris.
 Ireland: Blue Shirts, General O'Duffy.
 Lithuania: National Party delegate, M. Tamosciaitis.
 Norway: National Group delegate, Vidkun Quisling.
 Holland: Black Front delegate, Arnold Meijer.
 Portugal: National Syndicalism delegate, Eca de Queiroz.
 Roumania: Iron Guard delegate, M. Motza.
 Spain: Phalange Espagnole des J.O.N.S delegate, Ernest
 Gimenez Caballero.
 Sweden: National Youth Union delegate, Reutger Essen.
 Switzerland: Fascist federation of Switzerland delegate,
 Colonel Arthur Fonjallaz.

[59] Ibid., p.129.

[60] Ibid., p. 128.

[61] Ibid., p. 130.

[62] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 32.

[63] MI5 Report, March, 1935. PRO 144/20144/129. A separate meeting of Northern European fascists was scheduled for late December, 1934 in Berlin, and a separate meeting of Southern European fascists was scheduled for late January or early February.

[64] Ibid., p. 28.

[65] It would appear that Mussolini had always been concerned about Mosley's association with the Germans. In June 1934, Count Grandi, the Italian ambassador, was

censured by *Il Duce* for not telling him about a meeting Mosley had with the German ambassador. Bruce Lockhart, *Diary*, p. 297.

[66] Special Branch Report. 20 March, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/109-110.

[67] Nicholas Mosley, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 71.

[68] Special Branch Report. 20 March, 1935. PRO HO/20144/109-110.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] As cited in Nicholas Mosley, *Beyond the Pale*, p.31.

[72] See foot-note 52 of Chapter One.

[73] Special Branch Report. 4 April, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/79.

[74] Special Branch reported: "he returned on the evening of Monday 1st April and reported to Sir Oswald MOSLEY that, although he had been successful in I interviewing highly-placed officials in the Fascist Party in Italy, Signor MUSSOLINI refused to see him. Full details of his visit have not been ascertained, but such information as has been gleaned shows that he did not entirely succeed in his object". Ibid.

[75] Special Branch Report. 12 April, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/71. In May, the BUF were reported to be negotiating with certain Italians individuals concerning the Mediterranean. Specifically, the two parties discussed the policies Britain and Italy would pursue when a British Fascist Government came to power. See Special Branch Report. 9 May, 1935. PRO HO 144/20144/46. Could Mussolini have been making sure that Mosley had Italy's best interest at heart?

[76] Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, pp. 364-365.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR.
THE ASCENDANCY OF NEIL
FRANCIS-HAWKINS AND THE DOWNFALL OF THE BUF

In early June, 1935, the BUF was making final arrangements for moving into its new headquarters. But even such an apparently straightforward step was not taken without controversy. Joyce was apparently worried about the expenses incurred by the move, and by the party's outstanding debts. He therefore saved funds allocated to him by not holding as many meetings as Mosley would have liked during the last six months--something for which he was censured by the leader. The treasury--now composed of F.M Box, Hope Dundas, John Thompson, and Francis-Hawkins--came to his defence, though, by arguing that he had saved the BUF from financial complications.[1]

Also early in the month, the party was given an opportunity to do some damage to the vexatious IFL. The BUF was contemplating a libel suit after Leese's group printed an article in their party organ, The Fascist, alleging that General Fuller had been initiated into Aleister Crowley's "Beast 666 " occult group.[2] On the advice of their lawyers, however, the BUF decided not to pursue the matter; for the general had apparently written some material for Crowley which was, according to Special Branch, "of such a nature that it would be dangerous to bring an action to law." Fuller, who had a strong interest in the occult, had formed a friendship with Crowley, the notorious mystic, in the early twenties, and published an article in the Occult Review in which he asserted that the black arts are actually white "lucid and limpid, capricious will o' wisps which beckon us over heath and through hut, throng, cathedral, city and study." [3] The BUF evidently did not want the general's spooky beliefs to further diminish the movement in the eyes of the public.

By late June, Mosley made some important amendments to his reform program. As already mentioned, in early 1935 he intended that the BUF be divided into two organizations: Political Organization and the Blackshirts. But by the late spring, it was

apparent that Political Organization had failed to establish itself at the local level. He therefore decided that the entire district organization would operate under the control of the Blackshirt Organization, and that Political Organization would operate solely in an advisory capacity[4]--i.e., provide district officers with skilled instruction on political work. The district officer, whose main task would be organizing political work in the district, would be superior to the district treasurer, who would supervise district headquarters. The woman's section would be organized along the same lines. Mosley also decided to abolish the branch system. Districts would now be organized to cover one entire parliamentary constituency.[5] He made it very clear that headquarters were not to be social clubs, but nuclei of political work. In keeping with the fascist obsession with physical fitness, however, some would be retained as centres for athletic activity. Presumably to discourage district members from conglomerating at headquarters, they would be organized into units, dispersed throughout the district, operating from members houses or hired rooms. Only one meeting per week was permitted.

Although the BUF was now under the effective control of the Blackshirts, it was made clear that no differentiation was to be made between the Blackshirts and political members: all were expected to partake in political work.[6] A new tripartite division of members was also created: the first would consist of those who would give five nights of service a week; the second would be comprised of those pledging two nights; and division three would be made up of non-active recruits--"a mass of members of people supporting but not necessarily active in the movement."

If doubled sales of the Blackshirt are any indication, by the end of June, the BUF's popularity had increased--if only slightly.[7] And even though Mosley had decided not to field candidates in the upcoming election, there was some consideration given to nominating him as a candidate for the Ormskirk Division of Lancashire or for Evesham, Worchestershire.[8]

As usual, though, the party resonated with dissension and acrimony. P Symes, the national inspecting officer of the Birmingham District was brought before a tribunal to answer charges of disloyalty.[9] He had allegedly commented that Mosley was unsuitable for leadership, and that there was "too much Mosleyism and too little fascism" in the

BUF. It was also reported that he had been boasting that he had flown Mosley to Rome to meet Mussolini for the purpose of obtaining financial aid. He also was bragging to have gone to Rome by himself to receive funds and instructions from *Il Duce*. Furthermore, he was claiming to have had a very convivial time with Mosley and Hope Dundas in Paris.

By the middle of July, conflict and dissent within the party's ranks was occurring with increased frequency, and Mosley had had enough of it.[10] A minor complaint by the loose cannon, Budd, was the final straw. Mosley set up a court of inquiry, comprised of Major Lucas, Taylor, and Captain Reaveley to examine interparty strife. Written statements would be taken from witnesses and submitted to the leader.

The knives which some members had long been sharpening were now put to use. Not surprisingly, F.M Box was the popular target. A.K Chesterton blamed him as well as his deputy, Cleghorn, for impeding the movement and for provoking the ire of several officers, including Joyce, Beckett, Leaper, Donovan and Piercy. Joyce placed the blame for the recent breakdown of the propaganda department squarely on the shoulders of Box. Beckett criticized him for the improper working of the treasury, and Leaper accused Box of trying to make him look bad in Mosley's eyes.

The leader interviewed each of these men separately, and made it clear to them that Box had only been appointed as director-general in light of Robert Forgan's failure to keep the party on a sound financial footing. Now that Box had managed to get the party through a financially difficult period by instituting a rather unpopular retrenchment program, he and his deputy, Cleghorn, were mere political advisers on electoral issues. Mosley thus discredited the efforts of, and demoted his ablest political mind in order to keep the peace in his leadership cadre.

William Joyce must have been pleased with the outcome of the inquest, though he did not escape entirely unscathed. Once again the leader censured him for not holding enough meetings. It was noted that he should have held 300 national meetings between November 1934 and May 1935, but only held 70. Naturally, Joyce tried to pin the blame for this on Box, but Mosley was not convinced. Others were also scolded. In a July 11th meeting with his senior officers, Mosley reprimanded the treasury for meddling in

political matters. John Thompson was upbraided for not heeding complaints about the department's dilatoriness. Cleghorn was also censured for his lack of tact. Mosley also criticized Raven Thomson, Beckett, and Leaper for their clandestine discussions concerning party matters, and for not coming forward with their complaints in "a fascist and manly spirit".[11] To prevent a similar buildup of resentment, Mosley announced that in future, officers with grievances were to discuss them openly at weekly meetings, which would replace the old research department. The treasury would also be abolished. John Thompson, now the sole financial officer, would field questions concerning the party's fiscal matters. More serious issues were to be dealt with by the policy propaganda directory, comprising Box, Raven Thomson, Joyce, Beckett, Leaper, and Thompson; and the organizing department, consisting of Cleghorn, Dundas, Fuller, and Francis-Hawkins.

After Mosley had to his satisfaction dealt with the internecine squabbles plaguing the party, he turned his attention to international affairs. In June, Britain signed a naval agreement with the Germans allowing them to build a navy thirty-five percent the size of the Royal Navy. Believing that they had successfully placated the Nazis, the British Government sent Anthony Eden to Italy to employ a similar tactic in dissuading Mussolini from pursuing his territorial ambitions in Abyssinia. In exchange for dropping any claims on Abyssinia, Italy would be given Ogaden, a small piece of desert. [12] *Il Duce* was less than impressed by this offer, maintaining that he had no need to bargain. Although he claimed to be afraid neither of the British fleet or of British public opinion, it would nevertheless have been judicious for Mussolini to have had a strong pro-Italian voice in Britain speaking on his behalf during this rather tense period.

On the 25th of August, Mosley returned from Italy and immediately called a meeting of his senior officers.[13] Believing that the vast majority of Britons would oppose going to war at the behest of the League of Nations, he announced that the BUF would make "political capital" out of the international tension created by the Italo-Abyssinian dispute. Vociferously opposing sanctions against Italy offered the BUF leader a double benefit: not only would it serve to placate Mussolini, it would also allow Mosley to present himself as a patriot, interested only in preventing British lives from being needlessly

sacrificed. To this end, a vigorous propaganda campaign would be launched. Walls and pavements would be whitewashed with the slogan, "Mind Britain's Business", and beside it, the BUF's new symbol, an encircled lightning bolt. A series of large meetings would also be held. Mosley was scheduled to speak at Trafalgar Square and or Covent Garden Opera House on September 1st; the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on the 2nd; and the town hall in Birmingham on the 3rd.[14] Nation-wide, BUF orators were instructed to speak in plain clothes, suspend all normal fascist propaganda, and concentrate their energies on the current international crisis. If their message was dismissed as a "mere stunt in favour of Mussolini", speakers were to point out that non-involvement in foreign quarrels has been a central plank of the BUF's platform from the beginning.

The "Mind Britain's Business" Campaign did not, however, get off to an optimum start. Londoners were at first puzzled by the strange graffiti chalked on the city's roads, pavements and walls,[15] and Mosley's scheduled series of mass meetings would be smaller than originally hoped for. He cancelled the Trafalgar Square meeting because he could not gather a sufficient number of fascists on such short notice, was unable to secure the opera house at Covent Garden, and could not book the town hall in Birmingham. But he did manage to attract 1,500 interested spectators to the Adelphi Theatre on September 2nd.[16]

Speaking for about an hour, he argued that Abyssinia was a backward and heathen land, whose inhabitants kidnapped and enslaved British citizens. He claimed that neither the British Government, nor the socialists who constantly protested against wage slavery, spoke one word against the bondage of British people. Italy should be praised, least of all blamed, for clearing up the "plagued area". He condemned the Labour Party which had weakened the country by their constant call for disarmament, but now sought to drag the country to war against a well-armed nation. He was also highly critical of the government for putting Britain in the humiliating position of having to depend on France to stay out of war, and he dismissed Anthony Eden as a tailor's dummy stuffed with straw. Predictably, the Jews absorbed some of the blame for the trouble. Following the meeting, Mosley gathered some of his Blackshirts around him and told them:

Well, my brother Blackshirts, together we will do it. We have shown in this country in three years a force and spirit that nothing is going to stop. Blackshirts have got guts. Our will is stronger than their will, and the triumphant will of men, if it can be strong enough, will achieve anything in the world, and that is why the Blackshirt force goes through the old gangs today like steel through butter....Fascist organisation following the fascist spirit will conquer Britain and conquer the world; and everyone of you I thank.[17]

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of such words. Mosley's unalterable conviction that the BUF would eventually seize power explains his brazen approach to both Mussolini and the German Nazis. When he sat across from Mussolini or Hitler, he was not looking at his fascist superior, but an equal--a German or Italian counterpart who was only more powerful because he had had more time to develop fascism in his country.

Mosley's over-inflated sense of self importance was particularly evident following the height of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis. In late October, it was reported that he was claiming to have acted as an intermediary between the British and Italian governments.[18] He took credit for the moderation of Britain's position *vis a vis* Italy, claiming to have supplied the British Government with information suggesting that Italy had no hostile intentions toward Britain. Whether Mosley did, in fact, provide the British government with a pipeline to Rome can only be answered with certainty pending the availability of new sources. Even if he had been, it is, however, doubtful that anything he said influenced Britain's posture toward Italy or *vice versa*. But Mosley's state of mind was such that it would have been unnatural for him to do anything other than jump to the fantastic conclusion that the information which *he* provided to the British Government was responsible for its foreign policy position.

One thing is certain as far as Mosley's position on the Italo-Abysinnian dispute was concerned: he had once again seriously misjudged British public opinion. Most British people were in favour of collective security, and were singularly disgusted when hearing about the Hoare-Laval Plan. It was therefore not surprising that Mosley's hoped for "political capital" failed to materialize. While, at the end of October, copies of the Blackshirt remained at about 22,000 copies per week, which indicated continued quiet support for the party, total active membership in the BUF probably did not exceed 2,000.[19] BBC singer, former Mosley schoolmate, and BUF "officer", Captain Cuthbert Reaveley commented that the movement was "slowly dying and dying in a very nasty way, leaving bad memories and bad debts".[20]

The party's plight nation-wide would support such an assessment.[21] North London branches had deteriorated considerably in the last eight to six months. The north-west, once such a promising area, was practically moribund: although the Wallasey branch in Cheshire was claiming to be making favourable progress, Liverpool had practically shut down. Yorkshire was doing poorly, the north-east area was in a chaotic state, and most of the south-coast towns had very little active membership. The movement in South Wales all but ceased to exist--the Newport Branch, for example, had a grand total of one active officer. The only bright spot in this dark picture was the East End of London, with its large Jewish population, where the BUF could exploit native-anti-Semitism to great effect.[22] Definite advances were made in the Stepney and Shoreditch branches, due mainly to the popularity of caustic street speaker, "Jock" Houston.

With the party being in such a poor state, it was understandable that Mosley officially announced that the BUF would not contest seats in the December election. Following the election, Mosley, commented to F.M Box that " We will be ready by the next election".[23] Box, now thoroughly fed up with his leader, responded, " You won't be ready in ten years time",[24] and shortly thereafter announced that he would be resigning from the party early in the new year. This must not have been a difficult decision. He had no reason to remain loyal to Mosley--a man who demonstrated anything but loyalty to him.

Although Mosley claimed that Box's departure was a bitter blow to the organization, he could not have been too unhappy to see him go. Unlike many of Mosley's obsequious senior officers, Box was a hard-headed realist who resisted sticking to his assigned role in his leader's fantasy--he refused to feed Mosley's delusion that the BUF was well on its way to seizing power. He consistently opposed militarism and anti-semitism, and his goal of transforming the BUF into an orthodox mainstream party ran counter to Mosley's megalomaniac ambitions. He was also highly critical of Mosley's pro-Italian position, claiming that Rome was dictating BUF policy.[25]

Box's enemies on both the political and paramilitary sides of the party must have been delighted with the news that their old nemesis was on his way out. Members of the Joyce-Chesterton faction could not celebrate for long, though, as there was another detested figure making waves in the leadership group.

Neil Francis-Hawkins was a fanatically dedicated member of Mosley's staff, who spent up to twelve hours a day at headquarters--and his work ethic paid off. Beginning as an adjutant to Eric Piercy, head of I Squad, he was promoted to second in command of the Blackshirt Organization. In July, 1935, he was made head of the Blackshirts when Chief of Staff, Ian Hope Dundas, was placed in charge of a newly created leader's department.[26] Because the Blackshirts now administered the political arm of the party, Francis-Hawkins suddenly found himself commanding a very powerful position--something the party's political leaders would have been decidedly displeased about. But Joyce, Chesterton, and Beckett were not the only members who would have detested Hawkins appointment. He was a rigorous taskmaster; and because he was single, and had a penchant for giving preferential treatment to a clique of bachelors known as his "mafia", he was marked as a homosexual.[27] It was reported that many officers, if assured of jobs outside the movement, would have left the party on account of Francis-Hawkins.[28]

Not surprisingly, his appointment as head of the Blackshirt Organization touched off a power struggle. In October, 1935, the Blackshirts, the leader's department, and the propaganda department were vying for the leader's ear.[29] It was reported that Beckett and A.K Chesterton were exercising a great deal of influence over Mosley.[30]

However, Francis-Hawkins, who had been steadily seizing power, could not be held off for long. For he possessed all the attributes of Mosley's ideal right-hand man: he was thoroughly dedicated, absolutely loyal to the movement and to the leader, and--most importantly--was a staunch advocate of the military form of organization.[31]

Francis-Hawkins scored a major victory over his opponents when he was appointed as director-general in early 1936.[32] The Blackshirt Organization, henceforth known as the Department of Organization, would now manage all aspects of the BUF, save for the leader's department, administered by Ian Hope Dundas. The Department of Organization would be divided into northern and southern zones, each under the command of assistant director-generals of organization, immediately responsible to Francis-Hawkins.

Mosley's thorough commitment to the military form of organization was reflected in his new election strategy, which he announced to his senior officers early in the year.[33] He stressed the importance of garnering support during non-election periods. To this end, units of Blackshirts would be placed in every ward of every town, in each village, and each polling station so as to build a strong division three membership. To attract more active members, the level of mandatory service in division one and two would be reduced, and, as added incentive, a new military-style uniform--something similar to that worn by the SS, complete with jack-boots, cap, and jacket--would be provided to division one members. He also said that a future election campaign would be conducted according to the "Blackshirt technique", comprised of three essential elements:

- (1) A Blackshirt column on the march. This means a concentration of Blackshirts; the bigger the concentration the bigger the column, and the bigger the effect upon the people.
- (2) The band, the banners, and the display of fascism which arrests and gathers the crowd.
- (3) Equipment of loud-speakers to punch home the message to people.

While Fife-and-drum had always been a central aspect of the BUF, Mosley's fascism had been unique in that it had a strong intellectual base. Whereas Mussolini made up his ideology as he went along, and Hitler's mind was, in the words of A.J.P Taylor, "a junk-store of tired, second-hand ideas",[34] Mosley began his party with a clearly articulated ideological frame of reference. However, his megalomaniac craving was incompatible with his somewhat academic presentation. Hitler harnessed a nation of fanatical devotees by appealing not to their intellects, but to their base emotions—fear, anger, and pride. By early 1936, Mosley was acknowledging that reason has its limits. He told his senior officers that:

Programmes and policies alone do not win. Strike and shock their senses with something new. Rouse a red-hot lava of opposition if necessary; it will cool down to interest and later to solid support. Let the people realise that here is something new, forceful, something determined, something outside previous politics, something with a new and serious sincerity, something which is beyond the movements which have failed.[35]

Mosley's advocacy of a more intense military presentation must, of course, be viewed within the context of the party's growing support in the east end of London—an area characterized by a deep division between its Jewish and non-Jewish population. Vitriolic speakers like "Jock" Houston and Mick Clarke proved that the party could attract significant backing there simply by exploiting native anti-Semitism. Mosley doubtless reasoned that he could garner even greater support in the east-end if the BUF adopted a more Nazi-like appearance. Hence the introduction of a uniform similar to that worn by the SS, the name change from the British Union of Fascists to the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists(BU, for short), and the great stress placed on an anti-Semitic line. Mosley's move toward a more German fascist model would explain why militant anti-semites like Joyce, Chesterton, and Beckett remained with the party even

after Francis-Hawkins had secured Mosley's ear. Steady pay-checks were, of course, also an incentive to remain.

On the 22nd of March Mosley gave yet another speech at the Albert Hall. He spoke favourably of Germany as the best line of defence against the Soviet Union, asserted that the "best hope of peace in Europe and the world is the closest possible association between Britain and Germany", [36] and denounced organized world Jewry:

It is the force of Jewish money which owns the cinema, body and soul, which moulds the minds of the people and the children of the people, to hatred of everything....the force of the razor[sic], the force of the knife, the force used in the street. (Loud applause). What force is there in the world which at the same time uses the vilest instruments in the City of London and uses the Red Army of Russia(Applause) What force alone in the world seeks to defeat civilisation that it may conquer. Seeks to erecton the ruins of western civilisation. What is the force which Fascism alone dares to challenge--the power of the Jew. (Applause, loud and continued). [37]

Mosley went on to say that the Jew created anti-Semitism, "by just letting people see him and his method," and that even Hitler was not anti-Semitic before he saw a Jew. He argued that anti-Semitism did not become a force in Britain, until, "they [Jews] came into the open, when they marched into Hyde Park and tried to drag us to war with Germany". [38]

While Mosley was loudly applauded at Albert Hall, his message, as would be expected, was also met by vigorous protest. Foreseeing possible trouble at the meeting, the police had taken elaborate precautions. Hundreds of officers, both mounted and on foot, surrounded the building. [39] When the meeting began, demonstrators, their arms linked,

tried to make their way to the hall, but were pushed back by the police. Sixteen inside protesters were arrested.

In the wake of the meeting, anti-fascists not only denounced Mosley's vitriolic oratory, but also the behaviour of the police. Communist M.P., William Gallacher, accused the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, of trying to mislead the House concerning the nature of anti-fascist protest at the Albert Hall.[40] Gallacher argued that protesters had no intention other than to demonstrate peacefully. He also accused Mosley of incitement, and accused the police of false arrest. He said that "there would have been no trouble if the mounted police had not charged the crowd. There was no justification for such behaviour", and demanded an inquiry into police conduct at the meeting. In light of Sir John's refusal to do so, the Daily Worker reported that the executive of the London Trades Council was going to move a special resolution urging the government to suppress fascist "military squads" by putting into operation current laws "for the suppression of incitement to violence." [41]

While it is almost impossible to ascertain the attitude of individual police officers at the local level toward the BU, it is highly doubtful that the Metropolitan police, or the Conservative government, was sympathetic to the party. The government's unwillingness to suppress Mosley in the wake of the Albert Hall meeting does not necessarily indicate favouritism, but rather a reluctance to infringe on civil liberty and a reluctance to appear to be acting at the behest of the radical left.[42]

Moreover, the state was prepared to take legal action against fascists judged to be expounding a seditious kind of propaganda. In June 1936, Arnold Leese was prosecuted on the grounds of public mischief (thought not on the grounds of seditious libel) after an article appeared in the Fascist, which accused Jews of practising ritual murder. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour. The IFL became practically moribund thereafter.[43]

As far as the "Jewish question" was concerned, Mosley never reached the sickening extremes of Leese, who in 1935 wrote, "It must be admitted that the most certain and permanent way of disposing of Jews would be to exterminate them by some humane method such as the lethal chamber".[44] Mosley never advocated the extermination of

Jews, nor ever espoused a racist objection to Jews. He objected to Jews as an organized interest and alien culture, not as a race.[45] His proposed ultimate solution to the "Jewish problem" would be the founding of a Jewish homeland in one of the "many waste places of the earth possessing great potential fertility." In the meantime, he advocated the deportation of Jews proven to be disloyal. Those allowed to stay would be treated as foreigners, having no citizenship rights.[46]

Mosley believed that an anti-Jewish line must be propagated carefully. Rank and file speakers were, for example, ordered not to devote a disproportionate amount of their speeches to the Jewish question,[47](whether they heeded these orders is, of course, another question) and Mosley declined funding which would be contingent on placing the Jewish question in the forefront. In late March, A.C Scrimgeour, a generous contributor and virulent anti-Semite, offered to fund a large meeting at a hall such as Albert Hall or Olympia, so long the meeting were purely anti-Jewish in nature.[48] He proposed that free copies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion be distributed to the audience. While some of the party's senior officers were reported to be enthusiastic about the idea, Mosley felt that a meeting of such a nature might spell the end of the movement.

By the end of March 1936, the BU's standing, on the whole, remained considerably weak. It would appear, however, that total active membership in the party had increased to 4000 in March, 1936 from an estimated 2000 in October, 1935.[49] Though Special Branch viewed their claim skeptically, party members opined that the BU had increased its level of sympathetic support--ie, a larger division three membership. A growth of active and non-active membership was probably the result of steadily increasing support in the east-end of London in early 1936. Raven Thomson had been the first of the BU's senior officers to speak there. He was soon joined by Joyce, and then Mosley himself. Dressed in military-style uniform, he led a half "mile column" to a meeting in Victoria Park on June 7th.[50]

As the BU increased the intensity of its East End campaign, its opponents responded accordingly. Mosley's meeting in Victoria Park was met by a spirited counter-meeting. Several anti-fascist groups gathered in another area of the park to hear various speakers call for a united front against the BUF.[51] For example, Ted Bramley, a representative of

the London District Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, accused the British government of using the police to protect the BU. The speakers had difficulty maintaining their audience, however; for many members were drawn away by the sight of the arriving Blackshirt parade. In total, nine anti-fascists were arrested.[52] The counter-demonstration was followed by an anti-fascist march led by Douglas' Social Credit Greenshirts and members of the Communist Youth League.

During the summer of 1936, the intensity of anti-fascist protest increased considerably.[53] In the provinces, marching fascists were routinely attacked with stones and bricks; and in one notable instance, Mosley was shot at. In Hull, his car windshield was shattered by a bullet as he drove away from a meeting. At Merthyr in South Wales, three Blackshirt Stewards and a police constable were injured. In her autobiography, Nellie Driver describes the violent opposition Mosley faced at a meeting in late September at Holbeck Moor at Leeds:

Mosley stood on the van dodging from side to side as stones were flung at him from all quarters. He managed to get through his speech uninjured, but struggles were taking place in the crowd that which was estimated at fifty thousand. We formed a march to proceed to the city centre. Fighting was taking place all round us, and a woman just in front of me was knocked unconscious by a half brick, and a howling mob attacked our rear. The command came, " March straight on, do not break ranks!" Marbles and fireworks were being thrown under the feet of police horses. One was so badly slashed with a razor by a young red that it had to be destroyed. When we came level with a hoarding a shower of stones met us. Our men were so enraged that they broke ranks and chased the stone throwers over some spare ground, where fierce battles took place. [54]

In the East End of London, the BU exerted itself like never before. On 16th July, Mosley announced that the party would run candidates in the East End's next municipal election.[55] To this end, rallies were held every week-end, and open air meetings every night.[56] "Yids, Yids, we gotta get rid of the Yids," became a popular slogan for Blackshirt supporters. The BU propagated its line through blaring loud-speakers, even in entirely Jewish areas. Such provocation--in the name of "free-speech"--succeeded. A Jewish Defence Committee was formed, and Jewish ex-servicemen formed their own defence force. They were backed up by communists. A series of street battles ensued in which hooligans on both sides eagerly partook. It should be pointed out, however, that there were no reported deaths as a result of any of these street fights.

The party planned its largest East End demonstration for October, 4th 1936. Mosley would lead a massive march, stopping in each district to give a speech.[57] But as was the case with all of his well publicised major meetings, his opponents planned a strong counter-protest. In this case, between an estimated 1,900 and 3 000 BU marchers would be met by approximately 100,000 anti-fascist protesters.[58] The Blackshirts planned to parade in threes; 6,000 police were present to ensure that order was kept. On that fateful day in early October, Mosley, dressed in full military uniform, arrived in a Bentley. Large hostile crowds gathered in his path.[59] His car wind-shield was smashed, and he was struck in the face with a stone. Dauntless, he inspected the fascist columns, and gave the fascist salute. But Police Commissioner Philip Game had ordered that he could not begin the march until the parade route had been cleared--something the police were having a decidedly difficult time doing.

Anti-fascist protesters had constructed a barricade across Cable Street; and a battle ensued--not between the Blackshirts and their opponents--but between the police and anti-fascist protesters. Anti-fascist demonstrators, most of whom were brought in from the outside, used stones, truncheons, iron bars, and bricks to prevent the police from demolishing the barricade. Defenders had strewn the street with broken glass to

discourage mounted officers, and withdrew to further barricades. In total, eighty-three protesters were arrested, and one-hundred people were injured, including police. There were no reported deaths. Game, with the permission of Home Secretary, John Simon, ordered the march to be cancelled. Mosley turned around with his fascists and marched the other way. The "Battle of Cable Street" was over. Ironically, no fascist was involved.

The following day, Mosley travelled to Berlin. For on the 6th, he would be marrying Diana Guinness (formerly Mitford), who, along with her sister, Unity, had made friends with the *Fuehrer*. Last March, he had invited the two sisters to be his guests at the Olympic Games, and to accompany him to the Wagner Festival at Bayreuth.[60] Diana also befriended Magda Goebbels, and told her about her intentions to marry Mosley--and to do so in absolute secrecy. *Frau* Goebbels offered to hold the wedding at her home. On October 6th, in the presence of Hitler, Diana and Oswald were married. Hitler's wedding present to them was a framed picture of himself.

Mosley's German wedding would have dire consequences for the BU. For it did not remain the secret it was intended to be, as Mosley discovered during his trip to Rome later that autumn. He wanted to see Mussolini, but instead met with the *Il Duce's* son in law, Count Ciano, who pointedly asked him if he had recently been to Berlin. Mosley answered in the affirmative. Mussolini was informed, and, as was the case with Ian Hope Dundas in March 1935, refused to see his guest.[61] The British fascist leader was told that *Il Duce* was too ill to meet with him. Mosley never saw Mussolini again. Italian funding to the BU was cut off completely.

Mosley now had to find an alternative source of funding. He proposed a rather imaginative solution to the party's financial problem. He planned to establish a series of radio stations throughout the country in order to profit from advertising time.[62] Though the BBC's monopoly prevented him from building radio-transmitters in Britain, he could legally transmit a signal from towers built on foreign soil. Mosley planned to set up transmitters in the Irish Republic, and on the Isle of Sark. He also wanted to build one on Heligoland, which of course required the co-operation of the German

Government. Mosley enlisted his wife to persuade Hitler to partake in the Air-Time Radio Project, but, in 1937, the *Fuehrer* displayed no interest in the venture.

In the wake of the infamous "Battle Of Cable Street", the government finally decided to pass stricter legislation to ensure the maintenance of public order. Military style-uniforms were henceforth prohibited, and stern regulations were placed on political meetings and processions. The uniform ban took the sting out of the BU's campaign because party members now appeared less threatening[63]. To compensate, they took to wearing dark polo neck sweaters instead of black shirts, which were legally ruled not to constitute uniforms. Mosley protested that he was being victimized and claimed that without uniforms he would be less able to restrain his fascists. And party members did go on the offensive, taking up a popular tactic used against them by their opponents: interrupting meetings. In the East End, fascists became increasingly effective at preventing non-fascist speakers from being heard.[64]

Despite the uniform ban, Mosley remained determined. In December, 1936, the BU launched a vigorous campaign in support of Edward VIII's right to "live in private happiness with the woman he loves." Edward, however, paid scant attention to Mosley's words of encouragement and abdicated the throne.[65] In March, 1937, as planned, the party contested seats in municipal elections.[66] Mosley was ecstatic about the results obtained in the east-end of London: In Bethnal Green, Alexander Raven Thomson and Micke Clarke each obtained twenty-three percent of the votes; in Shoreditch, William Joyce and Jim Bailey got fourteen percent; and in Limehouse, the BU candidates won nineteen percent. Mosley concluded that these results were better than those produced by the Nazis in Germany four years before Hitler's accession to power. This was not true; the NSDAP had done much better in the 1929 local elections, sending members to the Reichstag and winning the mayoral seat in Coburg[67]. Moreover, the BU's successes were confined to the East-End. Unlike the Nazis, the party had made no headway in the provinces. Of course, Mosley would not have been inclined to view the election returns from this negative perspective. In 1937, Mosley pressed ahead with his plans for creating an electoral machine capable of contesting a national election by 1940. Not surprisingly, Mosley's choice of candidates gave rise to much internal wrangling.[68]

The BU's moral victory in the East-End municipal election did nothing to ameliorate the party's growing financial problem. In the absence of a significant source of outside funding it became impossible for Mosley to maintain his entire professional staff. In May, the leader concluded that he would have to dismiss one-hundred and one out of a total of one hundred and forty paid members.[69] Neil Francis-Hawkins was untouchable; his enemies, William Joyce and John Beckett, were not. That they were given the opportunity to remain on a voluntary basis did nothing to assuage their indignation. According to Mosley, Joyce unsuccessfully tried to incite a revolt in the party's ranks. He and Beckett thereafter resigned from the BU and formed their own party, the National Socialist League. Joyce then substituted Hitler for Mosley as his fascist idol. His admiration for the German *Fuehrer* would ultimately cost this hate-filled man his life; for during the war he defected to Germany and broadcast German propaganda to Britain as the infamous Lord "Haw Haw", and was consequently hanged for treason in 1946. Two other notable members who resigned from the party were Charles Wegg-Prosser, who had been the BU candidate for Limehouse, and Jim Bailey, the candidate for Shoreditch.

A.K Chesterton did not stay much longer either; he resigned from the party in early 1938 and published a scathing indictment of Mosley in a pamphlet titled, Why I Left Mosley. [70] Chesterton, who had just a few years earlier praised Mosley as a fascist superman, now thundered on about "Oswald in Blunderland". He asserted that the party was rife with incompetents, and accused Mosley of being closely associated with the intrigues within the movement--of conspiring with his favourites at private party conferences against their opponents. Chesterton criticized Mosley for avoiding the truth about the plight of his party, asserting that the leader would go to great lengths to protect those members who eagerly indulged his delusional enthusiasms:

I have never known him give a decision against his favourites or fail to come to their help when they have been embarrassed, or maintain any semblance of a judicial attitude when their interests were involved. Clearly, they are very valuable to him:

he finds them comfortable men shielding him from the impact of every reality, subjecting him to no heart-searching, no self-analysis, no stress or turmoil of intellectual conflict out of which great things may be born.[71]

Not surprisingly, he devoted some venomous words for Neil Francis-Hawkins, whom he called "the ringmaster of the whole circus, who, as Director General, has been pre-eminently successful in securing unto himself every vestige of administrative power, irrespective of his capacity to put it to good use and, despite his temperamental reluctance to allow others to get on with their job he has not the gumption to do himself." [72] Chesterton did not, however, cite Mosley's penchant for tolerating drunkards as one of his weaknesses as a leader.

Besides the problems created by financial stringency Mosley was also having increased difficulty finding places to propagate his message. Available halls became a rarity, as their owners and trustees feared potential violence.[73] And even though party members were now dressed in plain clothes, the BU still attracted violent opposition. The last serious episode of public disorder at a fascist gathering occurred in October 1937, on the anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street. Mosley and his men marched through the East-End. Once again, violence ensued between the police and anti-fascists. One-hundred and eleven people were arrested, all of them anti-fascist protesters. On that occasion, Mosley escaped unscathed. He was not so fortunate in Liverpool later that month. He suffered a serious head-wound when assailed with a jagged brick. Nellie Driver recalls this episode in melodramatic terms, as well as the BU's response to it:

Mosley was reckless. He defied his opponents and was determined to speak, but his immunity from injury could not go on for ever. At Walton, Liverpool, whilst he was addressing a meeting from the top of a van, he was stoned, and he was knocked down by a stone on the head. As he was rising to his feet a huge stone struck him on the back of the head and he fell back

unconscious. The St. John's ambulance men who went to his aid were subjected to a similar barrage. Strong men wept with rage as Mosley was carried to his car and his supporters pleaded with him to speak to them if he could. A faint smile went over his face and a hand was raised in salute. He was in hospital for weeks, and a youth was charged in court for throwing the stone. I cannot remember what sentence he got, but I do know that one dark night he was beaten up and given the hiding of his life by some of Sir Oswald's supporters. One can hardly blame them. They were thoroughly enraged by this cowardly attack, and by the long series of organised riots.[74]

As the clouds of war cast their dark shadow over Britain, Mosley concentrated his attention on a vigorous peace campaign. While it has long been assumed that the BUF proceeded to fade into national insignificance following the notorious Olympia meeting, revisionist estimates assert that in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war, the BU actually increased its level of national support, perhaps having as many as 22,500 members.[75] This would not be surprising, for Britain was psychologically and materially unprepared for yet another long struggle paid for in British blood; and an anti-war line--regardless of who propagated it--would have had some appeal.

But unlike Neville Chamberlain, who was willing to appease Hitler short of Poland, Mosley was prepared to allow Hitler to pursue any territorial ambition he had in Eastern Europe; for he believed that, fundamentally, the interests of Germany and those of the British Empire did not clash anywhere on the globe. The British Empire, both economically and militarily, would not be threatened by a potential German European Empire; and, if Hitler did decide to turn his guns against the west once having conquered the Soviet Union, Britain and her allies would be able to meet and defeat him. Mosley asserted that Britain was being dragged into war at the behest of the Jews; that the "Jewish masters of usury" wanted to crush Hitler militarily in order to re-establish the financial system he had eradicated--an "export-capitalist" economy.[76] Operating from

this premise, Mosley viewed Jewish persecution within Germany rather cynically. Concerning the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, he commented:

How many minorities had been badly treated in how many countries since the war without any protest from Press or politician?...Why was it only when Jews were the people affected that we had any demand for war with the country concerned? There was only one answer...that today Jewish finance controlled the Press and political system of Britain. If you criticise a Jew at home-the gaol threatens you. If others touch a Jew abroad--then war threatens them.[77]

Mosley also had a financial stake in the maintenance of peace. By 1939, Hitler had agreed to participate in the Air-Time Radio project. War between Britain and Germany, would, of course, spell the end of this joint venture. [78]

Mosley was not the only peace activist on the radical right. The BU took part in discussions with other fascist, anti-Semitic, and pro-German organizations, such as MP Maule Ramsay's Right Club, the Nordic League, and Sir Barry Domville's Link, with the goal of forming a united front against the war. At a secret meeting on the 16th of September, 1939, Mosley and Ramsay agreed to campaign for peace while eschewing any behaviour which could be constituted as treasonable.[79] Mosley called on BU members to be loyal to their country.[80] Evidence suggests that the clandestine activity of anti-war fascist organizations decreased rather than increased during the Phoney War period. For although these groups were bound by a common opposition to the war, their differences prevented them from forming a strong united front. Mosley was never impressed by Ramsay's crude anti-Semitism, and felt that his extreme positions would undermine the credibility of the peace campaign.[81] It was Mosley's association with Maule Ramsay which contributed to his ultimate political downfall.

Now that Britain was at war with a fascist nation, it was natural that its government would become increasingly concerned about the activities of fascist organizations. On September 1st, 1939, Defence Regulation 18b was issued via an Order in Council, which gave the Home Secretary the authority to detain people *he suspected could* carry out "acts prejudicial to public safety or to the defence of the realm."[82] An advisory committee was set up to which suspects could appeal.

In May 1940, the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, concerned about a possible fifth column threat, argued for the large scale arrest of suspect persons and enemy aliens in Britain.[83] However, the Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, informed the war cabinet on the 15th and 18th of May that such action could not be taken against any organization so long as they displayed no disloyalty.[84] Since Mosley had ordered members of his party to be loyal to the nation, he was legally untouchable.

Mosley's status as a free man changed, however, due to the activities of a Maule Ramsay associate, Anna Wolkoff, and an American cipher clerk, Tyler Kent.[85] Kent was responsible for decoding messages arriving at and coding messages sent from the American Embassy. He was a strong isolationist, who was privy to secret correspondence between Churchill (as both First Lord of the Admiralty and Prime Minister) and Roosevelt, who was at the time campaigning for re-election on an isolationist platform. Needless to say, had their communications been made public, the war effort could have been seriously compromised.

MI5 first suspected that Kent was a security risk when he was seen contacting a Gestapo agent.[86] He met Anna Wolkoff eight months later. Maxwell Knight then had a female agent, Joan Miller, infiltrate the Right Club and befriend Anna Wolkoff. Miller discovered that Kent was showing the Churchill-Roosevelt correspondence to both Wolkoff and Ramsay. On May 20th Knight raided Kent's flat, and found 1, 500 top-secret documents. The British Government now acted. Kent, Wolkoff, and Ramsay were arrested. Mosley's association with Ramsay now cost him dearly, for he along with his

wife Diana, and 800 members of the BU were also arrested. [87] Mosley was interned at Brixton, and then Holloway Prison.

Although 18b put Mosley out of business, it was not what killed the BUF. The final nail was hammered into Mosley's political coffin in the autumn of 1940, when German bombs assailed the British population. Mosley was now completely and utterly alienated from the vast majority of Britons. As he sat in prison, Britain faced a crisis of existence of the magnitude Mosley had long envisioned. Only it was not he who would pull the nation back from the brink of disaster, but the brave men of the RAF and those on the ground who supported them. They were the heroes.

NOTES

- [1] Special Branch Report. 6, June, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] As quoted in Anthony John Trythall, p. 107.
- [4] Special Branch Report. 20 June, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/269.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Ibid., p. 264.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Special Branch Report. 26 June, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/245.
- [9] Special Branch Report. 3 July, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145.
- [10] Special Branch Report. 16 July, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/222-225.
- [11] Ibid., p. 224.
- [12] Roy MacGregor Hastie. The Day of the Lion: The Life and Death of Fascist Italy: 1922-1945 (London: MacDonald, 1963), p. 226.
- [13] Special Branch Report. 27 August, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/98.
- [14] Ibid., p. 99.
- [15] " Mind Britain's Business." Daily Herald. 27 August, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/96.
- [16] Special Branch Report. 3 September, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/62.
- [17] Ibid. p. 65.
- [18] Special Branch Report. 23 October, 1935. PRO HO/20145/12. On 6 January, 1936 Special Branch reported that
 " Ian Hope Dundas, Chief of Staff..., left London fro Rome on 28th December last. The exact nature of his mission has not been definately ascertained, but before leaving he pretended that he was going to see certain Italian officials in Rome, in order to get them

to approach MUSSOLINI and persuade him to submit his terms for a settlement of the Ital0-Abyssinian dispute to London." PRO HO/20146/86. In March, 1936, Mosley was again reported to be claiming that the BUF had lent the British Foreign Office considerable assistance during the Anglo-Italian dispute. See Special Branch Report. 25 March, 1936. PRO HO 144/20147/301.

[19] Special Branch Report. 24 October, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/12-17.

[20] Ibid., p.15.

[21] Ibid., p.16.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Special Branch Report. 18 December, 1935. PRO HO 144/20146/82-83.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Special Branch Report. 20 July, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/206.

[27] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 48.

[28] Special Branch Report. 24 July, 1935. PRO HO 144/20145/15.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p.142.

[32] Special Branch Report, 6 January, 1936. PRO HO 144/20146/86.

[33] Special Branch Report, 17 January, 1936. PRO HO 144/20146/106.

[34] A.J.P Taylor. From Serajevo to Potsdam (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 132.

[35] Special Branch Report, 17 January, 1936. PRO HO 144/20146/109.

[36] "Police Guard Blackshirts." Daily Mail. 23 August, 1935. PRO HO 144/20146/351.

[37] Quoted from a transcript of short-hand notes taken by Eric Brown. PRO HO 144/20146/284.

[38] Ibid., p.292.

[39] " Police Guard Blackshirts." Daily Mail, 23 August, 1935. PRO HO 144/20146/351.

[40] " Gallacher Hits Out at Sir John Simon". Daily Worker, 27 March, 1936. PRO HO 144/20147/256.

[41] " Workers and the Fascists." News Chronicle, 6 April, 1936. PRO HO 20147/248.

[42] See John Stevenson, p. 147 concerning police attitudes. Police commissioners Lord Trenchard and Sir Philip Game were anything but sympathetic to the BUF: they proposed outlawing the party [43]. See Thurlow, " State Management of the BUF in the 1930's," p.38.

[43] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 75. However, Leese's acquittal on the more serious charge of seditious libel apparently made the state less willing to prosecute similar cases. As Thurlow points out, the Attorney-General was "astonished at the verdict, and concluded that the jury viewed Leese as a stupid crank with honest convictions who should be found not guilty of the serious charge of seditious libel. The Home Office viewed this as a precedent, and resisted all attempts to include specific clauses with respect to racial incitement in the Public Order Act. Unless it could be proved to have provoked disorder the authorities refused to prosecute even the worst cases of anti-Semitic or racist libel." " State Management of the BUF in the 1930's," pp. 43-44.

[44] Cross, p. 153.

[45] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 158.

[46] Oswald Mosley, as cited in Cross, p. 152.

[47] Ibid., p. 153.

[48] Special Branch Report. 27 March, 1936. PRO HO 144/20147/297.

[49] Special Branch Report. 24 March, 1936. PRO HO 144/20147/382.

[50] Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 110.

[51] Special Branch Report. 7 June, 1933. PRO HO 144/20147/35.

[52] " Sir Oswald in the East End." Times. 8 June, 1936. PRO HO 144/20147/9.

[53] Skidelsky, p. 415.

[54] Driver, p. 52.

[55] Skidelsky, p. 404.

[56] Cross, p. 154.

[57] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 133.

[58] Estimates vary. See Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, plate 9. Cross, p. 160.

[59] For accounts of the "Battle of Cable Street" see Cross, p. 160, and Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, pp. 113-114.

[60] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 105. Also see Diana Mosley, Life of Contrasts (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977).

[61] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p.106. Also see Oswald Mosley, My Life, pp. 363-364.

[62] Masters, p. 136.

[63] Cross, p. 174.

[64] Ibid., p. 176.

[65] Ibid., pp. 164-165.

[66] Nicholas Mosley, p. 117.

[67] Fest, p. 66.

[68] Cross, p. 178.

[69] Oswald Mosley, My Life, p. 311.

[70] A.K Chesterton, Why I Left Mosley (London: the National Socialist League, 1938).

[71] Ibid., p. 3.

[72] Ibid., p. 2. Chesterton did not, however, cite Francis-Hawkins by name.

[73] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale., p. 122.

[74] Driver, p. 42.

[75] See G.C Webber, " Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists." Webber argues that middle class support for the BU increased during the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. As he writes, "In the long run, the BUF continued to increase its support such that by the by the end of 1939 it had achieved a level of membership higher than any other time than 1934. Indeed, it may have even been the case that insofar as the Public Order act was successful in forcing the BUF to become more retained and respectable after 1936, it actually helped the movement to attract the middle classes thereafter." p. 597.

[76] Skidelsky, p.428.

[77] Oswald Mosley, The British Peace--How to Get it(1939). As cited in Skidelsky, p. 437.

[78] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 146.

[79] Ibid, p.183.

[80] Driver, p. 46.

[81] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, pp.184-186.

[82] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p. 162.

[83] Masters, p. 98.

[84] Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 194.

[85] See Masters for a full account of the Tyler Kent Affair.

[86] Ibid., p. 84.

[87] Ibid., p.80.

CONCLUSION: A BLACKSHIRT--TORN

Clip-board on lap, pen in hand, the brown-haired American journalist leaned forward in his chair. Sitting on the floor, surrounding him and his guest, were a group of young, eager-looking university types. In his usual style William F Buckley Jr, began his preamble to the week's episode of Firing Line:

Just after the First World War, a young British aristocrat, age 22, was elected to the House of Commons, and it has recently remarked that Sir Oswald Mosley was the brightest man of his generation to enter politics, and that he alone might have become prime minister of England, whether as a Conservative or as a Labourite. Instead, he became founder and leader of the British Union of Fascists....I was instantly struck by the laudatory notices given to it[Mosley's autobiography, My Life] in England by members of the left; for instance, Mr Michael Foot, who called the book, " a dazzling gleam across the whole century. What Mosley so valiantly stood for could have saved this country from the hungry Thirties and from the Second World War," and from R.H Crossman, intellectual leader of the socialist party(laughter), or so he is regarded, " Mosley was spurned simply and solely because he was right." [1]

Sitting across from the American conservative sat Sir Oswald Mosley, a large heavy-set man, no moustache, grey thinning hair, dressed in a suit--a man it is difficult to picture marching through a street dressed in self-styled military uniform, or jumping down from a stage and knocking three hecklers unconscious.[2] This was 1972. The former fascist leader was now seventy-six years old, an historical figure, and an embodiment of a

paradox. He first marched into the House of Commons a sworn enemy of the "old world"; yet, as a fascist, he looked to the past to see Britain's future. He had envisioned a government guided by science and rationality; yet, he sought to exploit the irrational aspect of the human psyche to bring such a government into being. His fascist Britain would be born by mass obedience to the will of a single man. Mosley professed to hate war, and was determined to prevent another one; yet, he was an ardent nationalist, organized his party along military lines, and upheld the spirit of 1914 as that which would create a new, more, humane, society. He had been a hero of the left, and then an enemy of the left.

By 1972, members of the left were beginning to reconsider him. Robert Skidelsky, perhaps summarized the revisionist view of Mosley when he wrote, "The past cannot be undone. But a better appreciation of it may lessen the inhibition of the present against allowing Mosley's voice to be heard on any issue affecting the future. The exclusion of Mosley from the contemporary dialogue as a punishment without end is both mean and unwise".[3] But, as would be expected, when Mosley emerged from "exile", he still had to face some very pointed questions, which were of course asked by Buckley:

MR. BUCKLEY: I'd like to ask Sir Oswald: do you believe there is a nexus between the two-- anti-Semitism and fascism?

SIR OSWALD: No, none whatever. That was a purely German phenomenon and that really made the whole complication. Germany, of course, under Hitler was definitely anti-Semitic. There's no doubt about that whatever--none whatever. That's all--

MR. BUCKLEY: You're not going to dispute that?

(laughter)

SIR OSWALD:--too painfully clear. But in the other countries where fascism occurred, in very different national forms, there was no question of it in the origin of the movement. Fascism was, essentially, a national creed--both its strength and its weakness--and, therefore, it took, in every country, a completely different form. And if you are running as we hope to run, a multi-racial empire, you obviously cannot have a racialist policy. And the quarrel with certain Jewish interests, not with all, by any means, arose on quite different and much later questions....I'll tell you how it arose.

Always when you're dealing with history, the thing is to see how a problem arose.

Now, I began in October, 1932. The subject was not raised by me until October, 1934, two years later, and for one definite reason--

MR BUCKLEY: The Olympia?

SIR OSWALD: No, at Olympia it wasn't raised. It was at Albert Hall, in October 34. One of the reasons, of course, was that at Olympia, for reasons I can well understand, we were largely attacked by Jews who happened to be members of the communist party. But that was not the original quarrel. The reason was that I naturally was determined to prevent another war, if I possibly could, having fought in the first war in air and in trench and having my generation practically wiped out. I did not want another war.

Well, now, Jews--and one can well understand their attitude--some Jews thought that any movement which had a Fascist character was bound to be anti-Semitic because their people were being persecuted in Germany by Hitler. And the reason for the quarrel, their attack on us at the time, are perfectly easy to understand. But equally, you can understand--though I think

it's impossible to understand *my* attitude--when there was a drive toward war with Germany, the organization of a boycott of German goods, all the classic recipes for producing war were being undertaken, not by all Jews, but by some Jewish interests. Then, when that occurred, and *not* before, I denounced those particular Jewish interests while stressing, in that same speech, that as members of a multi-racial empire, we never could be anti-Semitic, which I define--and I think anyone would there agree--as attacking Jews on racial or religious grounds.

MR. BUCKLEY: When you founded your second party, why did you call it a Fascist party? What was the attraction of that term for you?

SIR OSWALD: I very much wanted to avoid it, but if you are taking a certain line--I mean if you're obviously a liberal--liberalism in England was completely different from liberalism in France. I mean liberalism under Lord Grey, the Reform Bill and all the rest of it, was something different than the liberalism in France under Danton and Robespierre. But it does seem dishonest if you say, "I am not a Fascist," when there's a certain genetic similarity realizing how we all began. A genetic similarity--what I mean by that is ex-servicemen coming back from war on each side were promised the world: the end of slums, the end of unemployment, and the rest of it, a land fit for heroes to live in and all that old guff of Lloyd George's--and then complete betrayal, the survivors of my generation completely betrayed. And you had the same thing happening in each country--this explosion of the ex-servicemen, which it was primarily, in order to do something as a memorial to the fallen and to build a land which they thought worthy of their sacrifice. This was the origin of the whole thing.

MR. BUCKLEY: And what about the paraphernalia of

fascism? To what extent is the posture of the military, the uniforms, the salute, the marching--do you think that's sort of a necessary temperamental expression of fascist movement?

SIR OSWALD: No, not at all. You see, it arose--and that's the only similarity, purely superficial, but it's my great drawback today, because they can associate me with German or Italian fascism simply for that reason. My answer is: wearing a uniform no more turned us into German or Italian Fascists than wearing a uniform turns an English soldier into a French soldier or a German soldier. The origin of the thing was very simple. Our meetings were attacked; I mean, that's on record, there's no disputing it. Olympia was attacked like a military operation--organized for three weeks, openly and publicly, without any intervention by the state whatever. And, at that time, I was organized, being a professional soldier in origin myself, in a military fashion to meet it and defeat it, and we did defeat it. As I said in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, only this week, the only time order has ever been maintained in England and free speech was preserved was when we had completely broken the Red terror in the Thirties by those military measures which meant wearing uniforms and the rest of it. We did maintain order at our meetings, and we had meetings which were perfectly peaceful. They could not stop our free speech like they stopped Churchill and everybody else with whom they disagreed. That was the origin of the uniform and the military. But I'll admit this: I went too far. It was my main mistake. If I'd stopped at the simple black shirt--90 percent of our members were working class, and their wives made them up in their homes. They were very poor people. If I'd stopped there, that would have been all right. As soldiers--and they were soldiers in the end, because they had to fight--they liked smart

uniforms and I, as an old soldier, made the mistake of pandering to that taste and allowing them to wear very elaborate uniforms, which has been thrown at me ever since. A great mistake.

In both his interview with Buckley and in his autobiography, Mosley paints quite a different picture of the BUF than that which has been presented in this thesis. There are aspects of his account which will not, however, be disputed here. Mosley entered politics as a genuine idealist, very much wanting to see the emergence of a more humane nation, and correctly observed that governments do not necessarily work for the good of their people. As a Labourite, he fought to make the government for which he worked more active. Furthermore, he posited an imaginative economic solution to the economic problems of the day. He was never a coward, and was driven by an indomitable determination.

Ultimately, though, Mosley's failings as a politician outweighed his strengths. He was impatient, vain, and hungry for absolute power. Rather than compromise, and work harder within an imperfect system, Mosley rejected it completely, unshakeable in the belief that only he was right. His egoism was inseparable from his idealism. Fascism was thus an attractive ideology to him.

In attempting to understand why Mosley took the course that he did, it is also important to appreciate his place in the post-war social order. He was an uprooted landed aristocrat who had survived the horrors of the First World War. He needed to affirm the ultimate meaningfulness of his generation's sacrifice. A fascist party did so not only by recreating the spirit of the trenches, but also by upholding it as the force which would lift the nation to greater heights.

Mosley regarded the BUF not principally as a means to an electoral end, but as an end in itself. That he sought to maintain a party which would feed the fantasy that he would

eventually seize power as fascist dictator of Britain explains why it generally languished and was plagued by internal problems. There are reasons to believe that, in the early thirties in Britain, there was room for a strong nationalist, radically conservative, party. Judging by the number of people who attended the 1934 Albert Hall and Olympia meetings, the number of people who attended the January Club in 1934, Rothermere's support, and the BUF's membership tallies for early 1934, there was significant interest in Mosley. But, for the most part, such interest was expressed only because it was thought that he was simply an ultra conservative. Interest waned when it was discovered that he was much more than that--when he became associated in the public mind with a brand of continental extremism which simply did not appeal to the vast majority of Britons. But Mosley could--or would not--see this. Instead, he preferred to pursue his delusional enthusiasms. Starting in 1933, the national economy began to improve, and the likelihood of the success for a fascist party in Britain became less remote. The crisis in capitalism which Mosley had long been forecasting--the one which he believed would propel him to power--was unlikely to materialize in the near future. To keep the movement afloat, Mosley grasped at straws. He invented a crisis: the supposed threat posed by world Jewry to his party and to the nation. He also attempted to exploit regional discontent to limited effect.

By late 1934 it was clear that the BUF's reach had exceeded its grasp. It grew too quickly, and spread itself too thinly. Lacking the proper infrastructure, the party became rife with corruption and dissension. As the BUF languished, internal conflicts ensued. Soon, factions formed, the leaders of which had their own vision of the party's future. The main line dividing the party was between those who saw the BUF as a paramilitary organization and those who saw it as a political party. Turning the BUF into a more orthodox party was unthinkable for Mosley. Any reorganization scheme--any program for improving the party--would have to keep the paramilitary aspect of the organization in

the forefront. His answer to the party's internal crisis of 1934 was to reorganize it in such a way as to recognize the validity of both groups. But as membership dwindled discontent escalated. Soon, the paramilitary wing--led by a man who would most satisfy Mosley's hunger for adoration--had a monopoly of power within the party.

Through all of the acrimony, back-biting, and failures, Mosley evidently never gave up the idea that he was on a steady march to power; that he was not Mussolini's underling, but an equal; that Hitler was not someone he should look up to--but across at. The East-End campaign perhaps more than anything else reinforced the idea that he was Britain's future fascist dictator. His son recalls that even in his father's final days, Mosley,"seemed to be waiting for the crisis in Britain and in Europe to materialise which he had for so long expected and which, he still believed, might cause people to turn to him as the one man who had foreseen it and which might be a means at least of his at last being called to power: but then with part of him he seemed to accept that this was fantasy." [4] Perhaps he first began to realize this behind the walls of Brixton and Holloway Prisons, where he sat wearing a black shirt--torn.

NOTES

[1] Sir Oswald Mosley, interview, Firing Line, PBS, London, 25 March, 1972.

[2] Driver, p.34.

[3] Skidelsky, p.21.

[4] Nicholas Mosley, Beyond the Pale, p.310.

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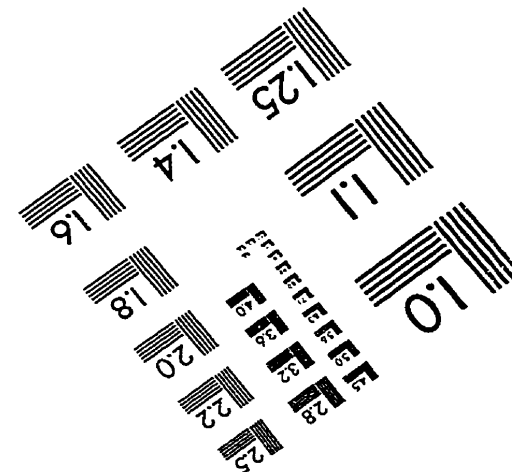
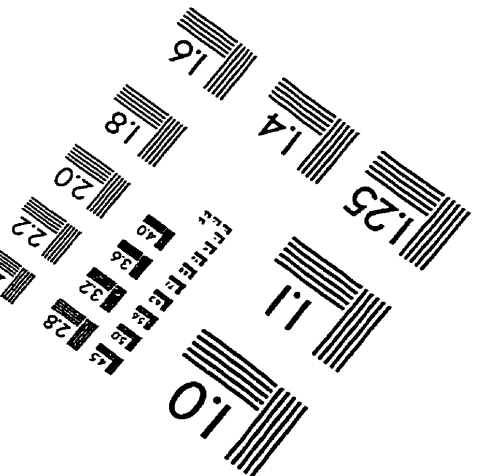
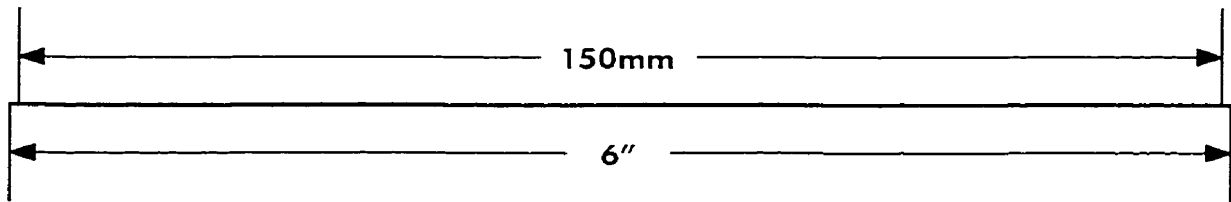
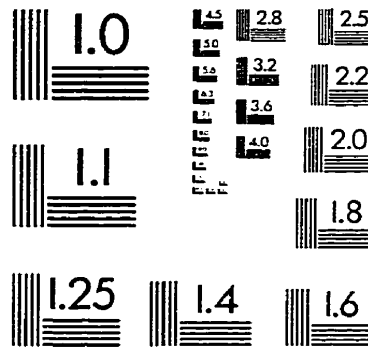
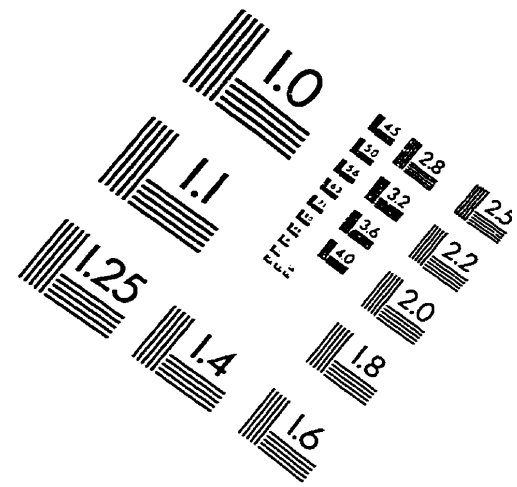
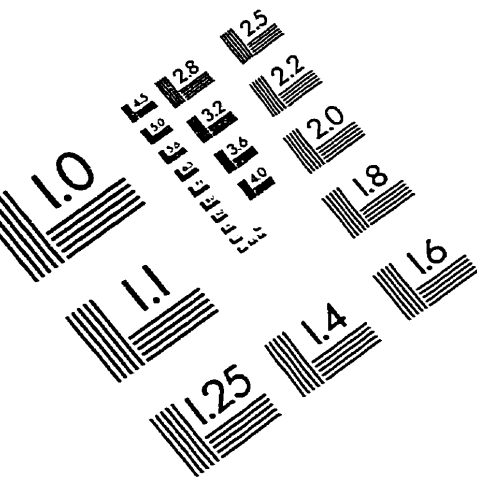
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