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**Towards a Greater Britain: A Political Biography of
Oswald Mosley, 1918-1947**

Colin Peter Cook

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Philosophy awarded by Oxford Brookes University

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Abstract

This thesis examines the major stages in the political career of Oswald Mosley and argues that a continuity existed in his diagnosis of contemporary history from the moment he entered political life at the end of the First World War as a zealous parliamentarian till his last days as an unrepentant fascist. An ideal type of the 'esoteric' core of Mosley's ideology is used to identify a consistent thread which resolves the contradictions in Mosley's political agitations into paradoxes. Drawing on a theory of ideology which distinguishes between its fundamental and operative dimensions, Mosley's core (fundamental) ideology is depicted ideal typically as the ambition to realize Britain's potential for national greatness conceived in a future oriented, modernizing rather than a nostalgic or conservative perspective.

The structure of the biography follows the chronological narrative of Mosley's life, episodically, illuminating it through pivotal moments in his career. Through a textual and contextual analysis of these moments it identifies the performance of the operative dimension of Mosley's fundamental ideology in order to bring out its internal consistency. Each chapter highlights a theme which may have manifested itself at other moments in Mosley's life but is especially distinct at one stage of Mosley's career. These themes are the myth of the airman, leadership, economics, unemployment, the New Party, the nation and Greater Britain, anti-Semitism and violence, philosophical idealism and the philosophy of apologia.

The thesis draws on the vast published textual output from Mosley along with reports of his speeches, supported by many contemporary writings relating to chapter topic.

These resources are used to demonstrate and shed light on the esoteric mainspring of Mosley's politics. In addition the thesis demonstrates and argues in favour of a biographic methodology which does not construct the inner machinations of the subject's psychology or 'mind' as an explanation of behaviour but looks pragmatically to the significant products of the subject and constructs, ideal typically, a consistent ideological matrix the centre of the subjects politics. This thesis contributes to knowledge of the subject by presenting a pragmatic understanding of Mosley's political motivations and identifying a consistent core to his political pronouncements. The thesis also brings to biographical studies a phenomenological methodology which dispenses with the postulation of a knowable core personality or 'real' psychological life in order to demonstrate the inner coherence of the subject's personality for the purpose of historical reconstruction.

One

Introduction and theoretical concerns

This study seeks to examine the charismatic politician Oswald Mosley and advance the thesis that his various and incongruous exoteric political forms can be better understood when viewed in terms of a consistent esoteric, ideological matrix. This chapter will introduce some of the theoretical concerns and problems which necessarily underpin such a study. There will be a discussion of political biography and ideology to enable this study to be located in a discourse. The core elements in Mosley's ideological matrix will then be outlined before an overview of previous biographies, and Mosley's autobiography, are discussed and it is argued that few of these accounts sufficiently grasp, or adequately describe, the consistent core of his politics. Mosley's fascism brought him notoriety and this political manifestation is discussed to bring out an idea of a fascist minimum which dovetails with the ideological matrix underpinning Mosley's politics argued in this thesis. Finally this chapter outlines some of the ideological trends and movements which contributed to the zeitgeist into which Mosley was born.

Contradiction and Problems

Oswald Mosley was a British politician whose political displays could be superficially interpreted as representing contradictory ideological positions. In itself this is not a unique trait in a fascist leader. Mussolini's contradictions intrigued Christopher Hibbert sufficiently to stimulate his biography of the duce. Hibbert begins by quoting Fernando Mezzasoma, Mussolini's Minister of Popular Culture to the Salò republic, who wrote of

his leader; "No one understands him, By turns shrewd and innocent, brutal and gentle, vindictive and forgiving, great and petty, he is the most complicated and contradictory man I have ever known. He cannot be explained."¹ This study sets out to resolve Mosley's inconsistencies by ascribing them to a consistent core which was not fascist in itself, but predisposed him to fascism when his belief and faith in the existing democratic structures broke down and the movement toward fascism in Europe was gaining impetus. This core will be described ideal typically as an ideological matrix with a core structure designed to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. It will be argued that using this ideal type matrix light can be shed on how Mosley interpreted and structured his world and his politics. Distinctively this political biography uses the heuristic device of an ideological matrix to resolve apparent contradictions in Mosley's career. Using this method an understanding of his long career of persistent political activism, which was criticised for its apparent fickleness in pursuit of power, could be gained. In methodology this is a pragmatic approach focusing on Mosley's exoteric expressions without deriving, or requiring any psychological insights and applying the maxim of 'Occam's razor' that, to use Bertrand Russell's words "if everything in some science can be interpreted without assuming this or that hypothetical entity, there is no ground for assuming it."²

Contradictions in Mosley's politics are easily stated. Mosley belonged to the aristocracy whose natural political home was the Conservative party to which he first turned at the

¹quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *Benito Mussolini: A Biography* (London: The Reprint Society, 1963) vii

²The maxim popularly associated with the Franciscan Schoolman, William of Occum,(c.1290-1350) reads 'Entities are not to be multiplied without necessity', Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946) 463

end of the First World War, yet Mosley's longest parliamentary political affiliation was to the party of the working classes, the Labour party. Furthermore, having spent the majority of the Twenties diligently working as a Labour MP, climbing the Party ladder and achieving a ministerial post, Mosley left the established parties to form his own New Party to be shortly followed by founding the British Union of Fascists: from the politics of the democratic left Mosley had swiftly moved to a politics commonly associated with the extreme right. During his early days as a Parliamentarian Mosley championed the League of Nations which sought to maintain the security of member nations and yet as a fascist Mosley argued against war with Germany which was violating national boundaries across Europe. Furthermore, when a fascist, Mosley encouraged a militarist symbolism among his blackshirted supporters and saw violent reactions to his movement as an indication of BUF success: battle would strengthen the movement, yet he opposed war with Germany when it became imminent. After the defeat of fascism in Europe Mosley emerged no more reticent with a critique of inter-war fascism and the demand for Europe a nation as a replacement for the idea of a Greater Britain. Mosley described inter-war fascism as attracting "people in too much of a hurry,"³ and later as an "incident rather than a renaissance",⁴ yet Mosley frequently evoked the spirit of the Blackshirts and even reproduced a photograph of Blackshirts on parade on the cover of *The National European* in 1965.⁵ Throughout, his political life Mosley remained within the law despite advocating extra-parliamentary methods when a fascist and it was the Government who

³Mosley, *Europe Faith and Plan: A Way Out of the Coming Crisis and an Introduction to Thinking as an European* (London: Eurphorion Books, 1958) 16

⁴Mosley, 'The European Renaissance' *The National European*, October 1964, 5

⁵'Spirit of the Blackshirt', *The National European*, May 1965, cover & 2

had to formulate laws to close Mosley's political movement.⁶ Mosley preached a message of intense British patriotism but was imprisoned by his government for posing a threat to national security. Furthermore, recent releases from the Public Record Office have been reported to highlight the irony that Mosley was declared unfit for the army in 1916 because he could not march due to ankle injury, and despite this his later notoriety resulted from the Blackshirt marches.⁷

Further contradictions appear in Mosley's parliamentary speeches, for example in his 1919 Maiden speech he argued against the encroachment of Government 'officialdom' stifling entrepreneurial spirit, a position which would feature again two years later when he spoke of efficiency through "the free play of competition".⁸ His alignment with a minimal state contrasts with his 1925 position when Mosley embraced the principle of state intervention, arguing that: "As Socialists we know well the nature of the society which we desire to create."⁹ Mosley's move to adopt an explicit fascist political stance was used by critics to demonstrate a sudden change of direction and political inconsistency. Lionel Birch stated that, "Somewhere around 1930 there was evidently a break, a "vision," a seeing of other people, but particularly himself in a fresh light."¹⁰

⁶Mosley seems to have been aware of the infiltration into the BUF by intelligence officers from the security services and this encouraged him to abide by the law. Allen worked either for MI5, the security service, or MI6 the secret intelligence service, see Thurlow, *Secret Service* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995) 206.

⁷Will Bennett 'Army gave Mosley marching orders over injured leg', *Electronic Telegraph*, issue 990, Monday 9 February 1998

⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 July 1921, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 144, col. 2269.

⁹Mosley, *Revolution by Reason* (London: I.L.P. 1925) 6.

¹⁰Lionel Birch, *Why They Join the Fascists* (London: Peoples Press, 1937) 41.

Mosley's one-time political associate, John Strachey, also observed a 'conversion' in Mosley on 30 April 1931 while he was on the Town Hall steps of Ashton-Under-Lyne.¹¹

These features suggest surface inconsistencies in Mosley's politics which can easily give an impression of fickleness. Thus Jenny Lee, the Labour MP and contemporary of Mosley, thought that he had a "fatal flaw in his character an overwhelming arrogance and unshakable conviction he was born to rule" leading him on to become a "pathetic imitation of Hitler".¹² To extend the analysis of Mosley it is important to bring out and make explicit the assumptions underpinning the thesis. The value of these assumptions lies not in their 'objective' truth but purely in their 'heuristic' value, or usefulness, in shedding light on Mosley's political biography and in using this approach the thesis does not need to establish psychological descriptions or motivations for Mosley's politics.

A primary assumption underpins this study which presumes that a connection exists between the outward, exoteric expressions of Mosley's politics, in the form of texts, utterances, speeches, actions and policies, and an internal, esoteric, consistent and coherent fundamental core. This core shall be referred to as an ideological matrix, but in light of Mosley's notorious association with fascism it is important to note that this core is not fascist in itself but has propensity towards fascism and, under certain circumstances, may lead to the adoption of fascist politics. It is important to distinguish between the heuristic assumption that such a matrix existed in order to shed light on Mosley's politics, and any implied or assumed psychological insight into Mosley's inner

¹¹John Strachey, *The Menace of Fascism* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933) 161.

¹²Jennie Lee, *My Life with Nye* (London: Cape, 1980)

world-view.

The work of the philosopher Daniel Dennett has gone some way to criticise ideas promoting inner causes for beliefs and desires. Dennett has argued that these are ascriptions which are used to calculate the behaviour of a creature in the absence of any genuine knowledge of the creatures inner world. Ideas of "beliefs, desires, pains, mental images, experiences" are not "good theoretical things" and "the *state-of-believing-that-p* is not a well-defined or definable theoretical *state*."¹³ It is such ascriptions which are being dealt with in this study. Dennett dismisses any need to know about the inner life of a 'thing', or even to establish if a 'thing' has an inner mechanism to know at all. Dennett also attacked the notion of a single location of a personality being expressed by its utterances because the brain has developed in an arbitrary manner producing the subjects psychological state.¹⁴ If Dennett's arguments are accepted Mosley's utterances, texts and actions are representations of diffuse, possibly random, neuro-synaptic firings. The idea of a determining inner-mechanism, or ideological matrix, is an ascription made because they have a predictive values and usefulness enabling calculations of behaviour intentions. Whether or not this study provides a true description of Mosley's inner world-view is of no real importance to the usefulness of this study: the actions, words and gestures of Mosley are phenomena with implications and interpretations determined at the point of their reception.

This approach to the biography of a fascist had a successful precursor in David Baker's

¹³Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainstorms* (London: Penguin, 1997) 1st pub. 1981, xx

¹⁴Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991)

study of A.K. Chesterton. Baker turned to Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* for his methodology. Nolte used a phenomenological approach to shed a new light on fascist studies in his analysis of the three different expressions of fascism in France, Italy and Germany. Baker highlights the usefulness of Nolte's work for biographic study because it uses a phenomenological approach seeking to understand the subject from outward appearances rather than imposing schemes, such as a Marxist paradigm, from the outside.¹⁵ Baker's methodology employs a multiple perspective approach acknowledging the influence of Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair* which analyzed three nineteenth-century intellectuals, Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn and Arthur Moeller van der Bruck and whose writings represented a perceived cultural decline in Germany. They were alienated by the modern aspect of German society of their day and sensed moral decay around them, they thus looked for a charismatic führer figure to return the spiritual aspect to the German peoples. Their idealism was not of a formal philosophical variety but an "attitude toward life, a set of sentiments and values, that the educated classes inherited from common intellectual traditions and that were gradually adapted to their position in society."¹⁶ This study was particularly useful to Baker's study of Chesterton, a writer whose "romantic literary intellectualism led him to a similar transfer of values from arts to human affairs and he too became intellectually alienated from his peers."¹⁷ Michael Billig's *Fascists* provided Baker with paradigmatic insight into the world-view of Chesterton, not only because of Chesterton's close involvement with the

¹⁵David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A.K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (Tauris Academic Studies, 1996) 7

¹⁶Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A study in the rise of German Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) xxiv

¹⁷Baker, 9

British National Front which Billig's uses as the subject of his study, but because Billig's analysis undermines the psychological model of fascists which held that they possess an 'authoritarian personality'.¹⁸ Billig broadens this model to include social conditioning, peer group pressure and/or a rapidly changing environment. The final influence on Baker's study came from Roger Griffin's theory of fascism which, in addition to a description of generic fascism as an ideal type of 'palingenetic' (or rebirth) ultranationalism, argues that fascism provided one route towards satisfying the desire for transcendence of the human condition.¹⁹

David Baker offers one approach to political biography which connects broad theoretical concerns about the nature of fascism with the life of an individual fascist. Before moving on to elaborate the motive at the core of Mosley's politics it will be useful to establish the specific use of the term 'political biography' as it is to be used in this study, contrasting it with approaches which have been adopted hitherto.

Political Biography

This study is a political biography in a specific sense. Conventionally biography attempts to reconstruct an individual life from the traces left by that person in the world and the impressions left in memory of others. A political biography differs in its central concern

¹⁸Adorno argued, "Thus a basically hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitive parent-child relationship is apt to carry over into a power-oriented, exploitatively dependent attitude toward one's sex partner and one's God and may well culminate in a political philosophy and social outlook which has no room for anything but a desperate clinging to what appears to be strong and a disdainful rejection of whatever is regarded as bottom.", T.W. Adorno et al, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton Library, 1969) 971

¹⁹Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993; 1st pub. Pinter 1991) 186-194

to reconstruct the political career of an individual and in doing so brings in as much of the individual's personality, world-view, background, as necessary to make sense, and describe the coherence, of their career. In this approach there is no inferred psychological description of the 'real' personality as such.²⁰ Of course with notorious individuals like Mosley a conventional explanation is to assign political motives to the pursuit of power, an approach which seems particularly plausible when dealing with a political player who dramatically changed political allegiances, eventually created his own party when his approach to real power was thwarted, and who eventually turned to extreme non-democratic politics in an attempt to become the absolute leader of the nation.²¹ Power, though, is an ambiguous term with a slippery nature;²² how is power measured, by its actual implementation or its potential? who genuinely holds the balance of power in a relationship, the dominant or subservient agent? what is the intention of any desire for

²⁰The use of the word 'biography' has been traced to the end of the fifth century AD and the Greek writer Damascius, while the word 'biography', rather than the Latin *biographia* was first found to be used in the English language during the 1680s, little more than a century before 'autobiography', Donald Phillip Verene [Charles Howard], *The New Art of Autobiography, An Essay on the Life of Giambattista Vico Written by Himself* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 54-55

²¹Humphry Berkeley described Mosley as a possibly great politician but his actions pointed to a "rash and misguided man" lacking "patience, humility and judgement." *The Myth that Will Not Die: The Formation of the National Government* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) 14-15; Mosley's 'official' biographer A.K. Chesterton wrote in his pamphlet *Why I Left Mosley* (n.p.: National Socialist League, 1938) following his resignation from the BUF that as a party it was "little more than a projection of his [Mosley's] own ego." cited in Baker *Ideology of Obsession*, 135.

²²Steven Lukes describes a clear-cut three level categorisation of power relationships connecting one and two dimensional views of power with liberal and reformist presuppositions and proposes a third view, "The radical,"... which "maintains that men's wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and, in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice." *Power: A radical view* (London: Macmillan, 1974) 34

power?²³ Power is inextricably bound to effects, and Mosley sought power to achieve particular ends, but this is a universal factor and can pervade all biographic narratives: the assessment of dominance and subservience sheds little light on an oddball character as Mosley. Ironically, one of the few continuities about Mosley's relationship to power is that throughout his political life real political power always remained in the hands of the British state which closely monitored his fascist activities.²⁴

While a typical biography strives to achieve a convincing and rounded portrait of its subjects life which connects both the public and private spheres, this was actually a division Mosley sought to uphold in his approach to politics,²⁵ and this artificial dichotomy will also be maintained in this study through the choice of source material, of which the majority consists of published, public, material. This method does not intend to deny the existential dimension of self-identity which can form an individual 'whole'

²³A concise collection of essays offering an array of approaches to the idea of power and discussed in an introduction by its editor Steven Lukes highlights the complex nature of the term power, *Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)

²⁴see Richard Thurlow, 'State Management of the BUF in the 1930s' in Mike Cronin, ed. *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996) 29-52; it is interesting to note that Ian Kershaw in his recent biography of Hitler uses 'power' as a focus of his study, but looks towards structural explanations of this power, as he writes "It is a task [of the biographer] which has to focus not upon the personality of Hitler, but squarely and directly upon *the character of his power - the power of the Führer*" (London: Penguin, 1999) xxvi, without doubt Hitler is an excellent example of the extent of power linked to charismatic leadership, while, on the other hand, Mosley represents charismatic power limited by the entrenched structural forces of Britain.

²⁵Photographs of Mosley posing with his family and photographs representing Mosley as a political leader graphically illustrate this divergence in character and represent different shades of personality proposed through texts with differing intents, see illustration in Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) and Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game/Beyond the Pale: Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1994 1st published 1982 & 1983)

and which the psychologist Laing claimed was "as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that... [the persons] identity and autonomy are never in question."²⁶ Instead it stresses the importance of recognising the existence of an external sphere of existence, or as Laing put it, "man does not live without 'his' world nor can his world exist without him."²⁷ This has the ring of Marx's dictum "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given transmitted from the past."²⁸ To some extent this political biography of Mosley emphasises the separation of an autonomous individual from the world he lives in through the exegesis of his textual products in the process of constructing Mosley as an individual political being in the world: a being engaging with existing discourses and [re]combining these structures with those that formed and define the individual. The effects of material historical forces on the production of the texts under consideration plays a lesser, background yet readily acknowledged, role in this study of ideas. So, while the structuralist canon may assign the individual to a function of the signification process, decentralising the individual subject for an eventual post-structuralist obliteration, this political biography assumes there is a connection between Mosley and his texts and that the texts have Mosley as their author.²⁹ Mosley lived as a being in the world and is the

²⁶R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 41

²⁷ibid., 20

²⁸Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 3rd. rev. Edition (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 10

²⁹John Sturrock ends his introduction to Structuralism with a reference to the post-structuralist (deconstructionalist) Derrida who argued for a refusal to distinguish between the willed and un-willed (unconsciously willed) meaning in a text: "An Author must will, or there an be no Text, but we have no sure way of telling *what* he

subject of this study, despite contemporary reservation towards dealing with only the public life of the subject.³⁰ By concentrating on Mosley's politics, his ideas, the locus of interaction between existing idea structures, his particular life narrative and the historical context which was dominated by political ideas, it could even be held that this is a study of ideology rather than biography.

An Ideology ?

Ideology is a notoriously ambiguous term which can be used both to indicate a set of genuine or evolving beliefs and to imply rigid political postures. It is a particularly modern notion originating from the political upheavals of the French Revolution, and developed in tandem with the erosion of universal beliefs which resulted from modernisation.³¹ Ephemeral and diverse ideas are bound up with ideology, some of which call into question its rational content characterising it as, "a myth written in the language

has willed." *Structuralism* (London: Paladin, 1986) 164

³⁰Philip Ziegler, "Biography: The Narrative," in *Shaping Lives, Reflections on Biography* eds. Ian Donaldson, Peter Read and James Walter (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1992) 226; Foucault has questioned the relationship between an author and the text evoking 'discourse' and 'ideology' to prominence over the individual, see Michel Foucault, 'What is an author', in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) 101-120.

³¹For an account of the use of the term 'Ideology' and its relationship to the 1789 Revolution see Michael Billig, *Ideology and Social Psychology, Extremism, Moderation and Contradiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) Ch 2, and Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) Ch 1; for modernisation and ideology see Andrew Gamble, *An Introduction to Modern Social and Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 12; for a useful account and developmental history of 'ideology' from a cultural studies perspective see Stuart Hall, "The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the 'Sociology of Knowledge'" in *On Ideology*, ed. Bill Schwarz *et al* (London: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Hutchinson, 1978)

of philosophy and science."³² A list has been compiled to show the diversity of meaning of ideology and its fickle nature.³³ Ideology can be perceived as promoting existing power structures producing "a set of assumptions and ideas about social behaviour and social systems,"³⁴ or as "a belief system linked to and legitimating the political and economic interests of the group that subscribes to it."³⁵ This can be achieved by modifying cultural systems of signification within a culture to bolster the dominant group.³⁶ Yet in appearance ideology is "someone else's thought, seldom our own,"³⁷ "always the stance of someone else, always *their* ideology."³⁸ The term ideology can be broadly applied to a set of beliefs which are common to a given a social group. It is not a term which is generally used to refer exclusively to an individual.³⁹ Yet individuals can

³²Lewis S. Feuer, *Ideology and the Ideologists* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975) 17.

³³Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 1-2

³⁴Graham Evans & Jeffrey Newnham, *The Dictionary of World Politics A reference guide to concepts, Ideas and Institutions* Revised ed. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990)

³⁵David E. Hunter and Phillip Whitten, eds. *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (London: Harpers and Row, 1976)

³⁶David McLellon associates ideology with all sign systems which can be implicated in an uneven distribution power and resources, *Ideology*, 2nd ed. (Buckinghamshire: Open University Press, 1995) 83.

³⁷*ibid.*, 1.

³⁸Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 2

³⁹Teun A van Dijk described the meaning of discourse, in both its construction or comprehension phases, as embodying opinions derived from an underlying ideology which acts as a framework of social cognition and part of the self-definition of a group, 'Discourse semantics and ideology', *Discourse and Society*, v.6, n.2, 1995, 243-289. Antony Giddens indicates a similar comprehension of ideology writing that "most casual exchange of words involves the speakers in the long-term history of language via which their words were formed, and simultaneously in the continuing reproduction of that language", *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (London:

be seen as agents constrained by existing social structures and simultaneously able to effect the constitution of society.⁴⁰ To shed light on an individual's 'ideology' it is useful to connect actions with political texts; to establish the relationship between the act with the ideas underpinning them.

One theorist of ideology has produced a paradigm setting out the relationship between an ideological core to the external world. This approach is particularly useful for a study of Mosley whose whole political project could be characterised as a rejection of abstract theory in favour of a system of ideas tested through practice and action. Martin Seliger describes ideologies as coherent systems of action orientated beliefs, comprising of a blend of fact and analysis of situations.⁴¹ He depicts the relationship of everyday politics and their justifications to suggest how everyday politics could jeopardise the purity of the central, essentially moral, prescriptive core of the ideology.

The result of exposure of the moral core to real political situations creates a rupture splitting the political argument into two strands: one of fundamental principles, final goals, and 'grand vistas' on which they will be realised set above the second, the operative dimension, of principles underlying and justifying policies. Seliger's model maintains the realisation of all the elements of an ideology but with differing emphases. Whereas moral prescriptions are central to fundamental ideology, technical prescriptions

Macmillan, 1982) 8.

⁴⁰see Antony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society Outline of the theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) passim

⁴¹Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976) 105-112

have priority in operative dimension. Tensions arising between the elements in the ideology cause realignments and hence ideological change.⁴² This distinction is crucial to this thesis, which demonstrates a consistent 'fundamental ideology', while also accounting for an extraordinary flexibility in the practice and policies Mosley chose (the technical prescription). Thus at the end of the Second World War, Mosley demonstrated a changing operative ideology, while sustaining a consistent ideological matrix, when he spoke to set up the Union Movement. He said:

"Every one of us knew [at the end of the First World War] that everything for which we thought we'd fought for had proved illusion, had proved betrayal. But, my friends, when we rose from disaster of that experience what happened then? It mattered not. We have not lost, we've gained, we've won. We've won ourselves and that's what matters."⁴³

Mosley's speeches and policy statements correspond to the operative dimension identified by Seliger's analysis. They represent an ideological expression with technical rather than moral prescriptions dominating; an ideology of political action rather than one of the philosophical meditative world. It is from these outward political expressions the continuities of fundamental ideology can be derived.

To describe this study of Mosley as a reconstruction of his ideology would be misleading

⁴²see 'Ideology as Belief System: Martin Seliger', John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984) 75-83; Mosley said in a 1972 television interview, "we have got to learn lessons from the past. Anybody who doesn't learn lessons from the past is a fool; he's lived without learning anything...the basic error of fascism was the disregard for liberty.. in its drive for action at all costs, it overrode liberty." *Firing Line*, chaired by William F. Buckley (London: Steven Books, 1997)

⁴³quoted by Trevor Grundy, *Memoir of a Fascist Childhood* (London: Arrow, 1998) 33

if it were to be taken to imply that a static, formulaic set of precepts informed his political career. Rather, by adopting Seliger's model of ideology, the dynamic elements of Mosley's fundamental ideology can be highlighted. This core consists of a matrix of interrelated elements, each present at every moment in Mosley's political biography. At any moment a particular combination of the fundamental elements may appear to dominate as the matrix responds to the social, political, economic, and historical environment which surrounded Mosley.⁴⁴ For the heuristic purpose of advancing this study, the fundamental ideological matrix, at the core of Mosley's operative political utterances, can be described as a quest to *realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness*. This ascription, in all its banality, describes the fundamental matrix underpinning all his politics and novel campaigns. It does not imply a psychological state or emotional conditioning but is, ideal typically, a heuristic device. Mosley wanted to recapture the greatness Britain had achieved during the preceding centuries and regenerate the nation to become great again. Furthermore, these terms in themselves shed light on Mosley's politics by raising questions, what would sufficiently constitute 'realization'; 'national' raises issues of what constituted the nation; and what are the boundaries of 'greatness'? In short, the matrix presents a number of intrinsic contradictions which can be resolved dynamically, for example, national greatness can only be maintained by persistent renewal and striving to become 'greater' at every moment. So while it may be possible to construct an argument that Mosley's love of his

⁴⁴to help illuminate this approach an analogy with biological genes may help: a gene is a piece of DNA code - a genotype which is sometimes expressed as a phenotype under particular environmental conditions. For example, genes giving their bearer a predisposition to cancer may only be triggered in the presence of a carcinogen such as those in tobacco smoke. Mosley's ideological matrix is comparable to a chromosome, a string of genes which are activated by particular environmental circumstances.

country was founded in his aristocratic background, a vision he wanted to preserve, his real experiences and understanding of the world led him to project this vision into the future. It is important that all the elements within the matrix are viewed as being interdependent and considered together and complete as an ideal type. By using the ideological matrix to shed light on Mosley he appears as an aristocratic futurist not a right wing conservative retrograde.

Core Elements in Mosley's Political Biography

In this political biography each chapter will be structured ideal typically around a particular ideological element determined by the exposure of the ideological matrix to the experience of the world. These are:

- the myth of the airman
- national leadership
- national economic planning
- unemployment as an expression of national decline
- demand for a new party for national regeneration
- ultra-nationalism
- intolerance to opposition and reflexive denial
- the neo Platonic-Hegelian moral core

Each element is the articulation or expression of a central concern, or issue, Mosley focused upon during a particular period.⁴⁵ They represent a manifestation of the

⁴⁵following Dennett's arguments discussed above these are ascriptions on behaviour. No claim is being put forward that they represent real internal cognitive mechanisms within Mosley's mind. Instead they have a heuristic function of allowing underlying patterns in Mosley's utterances and policies to become evident.

ideological matrix interacting with particular empirical circumstances. Of course this methodology uses sample synchronic 'moments' which disrupts the diachronic change over time. As samples, some elements are excluded, for example 'culture'. The theme of culture, which has gained considerable momentum in recent fascist studies, does not appear central to this study.⁴⁶ However the British Fascist press carried many articles on cultural issues as individual fascists 'worked towards' Mosley by producing texts that presumed Mosley's broad aims and wishes.⁴⁷ Mosley though wrote and said little about culture and was more concerned with themes such as economics and technocracy. Culture, then, does not appear as a major theme in the samples in this study despite playing a large part in British fascist publications with leading British fascists, such as A.K. Chesterton, being cultural producers in their own right.⁴⁸ One other area which is not

⁴⁶for example Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, *Fascist Visions. Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1997); Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford: OUP 1992); R. Bosworth and P. Dogliani, *Italian Fascism: History, memory and representation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: the political culture of interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Simonetta Falasca-Zampony, *Fascist spectacle: the aesthetics of power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeremy Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* (Valentano: Scipioni, 1991); Robin Pickering-lazzi, *Mothers of Invention: women, Italian fascism and culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); George L. Mosse wrote of the role of culture in understanding generic fascism two decades ago, see 'Toward a General Theory of Fascism' revised and reprinted in *The Fascist Revolution: toward a general theory of fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999) 1-44

⁴⁷Ian Kershaw uses the expression 'working towards the Führer' to express the way individuals within the Third Reich could advance their position and personal status, and also how the behaviour of ordinary citizens can be understood as acting within the broad parameters of Hitler's message and, without compulsion, anticipating his wishes and ambitions, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (Penguin Books 1998) 529-530

⁴⁸A few examples to give the flavour of cultural articles in BUF publications:

H.G. Gibbs, 'Behind the Screen... THE CINEMA - Jew Controlled and Jew Corrupted.' *The Blackshirt*, no.156, 18 April 1936, 5.

directly dealt with in this study is foreign policy. Mosley did hold, superficially at least, contradictory positions on foreign policy being once an enthusiastic supporter of the League of Nations and its bid to protect smaller nations, and later supporting the advancement of the fascist blocks in Europe as they swallowed up smaller countries. This contradiction can be resolved with reference to Mosley's ideological matrix which sought to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. And so once Mosley had turned his back on the democratic, parliamentary reformist route to achieve national greatness when the New Party failed at the polls in October 1931, he moved wholeheartedly, and unreservedly, into the fascist route to a greater Britain.

It is the presence of these sample moments which form the chapters of the study which

'A Worthy Englishman' about a comedian with the slogan "British artists for British Entertainments" which met with disapproval from "The alien controlled amusement trusts and their advertising media - the Press and the B.B.C." *The Blackshirt*, no.108, 17 May 1935, 5

Anne Cutmore, 'The Drama's Reawakening', *The Fascist Quarterly*, vol.1, no.4, October 1935, 489-495.

'Jewry and Art: Perversion or Public Taste' about Epstein's 'Adam' sculpture described as "vulgar and often blasphemous...But when British Union comes to power, a new standard of values will be introduced; in a nation striving to 'live like athletes' [a phrase used by Mosley *The Greater Britain*, (1932) 38] there will arise a true appreciation of the inspirational value of real art, instead of the decadent taste of to-day." *Action*, no.180, 5 August 1939, 13

A.K. Chesterton, 'Cancer of Jewish Culture: But Art Cannot be Denied to a Mighty People Restored to its soil' *Action*, no.75, 24 July 1937, 10-11

'Decline of the Pantomime because Alien Producers do not understand British Institutions' *Action*, no.148, 17 December 1938, 9

A new collection of essays on British Fascist culture is an important development and demonstrates the growing awareness among scholars of this area to an understanding of fascism, Thomas Linehan and Julie Gottlieb eds. *Cultural Expressions of the British Extreme Right* (forthcoming)

are central to this political biography rather than any assumed 'personality' of Mosley and such a methodology, and the restrictions on the length of this study, have produced circumstances which exclude some themes equally germane to this study as those included.

Biographies of Mosley

The enigma generated by Mosley's political manoeuvring and his association with fascism has attracted the attention of a number of biographers. Each biography has strived to explain or justify Mosley's politics within a general biographic tradition, yet they arguably fail to adequately disclose the underlying coherence of Mosley's ideas, or they do so in a reductionist manner which could be equally applicable to the whole of Mosley's generation and hence shed little light on his motivations. A recent television mini-series which appeared sympathetic to Mosley's life and was produced with Nicholas Mosley as advisor, demonstrated a general interest in Mosley as a subject but failed to illuminate fundamental motives, although it did imply a connection between betrayal of his wife and betrayal of his country in the promotional material.⁴⁹

The first major work of biography was written by W.E.D. Allen, former Conservative MP, and security service intelligence officer who infiltrated the inner sanctum of the BUF and wrote under the name James Drennan.⁵⁰ Allen was not a BUF member,⁵¹ yet his

⁴⁹Television drama *Mosley*, 1998 (broadcast c. February/ March 1998)

⁵⁰Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 120-1; Drennan was a MI5 agent spying on Mosley and the BUF; John Hope has suggested that a lack of knowledge among the MI5 papers of Allen may indicate he was an MI6, Thurlow, *Secret Service*, 206

⁵¹Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 121.

BUF, Oswald Mosley and British Fascism, published in 1934, provides useful insights into the BUF world-view. Allen portrays Mosley as both the embodiment of the fascist ideals he articulated and the product of historical processes he criticised: the paradox of Mosley's ideas emerge as he is portrayed as a man standing outside and unaffected by the decadent world he depicts. Allen illustrated this with the claim from opponents describing Mosley as 'un-English', a criticism Allen attributed to Mosley's lack of "that 'bourgeois' stamp which has moulded to its flaccid type the generations of English politicians who have grown up since the Industrial Revolution. There is something of the Elizabethan in his gallant, rather arrogant, air."⁵² Allen described Mosley as if he were a metaphor for the British national soul which had been suppressed.⁵³ The contradictions inherent in Mosley's various party affiliations is explained by Allen as a response to the flaws inherent in each party, an interpretation of events which is echoed by Mosley.⁵⁴

Allen also endeavoured to explain the paradoxical position which Mosley held as a British patriot supporting a politics with a continental source, fascism. He describes Mosley as fundamentally British, not under the sway of continental fascism, but argues that his deep-felt dissatisfaction with the old party system was gratified by fascism and developed "along his own lines and in accordance with the peculiar conditions of the

⁵²James Drennan [W.E.D. Allen], *BUF, Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: John Murray, 1934) 14; the problem for Allen was the mind of the bourgeois described as the "psychological expression of the capitalist state of society", *ibid.*, 76; this was Mosley's task to crack the bourgeois mentality, "A sublime unconsciousness of moral error is a very definite characteristic of the bourgeois mind, which has become associated with the bourgeois outlook." *ibid.*, 34.

⁵³Allen's description would not be out of place in Skidelsky's biography, see *Oswald Mosley*, 23

⁵⁴*Mosley - Right or Wrong?* (London: Lion Books, 1961) question 234, 217-218

British problem, [Mosley had] been developing that rationalization of Modern economic theory and pragmatic idealism which now forms the basis of action in those European countries which have already become Fascist".⁵⁵ Mosley's political affiliation was interpreted by Allen as an indication of a historical trend across Europe. Mosley was essentially impatient with the existing political parties and possessed a sensitivity to the pulse of modern political trends. Allen saw the problems of decline in Britain to be latent in the bourgeois mentality and the answer lay in the hands of an aristocrat.

Mosley appointed A.K. Chesterton to write his biography, *Oswald Mosley Portrait of a Leader* published 1937. Writing in a manner similar to Allen, Chesterton explored Mosley's life as a microcosm of the British nation. From Elizabethan roots the Mosley family had suffered the same decline that the nation had undergone, losing the "daring and enterprise of its Elizabethan and Cavalier spirit and lapsed into a somewhat ponderous pedestrianism."⁵⁶ Chesterton pointed to continuity in Mosley's politics arguing that since he entered parliament he was actually a National-Socialist.⁵⁷ Chesterton cites Mosley speaking to a Tory electorate as he first sought election to parliament:

"`Our policy,' he told his audience, `is to blot out the manifold disgraces of our national life as far as any Government can. We have set before you a great social, progressive programme, a great imperial programme. We must go forward as a great united people, as the greatest people in the world, with all the force behind

⁵⁵Allen, op cit, 141

⁵⁶A.K. Chesterton, *Oswald Mosley. Portrait of a Leader* (London: Action Press, 1937) 11

⁵⁷ibid., 25

us of our greatness, our wealth, and our power."⁵⁸

Mosley's consistency stemmed from his work for a grand cause beyond party or personal interests.⁵⁹ Destiny called him to lead the British people: "he will not rest until this deplorable decadence of the mind and soul and body of Britain has been cut away in the surge and spirit of a race reborn" wrote Chesterton to enhance the enigma of Mosley.⁶⁰ Both Allen and Chesterton sought explanations of the BUF leader in terms of continuity of purpose, for Allen it was dissatisfaction with the 'Old Gangs', for Chesterton it was the call of a higher purpose. Their sympathy and overt political purpose lends these accounts the flavour of hagiography, but they do represent an interesting attempt to relate the external course of Mosley's career to an internal principle even if this principle, that of decadence and rebirth, is arguably the fruit of their empathy with Mosley's fascist mindset at that phase in his career rather than of the empirical research needed to demonstrate its centrality to Mosley's thought 'objectively'.⁶¹

The post-war debate on Mosley and British fascism was opened by Colin Cross whose *The Fascists in Britain* was published in the early nineteen sixties amid a minor upsurge of violence at Mosley meetings with anti-fascist activity and fears of a fascist revival. Only two years earlier Mosley had made his first and failed attempt to return to

⁵⁸ibid.

⁵⁹ibid., 48-49

⁶⁰ibid, 115.

⁶¹However, David Baker described Chesterton's biography as "a work of straightforward propaganda.", op cit, 130

parliament since 1931 as a Union Movement member.⁶² Furthermore Mosley was also busy planning the grandly named Conference of Venice which would produce the European Declaration in 1962.⁶³

Central to Cross's account of British fascism is the charismatic role of Mosley, an approach later criticised because it "leads to the neglect of significant aspects of the topic".⁶⁴ Despite this, using a combination of journalistic insight and historical fact, Cross inferred Mosley's inner compulsions. For example, when crossing the floor of the House of Commons Mosley was "convinced that some new political force was on the point of being born, an apocalyptic vision which never left him."⁶⁵ Cross crudely sought to infer ideological principles from external aspects of the BUF as a movement, suggesting the "essence of Fascism was authority and the first proof of the BUF's authority was to be its ability to silence hecklers."⁶⁶ He also assumed that susceptibility to Mosley's charisma and ideological contradictions defined the typical fascist man who was "of the lower middle-class, not particularly clever but capable of loyalty and sacrifice. Fascism had appeal because it attacked both the capitalism he resented and the Socialism he feared."⁶⁷ Cross noted an ideological continuum from the First World War trench experience, and

⁶²Mosley for the first time lost his deposit polling just 8% of the North Kensington vote, Colin Cross, *Fascists in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rochcliff, 1961) 202.

⁶³Mosley, *My Life*, 434-439

⁶⁴Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn, *Traditions of Intolerance. Historical perspectives on fascism and race discourse in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 2.

⁶⁵Cross, *op cit*, 15.

⁶⁶*ibid.*, 68

⁶⁷*ibid.*, 70.

desire to rebuild the nation,⁶⁸ to the *Birmingham Proposals* and *Revolution by Reason*, which are "basically the economic policy which Mosley was to advocate as a Fascist".⁶⁹ But no attempt is made to link these themes to Mosley's apparently contradictory positions, for example his rejection of democratic politics in which his career was well established.

Robert Skidelsky's biography of Mosley strove to become the standard authoritative work but this ambition is flawed by his undoubted admiration for his subject, and while it stands as an impressive work of biographical reconstruction it does sit [un]comfortably as a companion volume to Mosley's autobiography, which was, incidentally, re-issued to coincide with publication of Skidelsky's biography.⁷⁰

Skidelsky recognised the First World War, "more than any other single experience shaped Mosley the man and the politician",⁷¹ but some rare feature in Mosley's character developed this experience: "it is the exceptional person who grasps the historical experience, who 'universalises' it."⁷² Skidelsky pointed to Mosley's first election address and suggests: "How little anything really fundamental changes thereafter....He has fought

⁶⁸ibid., 10-11.

⁶⁹ibid., 25.

⁷⁰Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London: Macmillan, 1975); critics of the biography point to the reliance upon Mosley's own recollections, John Vincent, 'The Case for Mosley', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 April 1975, 350; William J. Bader Jr., 'The Case for Mosley' *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, v.xxx, no.41-42, (1977) 62-67, esp. 66.

⁷¹Skidelsky, op cit, 66.

⁷²Robert Skidelsky, "Reflections on Mosley and British Fascism" in *British Fascism*, ed. Kenneth Lunn & Richard Thurlow (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 97.

all his life for the agenda of 1918, returning to it repeatedly with all the enthusiasm of a first love."⁷³ Skidelsky explains Mosley's politics with reference to the twin elements of the First World War experience and his aristocratic ancestry which provided the necessary aptitude for leadership. Skidelsky's approach to this biography is remarkably similar to the earlier biographies of W.E.D. Allen and Chesterton which also explain Mosley's politics as the fruit of a unique blend of 'ancestry + war experience'. Fascism fits like a glove to Skidelsky paradigm of Mosley's politics. Skidelsky's representation of fascism as consisting of three elements, the "quest for modernisation and the revolt against its consequences - at a particular moment in time",⁷⁴ hinders his understanding of Mosley by setting reaction against revolutionary principles. When seen in the light of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix, and alongside the emerging new consensus on generic fascism which argues fascism did indeed possess a coherent ideology, the contradictions Skidelsky presents evaporate. Skidelsky suggests a fusion of traditional and the modern existed in Mosley's presentation of policy: "Traditional was the large public meeting to get across policy, modern was the theatricality and bombast to sugar the pill."⁷⁵ But Skidelsky's account of fascism, being based on the apparent forward/backward, modern/tradition contradiction, is not evident to Mosley who does not speak from a position of contradiction when, for example, he attacks Britain's government:

"This is not Britain for whom these men speak with bluster, with cowardice, and with treachery. Britain is our Britain - the land of the yet more brilliant future

⁷³Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 72 & 73.

⁷⁴ibid., 299-300.

⁷⁵ibid., 358.

illuminated by the genius of modern science, and inspired by the deathless Spirit of Fascism. Forward to our own."⁷⁶

Skidelsky offers a detailed account of Mosley but one which does not shed light on the consistent motivation of his subject.

Memoirs provide insights and ambience of a period unavailable to the dispassionate biographer. Diana Mosley's *A Life of Contrasts: An Autobiography* describes her experiences while interned under Defence Regulation 18(b) in prison during the Second World War and she compare and contrasts Hitler with Churchill. Diana suggests it was Mosley's ambition to be able to "translate his ideas into action" and it was this which led him to form the New Party. His move into fascism Diana attributes to the "smashed meetings" and the need for a defense force. She continues:

"He called his movement Fascist because it would have been dishonest not to recognize that Fascism was a universal movement in the Europe of the period, although it took very different forms in different countries. He was convinced that the English form would transcend the others."⁷⁷

Diana's political bias and understandable faithfulness to her husband provides few further insights into his politics unlike the efforts of Mosley's heir Nicholas.

Nicholas Mosley provides greater analytical detail of the motivations of his father than his stepmother. Nicholas argues his father "never understood the limitations of the power

⁷⁶Mosley, 'Britain and Italy. The Fools who Govern Us', *Action*, no.11, 30 April 1936, 9.

⁷⁷Diana Mosley, *A Life of Contrasts* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1977) 97

of words,"⁷⁸ believing an argument won was a problem solved rather than the simple and effective deployment of language from one side of the debate winning mainly on the grounds of superior rhetorical technique. It was this attitude which led people to doubt the sincerity of Mosley and his motivations.

Language and words, the material stuff of Nicholas Mosley's working life as a novelist, are used to understand his father. He reveals that Mosley tried to order the world as if ordering words, and his failure was his inability to step back to "see what was the nature of human beings".⁷⁹ To Nicholas his father could achieve only with words and but not beyond them because he lacked self-knowledge. The rejection of the Mosley memorandum by the Labour Government was a brutal introduction to the reality of political life which could include not keeping promises. Raised outside of political traditions Mosley found this attitude difficult to bear and it was, to him, "cheating".⁸⁰ In his son's view, Mosley saw human beings as essentially rational and this was reflected in their words yet Mosley did not grasp the rules of the political game where what was said may contradict this.⁸¹ Such naivety is hard to believe yet Mosley's contempt of the 'Old Gang' politicians reflects this outlook:

"Their ways are not our ways, and even their language is not our language.

Between them and us is the great gulf which divides the new world from the old

⁷⁸Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982) 56.

⁷⁹ibid., 178.

⁸⁰ibid., 129.

⁸¹ibid., 130-131.

world."⁸²

Nicholas Mosley saw his father missing a fundamental truth at the heart of the political game and he veered off the political map leaving his ideas to the 'underground of rejected knowledge'.⁸³

The publication of his autobiography marked the return of Mosley into the limelight shed by television and press interest which was itself an acknowledgement that Mosley no longer posed the slightest threat to the Establishment.⁸⁴ *My Life* does, though, represent far more than a cultural gambit played to provide Mosley with an acceptable gloss. In his autobiography Mosley does present his life as driven by a consistent determination to regenerate the nation underpinned by a commitment to action, but this is displaced by his apparent desire to avoid war. So, while the empirical expression of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix, in its variety of formulations, including his autobiography, is not usefully represented in existing biographies, the detail of Mosley's own exposition of his life does express the ideological matrix described in this study. For example, as a 1918 candidate seeking election for the Conservative party he describes his written speech "fell flat" but the *dynamism* of the following question and answer session

⁸²Mosley, 'The "Old Gangs" Huddle Together: Olympia has proved they are all the same', *Blackshirt*, n.61, 22 June 1934, 1

⁸³an expression used by Richard Thurlow, "The return of Jeremiah: the Rejected Knowledge of Sir Oswald Mosley", in *British Fascism* ed. Lunn and Thurlow (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

⁸⁴Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 300-1; Mosley would now write for the *Daily Telegraph Magazine* no.279, 20 February 1979; for the reception of his autobiography by critics see subsequent editions of *My Life*, and also Richard Thurlow, 'The Black Knight', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 9, 3 (May-June 1975) 15-19

"brought me alive and evoked some latent power of exposition."⁸⁵ The vitality of these exchanges presented Mosley with a paradigm for the resolution of contradictions inherent in the various strands of the matrix: dynamism and action were, in effect, synonymous with the 'greatness' Mosley sought for the nation. Furthermore, in his accounts of his experiences in the Conservative party, and elsewhere in his autobiography, Mosley frequently juxtaposed the old with the new to act as metaphors of the historical process he perceived, and with regularity he aligned himself with the motivations of the young, as he wrote in 1968, "I do not feel that my years separate me from youth. On the contrary my own life experience gives me the liveliest sympathy with the young."⁸⁶ And even with the distance of time and a criticism of interwar fascism Mosley still expounded the fundamental fascist belief in national decadence and renewal, writing, for example, "in a decadent society renaissance is most likely to come from the mass of the people."⁸⁷ And as he recounted his visit to Germany in 1929:

"In several of the many resorts to which we were taken, the sexes had simply exchanged clothed, make-up and the habits of Nature in crudest form. Scenes of decadence and depravity suggested a nation had sunk so deep that it could never rise again. Yet within two or three years men in brown shirts were goose stepping around Kurfürstendamm."⁸⁸

Mosley described his political ambition as the formation of a movement of the centre,

⁸⁵Mosley, *My Life*, 90

⁸⁶*ibid.*, 129

⁸⁷*ibid.*, 191

⁸⁸*ibid.*, 243

which for some commentators was achieved,⁸⁹ in addition to preventing future wars, which he did not achieve. The First World War was fundamental to Mosley's politics: "my whole political life was in a sense predetermined by this almost religious conviction, and its inevitability influenced me to seek a continuance of the national union of war for the purposes of peace, for construction instead of destruction".⁹⁰ Mosley responded to claims about his anti-semitism through explanations in terms of his patriotic service in the First World War, and ceaseless search for peace.⁹¹ His opponent was not the Jew but anyone "trying to involve the British in any war which did not threaten the life or touch the vital interests of Britain."⁹² And this comment Mosley is reflecting his ideological matrix in apologetic mode.

The ideological matrix can be usefully seen as the centre of Mosley's belief system. He stated the belief that he had been given the task "of realising new values in a failing society, I believe we should look not to Puritanism but rather to the classic Greeks and to our own Elizabethans."⁹³ Mosley feared a reaction to the youth libertarian movements of the sixties leading to puritanism and start a "cycle of fatality ending again in decadence."⁹⁴ Throughout his autobiography Mosley describes himself as aware of an

⁸⁹see for example, D.S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 2, echoing the theory of fascism described by Martin Seymour Lipset, *Political Man*, (London: Mercury Books, 1963) 133

⁹⁰Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1968) 100.

⁹¹ibid., 340.

⁹²ibid., 339.

⁹³ibid., 246.

⁹⁴ibid.

emergent crisis which would spur a renewal of civilization: "At a moment of supreme crisis the will to Europe a Nation can arise everywhere from the soil of Europe, like a primeval fire. First must come the idea."⁹⁵ Mosley builds upon the writing of his acolyte biographers, Allen and Chesterton, to produce a fascinating apologia for his life studded with reference to some of the most influential personalities of his time. Despite Mosley's attempts to provide an explanation for his politics, they do not undermine the value of his autobiography as an expression of his ideological matrix: it is in itself a document representing Mosley producing an operative expression of his ideological matrix in an social atmosphere condemning all former fascists after the defeat of fascism and nazism in the Second world War.

The presence of an underlying continuity of fundamental ideology or 'vision' in Mosley's political career is a topic neglected in existing biographies as a primary focus of interpretation. The operative dimension of this ideology; that which engages in the day to day political realities, is by its nature accessible, but in itself does not disclose such a continuity. Attempts at driving deeper into the internal motivations which underlie them have often been scant and usually reductionist. As will become clear, despite being categorised as hagiographers, it is the biographies by Allen and Chesterton which closer describe the inner machinations of Mosley's ideological matrix because they take seriously his political ideas as representing a coherent ideology expressed in terms of dissatisfactions with the old system and the call of a presumed higher authority. This study of Mosley's ideological matrix moves some way to resolve the contradictions in Mosley's politics by arguing the ideological matrix was predisposed to fascism but was

⁹⁵ibid., 465.

not fascist in itself. For the implication of this assertion to become clear it is important that the concept of fascism used in this study is established.

Fascism

Ranging from a term of political fear and ideological opposition to one of scholarly analysis and reflection, the definition of fascism poses vexed question. The first to recognise the existence of a new genus of politics called 'fascism' were Marxists who, in the aftermath of the Russian revolution, found little difficulty seeing it the repressive last resort of capitalism in the face of rising proletarian strength. In his *Lectures on Fascism* Palmiro Togliatti described fascism as the "open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" developed to defend capitalist society at the expense of the democracy the bourgeoisie developed;⁹⁶ "Scratch a capitalist and find a Fascist" was the 1936 conclusion of the British communist Arthur Horner. R. Palme Dutt repeated the view of fascism coming from the political left and attributed fascism's rise to the weakness of working class leadership, suggesting that the national idea of fascism was simply the mask of a direct dictatorship.⁹⁷ In the fourteenth volume of the *New Peoples Library* Henry Brailsford described fascism as a militant, middle class youth movement which rejected representative democracy, civil liberty, and the right to free discussion. Fascism relied on a self chosen leader whose method of cajoling disciplined masses was brutal force: this was an anti-rational movement with the purpose of uniting the nation for war.⁹⁸

⁹⁶Palmiro Togliatti, *Lectures on Fascism* (New York: International Publishers, 1976) 3-4

⁹⁷R. Palme Dutt, *Fascism and Social Revolution* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934) 88-89

⁹⁸Henry Noel Brailsford, *Why Fascism Means War*, New Peoples Library vol. xiv. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938)

Fascism, in this interpretation, is an extreme extension of capitalism and without an ideology of its own. Mosley's fascism was also described in terms of a place of last resort for those disaffected by the existing democratic political system: if the socialist government relied on the opportunism which brought into being the National Government it would alienate Labour members, or if the socialist government pressed forward with a programme facing only a Conservative minority in the House of Commons and abolishing the Lords, the Right would lose the incentive to participate in the constitutional process. Either way Mosley could collect the disaffected into his fascist party, his day would have dawned.⁹⁹ Even after the war the Labour government was perceived by some on the far left as implementing "one Fascist policy after another", such as coercion of the individual; coercion of Justice; adopting Totalitarianism, muzzling the Press, and Dictatorship.¹⁰⁰ It would seem from these accounts that fascism was simply an abhorrent cancer growing on the political body: a perversion of existing ideology but not an ideology possessing its own and distinct genetic material.¹⁰¹

Outside the Marxist camp there has been an extraordinary lack of consensus over how to define fascism. Liberal academics and social scientists have made inroads into grasping the nature of fascism as a distinct ideology. Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* studied fascist movements in France, Italy and Germany and is a substantial work which

⁹⁹W.A. Rudlin, *The Growth of Fascism in Great Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935) 134.

¹⁰⁰John Amend-All [pseud.], *Fascism Comes to Britain* (London: np, 1945) 4

¹⁰¹this opinion still has currency in a highly elaborated form in the theory of Zeev Sternhell, who argues that fascism emerged from an anti-materialist revision of Marxism see 'Fascist Ideology' in Walter Laqueur ed., *Fascism A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979)

directed the debate over fascist ideology in a new direction even if the resulting definition was for many extremely cryptic, stating that fascism "is at the same time resistance to practical transcendence and the struggle against theoretical transcendence."¹⁰² Nevertheless, David Baker has highlighted the usefulness of Nolte's methodology for biographic studies because it uses phenomenological approach seeking to understand the subject from the way it presents itself rather than imposing schemes, such as a Marxist paradigm, from the outside.¹⁰³

Once the search for a definition of the central defining characteristic of fascism moved decisively away from the ideological demands of Marxism,¹⁰⁴ other scholars sought to either limit the term to a specific geo-linguistic region,¹⁰⁵ or produce a checklist of features which could be used to indicate the presence of the phenomenon.¹⁰⁶ Fascism has been described by Sternhell as an essentially anti-materialist ideology rooted in the traditions of the political left: "One of the most important factors in the rise of fascist ideology: the transition from the left to right."¹⁰⁷ Mussolini and Mosley exemplify this

¹⁰²Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965) 453

¹⁰³David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, 7

¹⁰⁴A.J.Gregor recognised that fascism had a substantive ideology of its own, albeit one broad enough to include all forms of totalitarianism, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York: The Free Press, 1969)

¹⁰⁵see for example George Allardyce, 'What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept', *The American History Review*, v.84, n.2, 1979.

¹⁰⁶Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980) 211

¹⁰⁷Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 15

argument, while significantly the title of his study into the sources of French fascism and today's Front National share similar slogans.¹⁰⁸ Mosley, argued for a similar political interpretation of fascism in *The Greater Britain*.¹⁰⁹ However, since Sternhell's analysis precludes in principle movements without left-wing input, notably Nazism, his influence on the debate has been marginal.

Over the last two decades the search for a fascist minimum with a strong ideological component and able to identify the body of fascism beneath its various national dresses has gained wide, if not universal, acceptance in the academic world.¹¹⁰ One example is Eatwell's model which identified fascism's tendency to carry out syntheses over a broad range of cultural and political themes based on a core myth of a 'Holistic-national radical Third way'.¹¹¹ Griffin undertook the task of establishing the generic core of fascist ideology by seeing in the utterances and texts of its proponents the permutations of a shared core ideology. Adopting a Weberian ideal type paradigm to advance his analysis Griffin,¹¹² identified the generic essence of fascism as "a genus of political ideology

¹⁰⁸ibid.; Nick Fraser, 'Journey to the Far Right', *BBC Two*, 20 March 1999, which included film of a march in Paris with demonstrators chanting "not left, not right but Front National"

¹⁰⁹Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: BUF publications, 1932) 17-19

¹¹⁰see Griffin's introduction, *International Fascism: Theories and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998)

¹¹¹Roger Eatwell's spectral-syncretic model, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol.4, no.2, 1992, 174 & 190, and *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto & Windus. 1995) 11; Mosley clearly exemplified Eatwell's typology in his titles, for example 'The World Alternative: European Synthesis', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1936, and *The European Situation: The Third Force*, March 1950

¹¹²"Such [ideal type] constructions make it possible to determine the typological locus of historical phenomenon. They enable us to see if, in particular traits or in their

whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism."¹¹³ This definition stands in stark contrast to the 'check-list' approach of Stanley Payne by postulating an ideological matrix which underlies all other ideological, organisational and stylistic components. Furthermore, Griffin has argued that a series of authoritative publications over recent years suggest the emergence of a 'new consensus' of opinion regarding the central elements of generic fascism which he summarises in the following definition: "fascism is a genus of modern, revolutionary, 'mass' politics which, while extremely heterogeneous in its social support and in the specific ideology promoted by its many permutations, draws its internal cohesion and driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth in a post-liberal new order."¹¹⁴ The fact that modern day fascists recognise the new consensus as being in accordance with their world view does suggest that it represents more than a semblance of truth.¹¹⁵ The 'new consensus' can be seen as the springboard from which this study into an individual fascist ideologue can be launched. It represents a body of theoretical work, arrived at independently by a range of scholars, recognising the existence of a distinct fascist ideology centred on the core preoccupation with

total character, the phenomena approximate one of our constructions: to determine the degree of approximation of the historical phenomenon to the theoretically constructed type. To this extent, the construction is merely a technical aid which facilitates a more lucid arrangement and terminology." *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans., ed. and intro. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction, ed. Karl Mannheim (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1947) 324.

¹¹³Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993) 26

¹¹⁴Roger Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998) 14

¹¹⁵Griffin's theory has attracted recognition from ultra-right organisations, see *ibid.*, 19, n.46

national decline and its transcendence in a new order, and has informed the peculiar focus of the present study. Furthermore, the earlier failure to achieve a consensus definition of 'fascism' influenced the argument surrounding fascism in Britain.

The propaganda of opposition to Mosley's attempted revival after the Second World War sought to know its enemy and required a definition of fascism. For example, Frederic Mullally's cautionary tale *Fascism Inside Britain* was published in 1946 to discourage a rekindling of fascism through its portrayal of fictional characters. Mullally described fascism as comprising three primary peculiarities, racism, the corporate state, and an intense hatred towards democracy. Individually these elements would not constitute 'fascism' but for Mullally, "it is not possible to hold all three without taking up a complete fascist position."¹¹⁶ This tripartite scheme has resonances in much later academic studies, for example Benewick who described a three part progression of Mosley's evolving ideas, the 'Corporate State', 'Jewish conspiracy' and 'Nationalism' as essential elements of fascism. Benewick's approach is refined by Nugent who described five elements of BUF ideology:

1. speeches and writings of Mosley
2. contributions of an inner core of BUF hierarchy
3. periodic publications of the movement
4. speeches and writings of lesser leaders
5. all other pronouncements

Categories 1 and 2 Nugent describes as authoritative categories. Nugent's framework was

¹¹⁶Frederic Mullally, *Fascism Inside Britain* (London: Claud Morris Books, 1946)
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elaborated by Cullen who highlighted four core doctrinal elements in the BUF, economic, patriotic, the ex-servicemen's ethos, and the idea of a modern movement.¹¹⁷ The problem of defining 'fascism' was circumvented by Richard Thurlow's in his history of British fascism by adopting an operational use of the term 'fascism' to indicate, "those movements which in terms of members and activity were significant in the inter-war period and which advertised their allegiance to the creed by calling themselves fascist."¹¹⁸ This approach had already achieved some heuristic success when used by Mullally to provide the framework for his account of British fascism. The British debate on fascism presents Mullally's emphasis on the negative factors in BUF ideas which is later countered by the sympathetic Cullen. The importance of Nugent's analysis lay in his stress upon the importance of taking seriously the ideas of Mosley which were the heart of the movement.

Beyond the confines of academia British fascists provide their own testimony to a distinct fascist ideology. The British fascist Captain R. Gordon-Canning wrote an article, recently republished, *The Inward Strength of a National Socialist*.¹¹⁹ Gordon-Canning wrote of the metaphysical and mystical elements which drive the fascist toward his chosen creed. A void in society which united people had arisen through the general

¹¹⁷R. Benewick *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Allen Lane 1972); N. Nugent, "The ideas of the British Union of Fascists" in *The British Right. Conservative and right wing politics in Britain*, ed. N. Nugent and R. King (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977); S.M. Cullen, "The development of the ideas and policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932-40." *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (1987): 115-136.

¹¹⁸Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, xv

¹¹⁹Capt. R. Gordon-Canning M.C. *The Inward Strength of the National Socialist* 2nd edition (London: Steven Books, 1998) 1st published 1938

decline in belief and of the church so, "it remains for the mystical urge inherent in national socialism to revitalise it, to spiritualise, the daily life and thought of the people."¹²⁰ This revitalisation had a militant method written in horticultural terminology to free humanity from economic hardship "militant he must be, for evil, like weeds, if tolerated will crush out good."¹²¹ And the organic message is central to Gordon-Canning's sense of the individual: "The National Socialist is a crusader - a warrior in the very best sense; he does not fear DEATH. If necessary he runs to meet it. For that is his merit; death for him is not something to be avoided, it is fulfilment, it is a symbol, not a disintegration, but a UNION."¹²² Gordon-Canning's words indicate a deep-felt urge striving for transcendence beyond the individual. A society where the primacy of the individual ceases. Gordon-Canning expressed one permutation of fascism while other fascists placed emphasis on spirit, state, economics and socialism. Common to all fascists was the perception of their creed as a positive force, distinct from liberal capitalism and socialism, and one striving for higher ideals. Hitler saw this in terms of a 'blood value' which people should, somehow, recognise: "Peoples who do not understand this value or who no longer have a feeling for it for lack of a natural instinct, thereby also immediately begin to lose it. Blood mixing and the lowering of the race are the consequences".¹²³ The failure of instinct and sense precedes the decline of the people. Mosley's former secretary Jeffery Hamm saw the fascist enterprise in economic terms: it was an economics beyond the individual "the basis of the whole thing. As I saw it, the

¹²⁰ibid. 1

¹²¹ibid. 2

¹²²ibid., 3

¹²³Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book*, introduced by Telford Taylor, translated by Salvator Attanasio (New York: Grove Press, 1961) 28

whole key to understanding Mosleyism, or British Union, or fascism, was that it was economic nationalism."¹²⁴ The transcendence of the self, beyond individualism and into a national dimension, could occur through a sense of common blood or through economic activity. But this longing, which could become the core of fascism, emerged from a desire for transcendence, which Mosley's ideological matrix represents. His followers voiced this as they described their reasons for joining the BUF. They joined for the betterment of their own conditions and for their country: "I believed in it [National Socialism] because first of all I'm a Socialist...and coupled with that I am a nationalist."¹²⁵ Consistent with these testimonies are those of Mosley, whose main concern, as will become apparent, was a concern with reversing the decline of Britain as a great imperial power which informed his political decisions both within and outside the liberal parliamentary system. Before proceeding to examine Mosley's ideological matrix which underlay these concerns, it will be useful to consider the cultural environment into which Mosley grew up which were to have such a formative influence on his career.

Prelude to Mosley's politics

The new consensus places emphasis on fascism as an ideology with roots in the history of ideas, in particular the revolt against positivism and the affects of the First World War. In this study Mosley's political biography begins at the end of the First World War when he first ventured into the public political fray. Mosley maintained a political outlook conditioned by the First World War and rooted in the intellectual climate preceding the

¹²⁴Jeffery Hamm interviewed by Chris Williams, *The Making of a Welsh Fascist*, 1st book edition (London: Steven Books, 1998) 1st published *Planet Magazine*, 1974

¹²⁵B.V. who joined the BUF in c. March 1936 aged 25, quoted in Thomas P. Linehan, *East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40* (London: Frank Cass, 1996) 255

war which was a ferment of creative, often revolutionary, ideas which influenced the soldiers of the trenches.¹²⁶ The expectations raised and dashed include a revolt against positivism, *fin de siècle* expectations, growing political hopes of socialism, capitalism, a growing sense ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, these took on the form and expression of organised protest often drawing on the working class, to fuel its politics and protest. This ferment of ideas is the first structural influence on Mosley's politics.¹²⁷

The war increased the enfranchisement of men. In Britain the 1918 Representation of the People Act was a recognition by the state of the sacrifice made by its men and was an indication of the rewards available for military service. Universal suffrage was given to men over twenty-one years of age and to women over the age of thirty who were married to men with the vote. Ex-servicemen received a vote at nineteen years and conscientious objectors were barred for five years from receiving a vote, reinforcing the reward for military service message. The war had apparently smoothed the path for democracy and enhanced the stature of the returning soldiers,¹²⁸ politically activating and enmeshing them into the state. Mosley's political dawn coincided with the incorporation of a militarily conditioned mass into the state.¹²⁹ The combination of mass political

¹²⁶Mosley was still recalling the political motivation provided by the First World War in 1972, see Mosley, 'Fascism - Past and Present', interview on *Firing Line*, host William F. Buckley, Jr.; transcript of program taped at Television International London, 25 March 1972, telecast on PBS 9 April 1972 (Southern Educational Communications Association; reprint 2nd edition London: Steven Books, 1997), 2

¹²⁷This is a period of intense, and concentrated, revaluations of man and his environment. What is presented here are examples to indicate the upheavals. For a wide ranging survey see Michael D. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses: Ideas and Society in Europe Since 1870* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977)

¹²⁸Taylor, *English History* (Oxford: OUP, 1965) 94

¹²⁹the change is lucidly described by Taylor, *ibid.*, 1

emancipation and the palpable state influence into the everyday lives of the nation's people was underscored by the ongoing critique of the basic tenets of society stemming from the *fin de siècle* mentality which was punctuated by the outbreak of the First World War. During the late nineteenth century a 'revolt against positivism' undermined the belief that rational solutions could be found to resolve all human problems in society.¹³⁰ Some impulses behind this revolt derived paradoxically from applying rational enquiry to aspects of human realities to the point where they disclosed their irrationality. Darwinism, for example, became a powerful deconstructive force challenging the dominance of rationality by allowing wild-card elements, such as environment and survival of the fittest, into the human equation. Yet, paradoxically, Darwinism was born of a pursuit for rational explanations, a product of the positive sciences.¹³¹ Further developments in philosophy brought the concept of the unconscious mind into the human equation and is evident in the work of Henri Bergson who saw intuition as the key to grasping reality:

"There is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis....The mind has to do violence to itself, has to reverse the direction of the operation by which it habitually thinks....But in this way it will attain fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and of adopting the very movement of the inward life of things."¹³²

Famously Sigmund Freud set out to describe the hidden human psyche; the unconscious

¹³⁰H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959) 37

¹³¹*ibid.*, 39

¹³²H. Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans T.E.Hulme (New York, 1949) quoted in Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 117

desires and impulses which drive human behaviour and to Freud are only approachable through the use of oblique strategies such as the interpretation of dreams, "the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious; it is the surest foundation of psychoanalysis".¹³³ Man's motivations were being perceived as complex, esoteric, not at all superficial or straightforwardly explained by the positive sciences.

The nineteenth century project of rationally based social science had emerged from the French Revolution in the works of Saint Simon (1760-1825) and August Comte (1798-1857) as the search for a rationally secure understanding of society with which to return order to a post-revolutionary society. But this world, shaped by man's rather than god's hand, was by the end of the century being described in dystopian terms or the product of break down and fragmentation. Ferdinand Tönnies detected a loss of community in the changes of society as it moved from *Gemeinschaft*, pre-industrial community, to an industrialized *Gesellschaft*, where society is organised in accordance with association and not traditional values. Emile Durkheim's sociology was one attempt to apply scientific analysis to modern society and he sought to connect impersonal social realities with individual acts. In *Suicide* (1897) Durkheim connected the pace of industrialisation and urbanisation to an increase in suicide rates. He described how the erosion of traditional constraints on human expectations bred 'anomie', one symptom of which was for the proliferation of impossibly ambitious and ultimately unrequited hopes and desires, the other side of which was dark despair.¹³⁴

¹³³S. Freud, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Standard Edition, vol.XI, 33, quoted in David Stafford-Clark, *What Freud Really Said* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1967) 51

¹³⁴Erin Stengel, *Suicide & Attempted Suicide*, second revised and expanded edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977) 48-51.

The social calculations of utilitarian and liberal individualism were being shown to be undermined by the very positive sciences they championed. Notoriously, it was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who relocated the values in a society back to the individual, albeit to an exceptional person with self-knowledge and will to power.¹³⁵ Nietzsche offered a new morality written in a philosophical style which both rejected and refused to open itself to the criticism of science or the academy. Man could create a value system as worthy as any other. Nietzsche challenged the opposition of 'science' and 'imagination', 'abstract' and 'concrete' and, what Stern describes as, "the fragmentation of knowledge which he saw as one of the chief blights of modern Western civilisation."¹³⁶ Nietzsche's contribution provided a rational acceptance of the essential irrationality things,¹³⁷ a directional guide pointing the way to a future in a world that was forever in a condition of becoming: "That which we call the world is the result of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen in the course of the total evolution of organic nature". Nietzsche concluded that, although science may disentangle elements "detaching us from this ideational world ... gradually and step by step illuminate the history of how this world as ideas arose... Perhaps we then recognise that the thing-in-itself ...*appeared* to be so much, indeed everything, and is actually empty, that is to say empty of meaning."¹³⁸ The world is appearance and there is nothing behind appearance. Nietzsche declared "*We*

¹³⁵Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, first published in 1946 provides a fascinating insight to philosophy at the end the war against fascism which he connects with Nietzsche's philosophy

¹³⁶J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1978) 147

¹³⁷F. Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human* section 515 extract from *A Nietzsche Reader* selected, translated and introduced by R.J.Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1977) 198

¹³⁸section 16

invented the concept 'purpose': in reality purpose is *lacking*...That no one is any longer made accountable, that the kind of being manifested cannot be traced back to a *causa prima*, that this world is a unity neither as sensorium nor as 'spirit', *this alone is the great liberation* thus alone is the *innocence* of becoming restored."¹³⁹ There is no design, no purpose to man's development. If nothing else Nietzsche removed any appeal to a higher authority, teleological expectation, utility, rationality, or claims to truth, which otherwise underpinned morality, legal codes, and political authority. Nietzsche attacked the conservative foundation of established politics and offered a substitute morality based on a striving heroic elite.

It was Georges Sorel (1847-1922) who attempted to synthesis Nietzschean elitism with socialism of Marx. In *Reflection on Violence* (1908) Sorel saw the value of an elite-inspired 'myth' which would act to inspire the masses into action. Sorel saw the myth of a general strike as providing a powerful incentive for the overthrow of the bourgeois world. If revolutionary violence is made the aim of the working classes it will evoke heroic values rather than dreams of utopian socialism.¹⁴⁰ The importance of the myth of revolution lay in its inspiration, and motivation for action not in its realisation. For some fascists the myth of a reborn nation would draw on the theoretical groundwork elaborated by Sorel.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, The Great Errors section 8 extract from *A Nietzsche Reader*, selected, translated and introduced by R.J.Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1977) 212

¹⁴⁰Michael Robert, *T.E. Hulme* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982) 100

¹⁴¹see Zeev Sternhell, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: from cultural rebellion to political revolution*, trans. David Maisel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1994)

These are a few examples to illustrate some of the stirring of discontent which were emerging at the turn of the century. These intellectuals were not a part of an organised movement but they did represent a critique of individualism, *laissez faire* economy, and the ideal of an autonomous liberal self; ideas which would rapidly mature during the opening years of the new century.

The first decade of the twentieth century brought an explosion in supremely modern and revolutionary thought which was often expressed in cultural forms, but held a political agenda pressing for change at all cost.¹⁴² This modern revolt is graphically expressed in Futurism an artistic enterprise with message of rejecting everything old and demanding a new future world. The instigator of Futurism was F.T. Marinetti who began the movement with the publication of a manifesto praising dynamism, machines, and the destruction of all that was old. The range of members within the movement demonstrated, in a variety of artistic forms, futurist interpretations of this world. In one of the first examples of performance art Marinetti and his cohorts would harangue their indignant audience with sound 'free-word' poems. Without constraint of artistic medium the futurists used paint, music photography and theatre to express their anti-bourgeois message. Their manifesto declared:

- "1. We intend to glorify the love of danger, the custom of energy, the strength of daring [...]
9. We glorify war-the only true hygiene of the world-militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchist, the beautiful Ideas which kill, and the

¹⁴²see Edward R Tannenbaum, *1900 The Generation Before the Great War* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976) passim

scorn of women [...]

10. We will destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice.¹⁴³

Marinetti's politics emerged from his futurism. The futurist longing for a war to cleanse the world was frustrated by Italian reluctance to fulfil its obligations under the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria. Marinetti campaigned with Mussolini for intervention on the side of Britain and France against Germany. Futurism has been described as a forerunner of fascism in its theatricality, praise of the modern, love of action and violence, and destructive attitude to dated view.¹⁴⁴ Marinetti's theatrical politics and political theatre would later be superseded by the poet D'Annunzio's intense nationalism and rehearsal of fascism with the occupation of Fiume in 1919-20. Futurism gave expression to the surging discontent, voiced in disparate disciplines, at the turn of the twentieth century and sought to offer an alternative, nationalism. Marinetti wrote in 1923, "Futurism is a movement that is strictly artistic and ideological. It intervenes in political struggles only in hours of grave danger for the nation."¹⁴⁵ Marinetti's propagandist techniques spread his message across Europe leaving a futurist seed to be propagated in the cultural soil of each country he visited. From Constructivism in Russia to Vorticism in Britain, Marinetti left his futurist mark but the desire for a new world devoid of old institutions was a pernicious seed germinating in the mind of the youth

¹⁴³F.T.Marinetti, 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism' (1908) published in *Le Figaro* 20 February 1909, reproduced in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, edited by Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 284-286

¹⁴⁴James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: Harper Colophon Books Harper and Row Publishers, 1965) 176-8; Z. Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 28

¹⁴⁵quoted in Joll, *ibid.*, 176

across Europe. In Britain Vorticism was the closest equivalent to Futurism and in the preface to the only Vorticist exhibition held in 1915, Wyndham Lewis defined Vorticism:

"By Vorticism we mean (a) ACTIVITY as opposed to the tasteful PASSIVITY of Picasso; (b) SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to the dull or anecdotal character to which Naturalist is condemned; (c) ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT and ACTIVITY (such as energy of mind) as opposed to the imitative cinematography, the fuss and hysterics of the Futurists."¹⁴⁶

And it was this sense of action which Mosley wanted to inject into politics.¹⁴⁷ Futurism can be cast as a cultural forerunner of fascism; it was revolutionary, anti-bourgeois, hated the old and held a complete belief in the modern; its praised action, and the capacity of war to intensify and test values in life. Above all else Futurism saw itself at a watershed of history where the dreary old world would be swept aside in a wave of mass action and a new 'futurist' era would begin.

Marinetti represented one extreme example of the war spirit among the intellectuals of Europe, preceded and welcomed war. Roland Stromberg has drawn the conclusion that the desire for war stemmed from an individual's need to come to terms with modernisation:

"The 1914 spirit was an antidote to anomie, which had resulted from the sweep of powerful forces of the recent past - urban, capitalistic and technological forces - tearing up primeval bonds and forcing people into a crisis of social

¹⁴⁶quoted by Philip Head, *Vorticist Antecedents* (Ware: The Wyndham Lewis Society, 1997) 3

¹⁴⁷This is evident in Mosley's maiden speech in the House of Commons where he fears the encroachment of 'officialdom' into the new and vital area of aviation, which is discussed in chapter two.

relationships. The primitive instinct to do battle against a common foe was a remedy for this crisis, unfortunately at too high a price."¹⁴⁸

The emergence of Fascism and Communism both represented radical political consequences stemming from the intellectual fervour and revolts against positivism which marked the early years of the century and were completed by the First World War. Mosley's political notoriety resulted from his association with fascism. During the Thirties Mosley founded the BUF and became one of fascism's most eloquent and prolific ideologues in the English language: Mosley's political expressions were founded in a consistent ideological matrix characterised by affective idealism and conditioned by the mentality of *fin de siècle* revolt against the old order compounded by the experience of the First World War.¹⁴⁹

G.B. Shaw

Closer to home, Mosley discovered a source of ideas and a distillation of, among others, Nietzsche, and evolutionary vitalists such as Bergson in the writing of G.B. Shaw. Mosley read Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* during 1925 when he had lost his Labour seat at Ladywood in the election of 1924. In *The Perfect Wagnerite* Shaw reworked the distinctions he made in an earlier work of 1891, *The Quintessence of Ibsen*. In that work he divided humans into three type or classes, philistines, idealists and realists with the latter depended upon for progress. Now Shaw used representations of the Wagnerian

¹⁴⁸Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: The Regent Press of Kansas, 1982) 198

¹⁴⁹in a review of the *Mosley* TV series the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* emphasised the use of the term 'fascism' by Mosley's organisations. *Searchlight* recognised the movement would regularly drop the term 'fascist' from the organisational name whenever the chance arose in favour of terms such as Union Movement or British Union, see 'Mosley Madness', *Searchlight*, March 1998.

divisions of dwarfs, giants and gods.¹⁵⁰ The divisions he described as, "dramatizations of the three main orders of men: to wit, the instinctive, predatory, lustful, greedy people; the patient, toiling, stupid, respectful, money-worshipping people; and the intellectual, moral, talented people who devise and administer States and Churches".¹⁵¹ From Wagner's *Ring* Shaw believed a faith emerged, not in achieving a final good in love, which would satisfy to the extent of extinguishing the desire for life itself, "but in life itself as a tireless power which is continually driving onward and upward...growing from within, by its own inexplicable energy, into ever higher and higher forms of organization, the strengths and the needs if which are continually superseding the institutions which we made to fit our former requirements...we must like Prometheus, set to work to make new men."¹⁵² And here the Bergsonian type of creative evolution, which would act as a broad philosophical undercurrent in Mosley's politics, is presented by Shaw and had appeared in his play, with obvious Nietzschean sympathies, *Man and Superman*. Shaw's narrative decried the morality of pretence and sought alternatives and his biographer condenses the argument "The Devil say fantasy and play: Don Juan says the evolution of higher type of man."¹⁵³ In the dream sequence dialogue Don Juan tells the Devil:

"I tell you that as long as I can conceive of something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it.

¹⁵⁰Parallels with Nietzsche have been drawn in Shaw's choice of subjects on the assumption that these adopted figures were rally points for the avant garde and this intelligentsia was the target audience of both Nietzsche and Shaw, Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw* (London: Methuen, 1967) 51

¹⁵¹quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw volume 2 1898-1918 The Pursuit of Power* (London: Chatto & Windus 1989) 11

¹⁵²quoted in Holroyd, *ibid.* 13

¹⁵³Holroyd *Shaw vol 2* 74

That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organisation, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding."¹⁵⁴

And again in *Back to Methuselah* Shaw wrote, "the impulse that produces evolution is creative...the will to do anything can and does, at a certain pitch of intensity set up by conviction of its necessity, create and organize new tissue to do it with", it is the "genuinely scientific religion for which all wise men are now anxiously looking."¹⁵⁵ Shaw's 'certain pitch of intensity' relates to Mosley's emphasis on the importance of the depth of national crisis facilitating national awakening and Shaw's 'scientific religion' to Mosley's belief in the power of science to redeem mankind from the historical determinism described by Spengler.

Shaw presented Mosley with a mix of Nietzsche and creative evolution and in return Mosley admired his intellect.¹⁵⁶ He described Shaw as the foremost intellect "who entered and influenced my life during the twenties and thirties."¹⁵⁷ Looking back Mosley saw the twenties as a time when thinkers and writers were more important than politicians because they could see the future: "The clear thought of one age can and should become

¹⁵⁴George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman. A comedy and a Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946; 1st published 1903) 174-175

¹⁵⁵George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch* (London: Penguin 1939, 1st published 1921) 14-15; Shaw's influence on Mosley is noted in *My Life*, 223; Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game*, 59; Skidelsky *Oswald Mosley*, 476.

¹⁵⁶Mosley, *My Life*, 226

¹⁵⁷ibid. 222

the action of the next."¹⁵⁸ But Shaw's influence went beyond this to urging him to break with the Labour Party and form his own party called The Activists, which Shaw was later to withdraw, and this does indicate a shared affinity of thought particularly when considered in the light of Shaw's notorious remark about Mosley as "a very interesting man to read just now: one of the few people who is writing and thinking about real things and not about figments and phrases." To Shaw, Mosley's fascism became the only alternative to Communism and he used it as a stick to attack the parliamentary system for its talk without action.¹⁵⁹ Shaw had avowed to "make a religion of Socialism." he continued:

"We must fall back on our will to Socialism, and resort to our reason only to find out the ways and means. And this we can do only if we conceive the will as a creative energy as Lamarck did; and totally renounce and abjure Darwinism, Marxism, and all Fatalistic, penny-in-the-slot theories of evolution whatever."¹⁶⁰

Shaw saw in Mosley opportunity and possibility, and his ideas did possess a resonance with fascist ideology. Shaw was sympathetic to fascism in its 'reform' phase,¹⁶¹ a disposition echoed in Mosley's description of fascism as "based on a high conception of citizenship" beyond politics and with ambition to pervade "the whole of our national life".¹⁶² Much later Mosley would seek to combine Shaw with Wagner in a synthesis of

¹⁵⁸ibid. 222

¹⁵⁹Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw. Volume 3, 1918-1950 The Lure of Fantasy* (London: Penguin, 1991) 111-112

¹⁶⁰G.B. Shaw, unpublished manuscript, quoted in Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw* (London:Methuen, 1967) 31-32

¹⁶¹Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, volume 3 1918-1950: The Lure of Fantasy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993) 143-146.

¹⁶²Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 13.

life and love which was the requirement of "the final hero, the symbol of that generation of higher men which is ready to give all that all may be won."¹⁶³ Shaw was a persuasive influence on Mosley and his belief in the importance of striving to achieving of higher levels of humanity not only impressed Mosley but also provided an articulation of his fundamental ideological matrix and a cultural dimension to his politics.

The intellectual seeds of Mosley's tragic political folly were already sown before he was born. The structural impact of Nietzschean destruction of moral absolutes combined with relativity in the sciences,¹⁶⁴ the 'discovery' of the unconsciousness, the empowerment of the masses, the ever-increasing role of the machine in daily life with mass production, mass entertainment such as cinema. These forces provided the climate of thought into which Mosley grew. These youthful themes were magnified and focused by the experience of the First World War after which Mosley immediately entered politics.

To sum up

In this chapter various aspects of the problem of shedding light on the underlying coherence of Mosley's political thought have been made explicit. Not without reason, fascist leaders have generally been portrayed as the embodiment of opportunistic ideals and hungry for power over others.¹⁶⁵ This study does not draw on assumptions of

¹⁶³Mosley, 'Wagner and Shaw: A synthesis' *The European* 17 March 1956, 61

¹⁶⁴Ernst Jünger attributed the rise of the Nazis and their ability to command a mass following to a "spiritual preparation" carried out in many scientific works, quoted by Michael Billig, *Psychology, Racism and Fascism*, A Searchlight Pamphlet (Birmingham: A.F. & R. Publications, 1979) 5

¹⁶⁵Denis Mack Smith's biography of Mussolini is one outstanding example, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982)

psychological interpretation, but by accepting the emerging consensus that fascism possesses an ideological core of revolutionary nationalism, and through analysis of Mosley's published texts and utterances, alongside the environment of ideas which surround them, light will be shed on the coherence of Mosley's politics and his ideological matrix. We can now turn to Mosley's experience of the First World War which had such a powerful impact on his political development.

Two

The Early Political Life of Oswald Mosley

Oswald Mosley was born 16 November 1896 into an aristocratic family whose legacy of wealth, combined with well-established membership of the British ruling classes, provided the solid rock of security upon which Mosley could build his life.¹ Whether or not the parochial aspect of his ancestry, described as the family's choice "not to accept the aristocratic responsibility of national leadership",² affected Mosley's political life is mere conjecture, but his inherited wealth and his willingness to assume the role of political figurehead were attributes which cannot easily be disconnected from his ancestry.

Oswald Mosley's immediate family, his father and especially his mother, were particular influences either by their respective absence or presence. His father's hedonism and extra-marital affairs have been attributed to surplus energies of a squire seeking to fill his time. His behaviour led Mosley's mother to seek a judicial separation and she took their three sons when Mosley was five years old. He had little further contact with his father who died aged fifty-four when Mosley was thirty-one. Mosley, the eldest boy, spent his childhood as the 'man' of the household in his father's absence.

¹The details of Mosley's background and life in general are well documented in his autobiography *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1968); in Robert Skidelsky's biography *Oswald Mosley* (London: Macmillan, 1975); and the biography by his son Nicholas, *Rules of the Game/Beyond the Pale: Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1982/3)

²Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 27.

Mosley was his grandfather's favourite and he was treated by him as a son, almost as replacement for his undisciplined son. Mosley wrote of his affection for his grandfather in terms absent from those used to describe his father. His grandfather also assured him a degree of financial independence, severing the necessity of a paternal fiscal relationship. Although some friendship grew between Mosley and his father, he also acted as a ghost in his son's political cupboard coming out to haunt Mosley when joined the Labour Party which went against his father's Tory instinct.

Mosley's mother remained a dedicated supporter of her charismatic son throughout his life and he returned her loyalty with a deep affection for mother.³ Separation from her husband meant Mosley and his two brothers were raised by a single mother, albeit one with income enough to fund schooling at the cost of a few upper class luxuries. Beyond her parental duties Mosley's mother supported her son throughout the twists and turns of his political career, even donning a fascist blackshirt in the nineteen thirties.

Mosley's education was typical of the British ruling classes, Winchester followed by Sandhurst. Schooling was dominated by physical activity and boxing followed by fencing special pursuits.⁴ Mosley entered Sandhurst aged seventeen in early 1914 which he describes as an experience more for the body than the mind. From Sandhurst Mosley entered the First World War which left a profound mark on him and his future direction: no longer was Mosley to be solely an aristocratic playboy seeking to preserve his good

³Lady Maud Mosley appeared as the hostess of 'Midnight Fencing Display by The Leader at the Blackshirt Ball on Friday October 12', *The Blackshirt*, no.75, 28 September 1934, 8; for Mosley's mother see Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 31.

⁴Mosley was still able to represent Britain at fencing in the 1937 world championship at Paris.

fortune, he now had a political purpose and motive. He was the child of an age in which fundamental questions about the viability of Western civilisation and the possibilities of finding a radical alternative were rife. It is the point at which Mosley returned from the First World War and became a conscious political agent, that this study begins.

Oswald Mosley's parliamentary career was to last for more than a decade, from 1918 until 1931. He started out as the youngest Member of the House and went on to become the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the 1929 Labour government. His journey through Parliamentary politics began as a Conservative, then as an Independent, then as a Liberal, and ended as the leader and founding member of his own and electorally doomed New Party. The majority of his parliamentary days were spent under the Labour Party banner but they began when he was politically 'wet behind the ears' and full of the excitement of the Great War.

One cluster of concepts and images guiding Mosley's early speeches are those of the airman or aviator which can be found amongst Mosley's earliest and last utterances.⁵ It must be noted that Mosley actually spoke little directly on the subject of aviation in Parliament, not especially more than many other Members of Parliament, but the 'myth of the aviator' is useful in understanding Mosley's political decisions. This myth coloured Mosley's belief system and it was a central ideological touchstone, directing his early political decisions not least because he was young and without any other comparable

⁵Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 17 February 1919, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 112, cols. 671-674, and Mosley, 'Prospect of Another War? Dialogue with the Russians', *Broadsheet No. 39*, 2 May 1980 (London: Sanctuary Press)

experiences on which to base his judgements than those accumulated during the First World War.

The myth of the airman

Aviation was the new realm of the twentieth century. Aviation provided a space for adventure and comradeship in the face of the levelling effects of modernisation; in this zone the individual and the machine were engaged in a fight for dominance. One response to this struggle came through the synthesis of the two elements producing the myth of the aviator.

Before the outbreak of the First World War flying, the *avant-garde* experience of its day, was a minority activity. The Great War produced extreme experiences en-masse and enlarged the number of those who could taste the delights of flight.⁶ The aerial perspective, one of the most significant myths of the First World War, "kept open the realm of purpose and meaning with which many had entered the war."⁷ Unlike the foot soldier, the aviator's experience of the war gave him some active control over his fate, decreasing his susceptibility to the neurosis commonly found in the trench soldier.⁸ Flying implanted an almost revolutionary zeal and a particular consciousness in the minds of an elite group, which was not unlike that of the trench soldier but possessed the

⁶The percentage of aviators in the War was never a large proportion of the Expeditionary force; 0.6% in 1914 rising to 3% in 1918, see Denis Winter, *The First Few: Fighter Pilots of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) 12.

⁷Eric J. Leed, *No Mans Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 134.

⁸This connection between the character of the war and neurosis is supported by a decrease in neurosis recorded when the war became one of movement with the German offenses of 1918, *ibid*, 181-182.

added ingredient of an encounter at the cutting edge of modernity.

The conquest of the air and the evolution of this new weapon was not perceived as a destructive force, but constructive one; the belief was held that the development of ever-more destructive weapons was a means of shortening wars not lengthening them.⁹ Extraordinarily, C.G. Grey wrote that the Great War was not a very considerable war: "It only lasted four years and did comparatively little damage." He thanked the aeroplane for this lack of destruction because reconnaissance from the air prevented any large troop movements from going undetected.¹⁰ The air was not the traditional site of warfare but the place where a new and modern warfare was evolving this gave the participants an experience of flight with a 'shock of the new' factor.

The addition of the air as a new location for national conflicts brought about strategic problems and a change in the way the national community was perceived.¹¹ A nation, once physically defined at its extremities through a variety of factors such as geography, language, culture, family, and wars which were essentially boarder conflicts, was now a nation whose civilian population was at risk from an enemy; attacks could now be swiftly made to the heart of the nation from the sky.¹² A shift in the nature of war brought

⁹Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 365

¹⁰*The Aeroplane*, Vol.16, 1, 08/01/1919, 13, and C.G. Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940) 21

¹¹For an argument to increase the strength of the air services to that of the navy in order to defend the nation and the Empire see *The Aeroplane*, Vol.17, 1, 02/07/1919, 5.

¹²For example the 'air panics' of 1913 and the serious thought given to Zeppelins raiding Woolwich, London in July 1914, See Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power*

about a shift in how the nation was perceived.¹³ The threat from the air literally brought home the existence of 'others' as enemies. Any future war became more than a matter for armies but one that potentially affected the nation as a whole. Flight and aviation brought the reality of war into the daily lives of people who would previously have felt unaffected.¹⁴

In addition to a revised perception of the nation was the new elite force of national guardians born with manned flight. The airman was a privileged member of a new elite. This elitism, seen in British cultural ideas well before the First World War, even before the aeroplane was a practical reality, linked the conquest of the air with a variety of abstract concepts; human progress, a decisive influence in future warfare, and the aviator as a special kind of hero.¹⁵ After the War these ideas became elaborated to include the glamour and romance of aerial warfare, chivalrous and knightly aspirations of modern combat, and the dream of an end to the trench warfare so recently etched into society's

on the British People and their Government 1909-1914 (London: Macmillan, 1989) ch.11 and 295-6. Italy's Giulio Douhet argued for mass aerial bombing against industrial and civilian targets leaving ground forces to defend and police the achievements of this 'ultimate weapon'.

¹³The Aerial Navigation Bill of 1910 can be seen as part of this adjusting to the new dimension in national boundaries. The pages of *The Aeroplane* also carry many aerial photographs of famous landmarks for their own sake demonstrating the novelty of this new view on the familiar.

¹⁴The first attack of this type is described as coming from a German cruiser shelling the East coast in December 1914 but the majority of attacks on the home front came from the air, see Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968) 68.

¹⁵The percentage of aviators in the War was never large; 0.6% in 1914 rising to 3% in 1918, see Denis Winter, *The First Few: Fighter Pilots of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) 12.

memory.¹⁶

The myth of aviation represents a blend of ingredients including the myths surrounding the Great War, youth, futurist experience, and the success of modernity over a fundamental natural phenomenon - gravity. A cluster of images is subsumed under the general heading 'aviation'; for example the irrational experiences associated with early flight, brought about through the rationality of science, engineering and aerodynamics.¹⁷ Flying also became the third defensive arm of Britain, yet it drew criticism because of its immaturity. Compared with the army or navy the air force was a young service without "the decorum of age". The air service response to this claim can be summed up by its early historian Walter Raleigh: "The Latin poet said that it is decorous to die for ones country; in that decorum the [air] service is perfectly instructed."¹⁸

The heroism of the pilots became legendary. Pilots needed "skill rather than machinery" according to Wilber Wright in 1900,¹⁹ they were the soul of the aeroplane with the engine

¹⁶Michael Paris, 'The Rise of the Airman: The Origins of Air Force Elitism c.1890-1918' *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993) 123-141.

¹⁷"I was drunk with air. I was wild and driving home sang and shouted, full of realization that we had found a new freedom - a new Ocean....The air is more marvellous than any sea, it holds more beauty, more joy than any Pacific swell or South Sea lagoon", David Garnett; "Flying is hypnotic and all pilots are willing victims to the spell. Their world is like a magic island in which the factors of life and death assume their proper values", E.K. Gann, Quoted in Charles Harvard Gibbs-Smith, *Aviation: An Historical Survey from its Origins to the End of World War II* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1970) 226.

¹⁸Walter Raleigh, *The War in the Air: Being the Story of the Part Played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922) 14.

¹⁹Quoted in Gibbs-Smith, *Aviation*, 222.

its heart.²⁰ A biography of Mussolini describes this symbiotic relationship:

"no machine requires so much human concentration of soul and will power as a flying machine to make it work properly. The pilot understands the fullest meaning of the word "control". Thus it seems that there is an intimate spiritual link between Fascism and Flying. Every airman is a born Fascist."²¹

The British First World War fighter pilot James McCudden summarises the qualities of a pilot, in his description of his old enemy as, "disciplined, resolute and brave, and is a foeman worthy of our best....The more I fought them the more respect their flying qualities."²² The pilot was seen as crucial in creating a virtuous tradition for the Royal Air Force which attained "a life beyond a life".²³ Mosse comments on the belief that control of the aeroplane depended on the moral qualities of the pilot rather than the technical aspects, symbolising "new man".²⁴ This new elite of men, Mussolini's 'spiritual aristocracy',²⁵ harnessed machinery at the frontiers of science to fly the flag of modernity into a new age, leading the way for the masses.

These images disguise the reality of flying which at this time was, to say the least,

²⁰Sir Walter Raleigh, quoted in *ibid.*, 224.

²¹Guido Mattioli, *Mussolini Aviator, And His Work for Aviation* (Rome: L'Aviazione, 1935) 4; quoted in Lawrence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986) 139.

²²James Byford McCudden, *Flying Fury* (London: John Hamilton, 1930) originally published as *Five Years in the Royal Flying Corps* (1918) 266.

²³Walter Raleigh, *The War in the Air*, 14.

²⁴George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 123.

²⁵*ibid.*, 124.

uncomfortable. Engine vibrations, wind blast, cold, a lack of oxygen, increased blood pressure and the trauma of G force pressure during combat manoeuvres were punishing to the flier.²⁶ These experiences help to impress into Mosley's psyche the myth of aviation. Mosley was a member of that elite of airmen whose war experience was bound up with flying, these memories were a constant reality in his daily life; he suffered an injury and permanent physical disability from a wartime aeroplane crash; his beliefs evolved to rationalise his experiences. They were held at a deep ideological level and his experiences and physical memory impressed deeply upon him the revolutionary power of flight.²⁷ The myth of aviation was a tangible representation of Mosley's fundamental or core ideology to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness.

Mosley's Maiden Speech

The selection of the *Aerial Navigation Bill* as the occasion of his Maiden Speech in Parliament is some measure of the importance and commitment Mosley held towards aviation.²⁸ In this speech Mosley brings forward a number of themes which draw upon the myth of the airman for their ideological foundations, for example youth, bureaucracy, state intervention, the memory of the War and the supremacy of flight. This 1919 Bill amends the Aerial Navigation Bill of 1910 which was part of the debate about the 'rights' a nation has over the air space above its country. In the preamble to this earlier Bill it is

²⁶Denis Winter, *The First Few: Fighter Pilots of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) 147.

²⁷Mosley constantly reminded his readers of his participation in the air war of 1914-18 see Oswald Mosley, review of *If Britain Had Fallen*, by Norman Longmate, in *The Listener*, 21 September 1972, 358, and Oswald Mosley, 'Prospect of Another War? Dialogue with Russians' *Broadsheet No.39*, 2 May 1980.

²⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 17 February 1919, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 112, cols. 671-674

asserted that "the air above all parts of His Majesty's Dominions and the territorial waters adjacent there to was in inviolable." This effectively became law in early 1913.²⁹

Mosley, in a speech described in *The Aeroplane* newspaper as "somewhat flowery and needlessly polysyllabic",³⁰ introduces himself to the House of Commons as a young man, or more precisely as the youngest Member of the House.³¹ This identification with a particular age group has a purpose beyond a merely associative bond, or the signalling of a difference between Mosley and the rest of the Parliamentary Members. This was a direct reference to a mentality and ideological position holding ambitions of a revolutionary nature, to which Mosley was sympathetic not least due to his war experiences.³² Mosley's fellow secretary in the New Members Coalition Group, Colin Coote, recalls the impact of the Great War:

"Later generations may not now recall how few we survivors from the infantry of the were and how absolute was our determination to see that our generation had not died in vain. What is now a cliché was then a faith, intensely held and

²⁹Quoted in Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government 1909-14* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 157.

³⁰*The Aeroplane*, Vol.16, 8, 02/26/1919, 842.

³¹Mosley later that year became the President of The League of Youth and Social Progress. In his inaugural address to the League Mosley spoke of "two mentalities ... the mind of 1914 and the mind of today" and warned of the old men of the past creeping back "to dominate your new age, cleansed of their mistakes in the blood of your generation", Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982) 26; Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 3d. ed. (London: Papermac, 1990) 83; Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, paperback ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970) 128.

³²An autobiography by Chapman, *The Survivor*, whose life after the War was haunted by a feeling of being alone and one of a separate generation, cited in Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Allen Lane, 1978) 251.

swiftly frustrated".³³

Born in the furnace of modern warfare, this 'faith' expressed by the war generation would remain with them throughout their lives affecting their world view and influencing their politics. This was expressed by Lloyd George in 1918, "Let us cleanse this noble land...and make it a temple worthy of sacrifice which has been made in its honour".³⁴ After the horrors of the trenches any subsequent experience could simply not match up.³⁵

The war homogenised the surviving youth, giving these young soldiers an experience that was truly their own; a spiritual bonding of men in a manner unavailable in the course of everyday affairs.³⁶ The ex-Service men's monthly journal *The Veteran* carried articles which maintained these deep emotions, for example a piece titled 'The Romance of War' published in 1921 remembers the atmosphere of the trenches:

"True romance there is, of course - where death, the glorious death of a soldier, is, there romance must always be - but that romance so supreme that it is above interpretation in words. Certainly such art is beyond me."³⁷

Modern warfare brought about a common identity between the soldiers highlighting in

³³Quoted in Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus & Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 178.

³⁴Quoted in Colin Cross, *Fascists in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rochcliff, 1961) 11.

³⁵Dan S. White, *Lost Comrades: Socialists of the Front Generation, 1918 - 1945* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992) 194.

³⁶"in times of war even the crudest kind of positive affection between persons seems extraordinary beautiful", W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety* (New York, 1947) 111; quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 270.

³⁷'The Romance of War: A memory', *The Veteran*, March 1921, 7.

their minds that they, the young, were all victims produced by the political manoeuvring of another very different generation. This evolving self-awareness of the young laid the foundations on which the (post-)war generation could build their identity.

An 'ideology of youth' can be traced to the late nineteenth century following the program of social liberation,³⁸ and this process whereby 'youth' emerged as a culturally discrete social grouping continued after the war.³⁹ Pre-war theories which responding to modernity and technocracy and rebelling against the 'old' found sympathetic readers as the soldiers returned home.⁴⁰ To Mosley 'youth' fulfilled and represented the dynamic and futurist elements of his fundamental ideology.⁴¹ Although traces of the pre-war theories extend well beyond the cessation of fighting and into the following decades their fundamental nature and affective value was changed by the war.

Following the War pre-1914 analyses of society moved from a position of idealism, intellectual contemplation, and artistic playacting, to one of plausibility and action. The

³⁸Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) 205-207

³⁹For the emergence of youth see John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-present* (New York: Academic Press, 1981) 133-183

⁴⁰One example is Wyndham Lewis who identified with those "questions of renovation of art, and showing a tendency to rebellion against the domination of the Past", *Wyndham Lewis on Art*, ed. Walter Michel and C.J. Fox (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969) 47; quoted in Timothy Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979) 22-23

⁴¹When he was older, loosing his youth, Mosley would place greater emphasis on the importance of the dynamic qualities of the individual rather than antagonism between the old and the young suggesting a shift in the operative 'technical' dimension of his ideology see *My Life*, 128-136

war brutally signified a schism with the past, setting alight those pre-1914 theories and empowering the young soldiers. Social barriers came crashing down in the trenches and the soldier-comrades felt compelled to act for an improved future. But this 'socialism of the trenches' was contingent upon its context; it was when soldiers found themselves defenceless in the face of authority and technology that this 'socialism' emerged among them; T.E. Lawrence's observation that "Except under compulsion there is no equality in the world" is fitting.⁴² Surfacing from the trenches was a young generation which differed from those setting trends before the war, these men were not the few privileged intellectuals who had acted as cultural leaders before the war, but a mass of soldiers and officers.⁴³ Myths developed around the young soldiers promoting their vitality and courage in the face of danger during the War,⁴⁴ these became a powerful symbols in the post-war culture.⁴⁵ Mosley was part of this war generation and at the end of the Great War he dedicated himself, with instinctive resolve, to the:

"sentiment of youth, which was then only instinct without shape...war must never happen again ... we must build a better land for our companions who still lived...we must conceive of a nobler world in memory of those who died. We

⁴²Eric J. Leed, *No Mans Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 200

⁴³Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) 222

⁴⁴George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 70-106

⁴⁵The element of youthful sacrifice in the Langemark myth was replaced by the image of experienced fighting men whose sense of duty denied such romantic associations in the construction of German nazi ideology, see Bernd Huppau, 'The Birth of Fascist Man from the Spirit of the Front: From Langemark to Verdun', in *The Attractions of Fascism: Social Psychology and Aesthetics of the 'Triumph of the Right'*, ed. John Milfull (New York: Berg, 1990) 45-76

later gave form to instinct, and clear will to passionate resolve; we failed once, but that purpose remains and will endure to the end."⁴⁶

To Mosley aviation became a symbol of youth which could provide a dynamic motif for change. For Mosley this vital core was in perpetual danger of drifting towards stagnation if neglected; it had been revived in the War and needed protection from the tireless gnawing of bureaucracy. In this Mosley is at one with *The Aeroplane* which describes how the Air Ministry was known as 'Hotel Bolo' or 'Bolo House' after Bolo Pasha the French traitor shot for his defeatist policies. The perception of the Ministry as either interfering with the progress of the war or leaning toward a neutral position at the expense of life was considered 'criminal negligence' by *The Aeroplane*.⁴⁷ Mosley's declared reason for entering this Parliamentary debate on aviation was his belief in the importance of air supremacy for Britain, but this was threatened by the "pitfall" of bureaucratic control which this act represented, "The war-time epidemic of bureaucratic control has had this nation in its grip for a long period past, and we may deduce from the Bill that we stand in very grave danger of its paralysing influence being extended to embrace the youngest child of the British public, our newly founded Air Force."⁴⁸ To stifle this child would be an attack on one of the few remaining sites of 'heroic' activity in modernised society so that "the air is the very last conceivable sphere of human activity to be brought too closely beneath the eye of the clerk in Whitehall."⁴⁹

⁴⁶Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1968) 17

⁴⁷*The Aeroplane*, Vol.16, 1, 08/01/1919, 14, and Vol.16, 9, 05/03/1919, 938.

⁴⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons op. cit.

⁴⁹ibid.

In his argument opposing the intervention of the State into aviation, Mosley proposed moving the onus of responsibility to the "private exploiter of aviation" and implementing a system of penalties for accidents caused by negligence. One effect would be the return of control over the future of aviation to the air service, the aircraft, and the airmen. The creation of the Royal Air Force as a single air service on 1st April 1918 through the combination of the Royal Air Corps and the Royal Navy Air Service was seen by *The Aeroplane* as destroying the "emulation and competition" which existed between the two air services and which had in-turn generated improvements.⁵⁰ In contrast, Mosley's vision of the air services was more grand. By facilitating a shift away from State intervention, Mosley was not recommending a return to the internal competition advocated by *The Aeroplane* but he was attempting to give the control of aviation to those possessing direct experience and who, therefore, 'understood' flying and to keep at arms length the anonymous bureaucrats in Whitehall.⁵¹

"In fact, at every step of aerial development ... Officialdom, has refused to credit the possibility of the next step. The development of this new sphere of our ascendancy, which admittedly contributed largely to the recent glorious termination of hostilities, was achieved almost entirely by individual effort and sacrifice, in the face of an official lethargy and passive opposition which have seldom been rivalled even in the long record of these things which stand to the credit of British bureaucracy."⁵²

⁵⁰*The Aeroplane*, Vol.16, 1, 08/01/1919, 14.

⁵¹echoing the ideal structure of Plato's *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) book II 370c, 60

⁵²ibid.

Mosley placed the major points of his speech into the larger context of British history where, for him, individualism and State bureaucracy were antagonistic strands. Individualism was responsible for the "commercial supremacy of the race, the fruit of centuries of individual effort and enterprise."⁵³ The whole phenomenon of British success, including the Colonial Empire, is due to individualism. The achievement of the individual in the face of the State began, Mosley suggested, in the days of Queen Elizabeth and Drake and he sees a continuation of this spirit in the current argument on aviation.⁵⁴ Mosley's appeal is for individual initiative and enterprise to be given the space to flourish where state intervention is likely to fail.

The special nature of the aviators

Mosley opened his Parliamentary career with a vigorous defence of the air service which became a symbol closely associated with his vision of the nation. A cluster of concepts he held at an affective level were made communicable through language, operating in a similar manner to a metaphor which extends "language so it can express meaning it cannot express literally by broadening the semantic range".⁵⁵ The myth of the aviator provided Mosley with an operative expression of his fundamental ideology and the aviator can be seen to be given a special position in Mosley's Parliamentary

⁵³ibid.

⁵⁴The constant referring back to the Elizabethan days becomes a regularly repeated theme throughout Mosley's career. For example: "Fascists stand where stood the heroes of our past while fools played and laughed....Our minds travel back to the Christmases of 'Merrie England' at the dawn of our nation's greatness; then forward to the Christmas of the future, to a nation reborn", Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London: B.U.F., 1933) 76.

⁵⁵Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 220

statements again when he next spoke in a debate directly connected to the subject of flight.

During the debate on the Air Force Estimates, 15 December 1919, Mosley brought to the fore what he saw as the exceptional nature of the air services. To acknowledge this Mosley called for the appointment of a single dedicated chief responsible for the air as replacement for the existing situation where the Air Ministry and the War Office exist under a single Head of department. The holder of this post, Churchill, was the target of regular Parliamentary attacks from Mosley but to characterize these clashes as one of personalities can lead to marginalisation of the operative ideological message in Mosley's words.⁵⁶

The myth of the airman possessed many traits, such as the passing of an old order to be supplanted by a new order, which held a symbolic significance to the war generation for who it encapsulated their heroism and their aspirations for a new society born from the mechanisation of modernity. Mosley's ideological imperative, to maintain national greatness through dynamic futurism, was evident in the myth of the airman. Hence, the

⁵⁶see the accounts of Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961) 12-15; and, following the incidents described by Cross but with added detail, Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 3rd ed. (London: Papermac, 1990) 78-80; Although interesting in itself, the parallel lives analysis, comparing the lives of two individuals with some apparent commonality between them, can lead to each subject becoming stereotypical representatives of standardised ideological positions, for example Nazi and Communist, overrunning and concealing those nuances and idiosyncratic regions of thought which distinguish one individual's worldview from another. It is those regions we are attempting to shed light on in the case of Mosley, even if he encouraged the adoption of the comparative approach in his autobiography by associating himself with other contemporary 'big name' politicians so as to give added credence to his political positions, see *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968) for example Lloyd George, 143-149 & Churchill 104-110

maintenance of British air power was vital to such a scheme and to Mosley this could be threatened if the Air Ministry was, even symbolically, subordinate to the War Office. To Mosley, the British air power should have its own executive authority and he argued that Ministry of two departments was too big for one man, who "cannot possibly afford to devote proper attention to the birth of that Service which we are now witnessing in the present transitional stage of the Air Service."⁵⁷ Mosley's ideological imperative demanded a single political chief of the Air Service and he implied the existing situation left the country's defence under the effective control of Civil Servants. The demands created by the advances of aviation could not be achieved under partial leadership and Mosley's answer called for a political head of department given sufficient time to deal with leading problems and time to study all the minutiae of detail. These demands called for a full-time post. During his speech Mosley suggested the creation of a new Ministry of Defence and "to leave such a Ministry the new problems of warfare which will arise in the future and which will necessitate some such provision."⁵⁸ The future demanded action in the present, and in these words Mosley's ideological matrix can be detected seeking to protect Britain and by shifting the emphasis from a ministry of *war* to a ministry of *defence* and acknowledging the Air Force was equal to the senior services. Mosley wanted to avoid war to protect Britain and reward those who had served and fought for Britain. Prevention of a future war was one route to maintain British greatness.

The Prevention of War

The experience of the First World War inculcated Mosley with an understandable

⁵⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 15 December 1919, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 123, col. 111.

⁵⁸*ibid.*, col. 113.

abhorrence of warfare. His political ambitions were directed to prevent a repetition of the 1914-1918 bloodbath; but they were also more than a mere reflexive response to these horrors, they encapsulated a particular conception of humanity, social relationships and hierarchy, memory, and nationhood. Furthermore, prevention of war was an operative route to bring about national greatness by conserving energies and resources. This particular feature of Mosley's thought can still be detected in the publications of his followers today which, for example, include a "British Union Roll of Honour" remembering BUF members who died in the Wars.⁵⁹

The nations which emerged victorious at the end of the war sought to create an international organisation to prevent, or reduce the probability of future wars, and Lloyd George set this as a his final war aim. The League of Nations emerged as much the result of the hard slog British Foreign Office as the fulfilment of Woodrow Wilson's vision. Mosley wholeheartedly supported the League of Nations as he recoiled from the first-hand experience of modern warfare and set himself the task to prevent a reoccurrence of that nightmare. The League represented a manifestation of many of Mosley's post-war hopes for a future peace.⁶⁰ Mosley later became the Parliamentary Secretary to the League of Nations Union which was set up to promote the League, in the Summer of

⁵⁹For example, *Comrade; Incorporating Action and Union: Newsletter of Friends of O.M.* (London: John Christian for Friends Of O.M.) 26, Oct./Nov., 1 & 4-5; 33, Feb./April 1992, 1 & 7; 35, Aug./Oct. 1992, 1, 2 & 7; 39, May/June 1993, 1-5; 43, May/June 1994, 1, 7, and 8.

⁶⁰"Peace was throughout my overriding passion, and the League of Nations was the first and last effective and disinterested effort to secure peace by comprehensive international action." Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, 136, and, *Broadsheet*, No. 39, 2 May 1980 (London: Sanctuary Press)

1923.⁶¹ In this role Mosley was a dynamic influence and he wanted the League to oppose the government of the day when the situation demanded rather than to simply placate those who never truly supported the League. The Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, binding signatories to a reduction in armaments which was linked to a guarantee of security to other signatories on the same continent in the event of an attack was, in Mosley's opinion, a return to the balance of power politics; the politics which led to the First World War. Mosley clung to the idea of the League being motivated by a group of critical activists; a dedicated core of devoted League followers providing dynamic solutions rather than the trade off in favour of the hope of mass support at the expense of effective action, the path which it ultimately took.⁶² In Mosley's eyes the League was an organisation which signified the end of the style of politics whose logic resulted in the Great War; the League represented the new and young generation.

In Parliament Mosley first questioned the Prime Minister about the League of Nations in October 1919 asking for the Government's proposals on universal disarmament.⁶³ The following February, on the third day of the debate on the Kings Speech, Mosley connected the League of Nations to those who fought the war: "This subject is of paramount importance to the generation to which I belong".⁶⁴ Mosley maintained

⁶¹Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, 141, and Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 41

⁶²Donald S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 41-49

⁶³Mosley, Oral Answers House of Commons, 27 October 1919, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 120, col. 277

⁶⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 12 February 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 125, col. 338

communication with discharged Service men and claimed that after issues such as their pensions "this question of the League of Nations and a measure of disarmament exercises their minds more than any other question of grand policy."⁶⁵

Mosley not only supported the idea of the League of Nations but placed it at a pivotal position in his political thoughts. Speaking in the debate on the Second Reading of the Nauru Agreement Bill he makes this explicit: "I do not know how many Members of this House feel as strongly as I do on the subject of the League of Nations. Some of us feel that it is the one dominant question in politics, the one thing that really matters."⁶⁶ The League of Nations set out to avoid the slip into war which occurred in 1914 by providing a forum where disputes could be argued without resorting to armed conflict. Mosley held that the League of Nations would also help to prevent the betrayal of those men who fought and died for an ideal handed to them by Statesmen of all political persuasions who had proclaimed the Great War was 'the war to end all wars'. Mosley suggested that disarmament can only constructively work towards world peace undertaken collectively, by all nations, and he viewed the unilateral approach as one of the causes of the First World War: "the British Nation has a positive duty before it in the interests of humanity, and we should bring financial pressure to bear in order to force other nations to join with us in some general measure of disarmament."⁶⁷

In Mosley's opinion disarmament was the one policy which could prevent unnecessary

⁶⁵ibid.

⁶⁶Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 16 June 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 130, col. 1324

⁶⁷ibid., 12 February 1920, vol. 125, col. 341.

warfare and this could only work effectively under the collective security of the League of Nations which was 'wrecked', according to Mosley, by Mussolini's 1923 shelling of the island of Corfu killing some Britons.⁶⁸ Despite its lofty ideals the League failed to prevent the maelstrom of European crises during the late nineteen-thirties and was all but ignored during the course of the Second World War. Mosley had perhaps detected a weakness in the League when he later turned to the preservation of British greatness above all else rather than the League's mutual assurances. As leader of the BUF, he would extend this to adopt an apparently contradictory policy of rearmament to assure British self-sufficiency, defence of the empire and, significantly, to avoid British involvement in "foreign quarrels", but this paradox represents a change in operative ideology maintaining the consistent fundamental ideological core.

BUF chauvinism emphasised a strong air force because it possessed a "rare combination of physical and traditional qualities which give the English a singular aptitude for air combat"⁶⁹ Aviation mythically offered an elite representation of the League's association of nations. Aviators were elite transnational guardians of international peace yet, strangely 'English.' The League offered a 'weak' breakable peace while aviators offered a strong peace wrought from the fruit of modernity. Furthermore, Mosley sensed the spirit and amalgamation of 'heroic' qualities was being betrayed by post-war politicians and bureaucrats and he fought for the recognition of this quality from his time in

⁶⁸Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, paperback edition (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970) 141, and F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times 1920-1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986) 108

⁶⁹Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, 392.

Parliament to his pleas on behalf of Nazi aviators in his autobiography.⁷⁰

The idea of hierarchy

The League of Nations attracted Mosley's support because he believed it would provide a mechanism to prevent a recurrence of the Great War while the implicit hierarchical structure of nations favoured Britain through the League's voting scheme reaffirming his ideological core demand for a strong Britain.⁷¹ The mandate system, which provided one nation with protective powers over another nation, allocated the lions share of mandates to Britain along with considerable influence over other countries. Six out of the fifteen 15 mandated countries went to Britain, with the British Empire and British Dominions (i.e. Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) a further four countries.⁷² But from Mosley's ideological position the mandate system was congruent with a belief in a hierarchical international system of power distribution; some nations were more advanced than others; those ahead in the race of progress hold a 'natural' right to determine the future of those nations lower in the hierarchy.⁷³ This position brings with it responsibility, which is evident in Mosley's criticism of the Government over the annexation of the former German colony, the Nauru Island, which was rich in mineral deposits. Mosley viewed the Nauru Island Agreement Bill as a violation of Article 22 of

⁷⁰For example see the 'persecution' of war heroes see *ibid.* 439-440

⁷¹F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times 1920-1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986) 47

⁷²*ibid.*, 195.

⁷³the perceived affinity between the role of individual nations and the Empire is analogous to the 'correct' correlation of an individual to their function in society: of suitably matching individuals to their task, which marked Mosley's ideological matrix and became explicit in the BUF corporate state.

the Covenant of the League of Nations which would present Britain in the eyes of the world as prepared to use the League merely as a pretext for promoting personal interests.⁷⁴ Fearing an undermining of the League by Britain which could signal a return to "the worst days of predatory imperialism of the past",⁷⁵ Mosley saw the action "setting up a precedent which eventually, we may be certain, will be used against us....The British Empire holds this trust on behalf of civilisation"⁷⁶ With missionary zeal Mosley expressed the burden of 'civilisation' sitting on the Empire's shoulders.

A belief in hierarchy in the social, national, and international arena was intrinsic to conservative thought during the early part of the twentieth century and Mosley was predisposed by his aristocratic background to uphold it. Hierarchy, emanating from Mosley's ideological matrix was though, not fundamental but operative; it was a technical prescription underpinning his core principle to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. Central to this hierarchy was the accordance of different positions to individuals according to their service to the nation. Mosley's vehement defence of ex-servicemen was motivated by a desire to acknowledge their service to the nation within the hierarchical system.

⁷⁴Article 22 of the League of Nations provides for the well-being and development of colonies and territories "which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world", the best method for this is the "tutelage of such people to advanced nations". Part 5 of Article 22 secures "equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other Members of the League" in the mandatory country.

⁷⁵Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 16 June 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 130, col. 1313

⁷⁶ibid. vol. 132, cols. 140 & 141.

Mosley considered himself a 'fact man' and he used the forum of Parliamentary Questions to raise the issue of the availability of work and the rewards for ex-servicemen after serving the Nation.⁷⁷ Mosley sought to discover the percentage of military age employees in Government Departments replaced by ex-Service men since the armistice;⁷⁸ were ex-Service men given privileged treatment by Labour Exchanges?⁷⁹ Was there provision for the training schemes for women to become Housing Inspectors also available to ex-Service men whose disabilities make this work a suitable option?⁸⁰ The disabled ex-Service man bore the true nature of war and the effect of his service in his injuries and Mosley, himself disabled by the war, fought their case. Why were these men having to wait long periods of time to receive medical treatment?⁸¹ Using other questions Mosley sought to establish a privileged position for the ex-service men in recognition for their service and sacrifice to their country; questions probing the reasons why particular ex-Service men had not received the pension monies due to them.⁸²

Underlying these utterances by Mosley is an assumption that privilege should be an earned entitlement. In questions about the recruitment of unemployed men for the construction of the British Empire Exhibition to be held at Wembley 1924 Mosley

⁷⁷Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game: Sir Oswald and Cynthia Mosley 1896-1933* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982) x

⁷⁸Mosley, Oral Answers, House of Commons, 12 August 1919, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 119, col. 1091

⁷⁹Mosley, Written Answer, *ibid.*, 119, col. 1117.

⁸⁰*ibid.*, col. 1119.

⁸¹*ibid.*, vol. 121, col. 1874.

⁸²*ibid.*, vol. 119, col.1658.

wanted ex-servicemen to be favoured. The Exhibition brought for the first time a comprehensive survey of the Empire's peoples, cultures, and economics and, as its historian wrote, was symbolic: "The lesson to be learned was that the empire stood for 'justice, progress and liberty'. The British Empire Exhibition brought to life a vision of empire founded on the brotherhood of man and dedicated to the principles of peace and democracy."⁸³ Mosley sought to connect these themes with the concrete employment of ex-servicemen.

Speaking in the British Empire Exhibition Bill (Second Reading) Mosley expressed his wish to see the project: "contribute in some degree to the solution of the national question of unemployment".⁸⁴ Mosley sought to remunerate the individual who had served the nation with the reward of employment, favouring them more than those had not risked all for his country. Proposing an Amendment to the Bill Mosley sought to link the employment of ex-Service men and local labour to the Government's guarantee given to the Wembley project and tie this hierarchy to the mechanism of the State.⁸⁵ The Amendment gave priority to local ex-Servicemen; then to all ex-Service men; and finally local labour who are not ex-Servicemen. Mosley's scheme was designed to prevent the importation of labour from as far afield as Ireland which brought the costs of accommodation and transport of the workers. This apparently pragmatic approach to a problem called for positive discrimination in favour of ex-Service men and it is evident

⁸³Thomas G. August, *The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890 - 1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985) for the 1924 Exhibition 125-153, this citation 128.

⁸⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 3 July 1922, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 156, col.136

⁸⁵ibid., col.459.

that Mosley had categorised the unemployed, not a homogenous mass but, as a collection of more or less worthy individuals depending upon their relationship and service to the nation. Not only military service to the nation counted in Mosley's schemes: during the second reading of the Consolidation Fund Bill Mosley argued in support of Civil Servants whose retirement pensions were effectively halved because the cost of living index figure, used to calculate the pensions, was at a much reduced level than in the past.

Mosley argued:

"It is highly inexpedient to penalise those men who have served their country best. All the men who have hung on through the difficult and arduous period of reconstruction to the present time are at a great disadvantage compared to those who retired comparatively early"

It is a simple matter of honour, "There is no question of degree in matters of honour. Either we are bound to all these men, or not at all."⁸⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has described Mosley's first years in parliamentary politics. His experience of war confirmed and established his ideological matrix to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. He held a naive yet genuine desire to ensure the Great War was the 'war to end all wars' on condition that Britain retained its advanced place in the hierarchy of nations. His memory of the war was influenced by his time in the Royal Flying Corps, and the myth of the airman represents the dynamic and a futurist visions he experienced. Mosley attempted to secure a degree of freedom for this new aerial zone; free from the encroachment of the bureaucracy with its own Chief to direct this modern

⁸⁶Mosley, *ibid.*, 23 February 1922, vol. 150, cols. 2168 & 2170.

innovation.

During this time the League of Nations provided Mosley with an authoritative and institutional body through which his opinions on the nation, peace, and relationships between nations could find their expression. This core of idealism, embodied in the League of Nations, was always under threat and he battled against any perceived attack to its principles. From relationships between nations to the relationships between the individual and the nation, Mosley perceived these as hierarchical but it was the movement between two conditions, the nation *to* the individual, or, nation *to* nation, which is the significant factor in Mosley's ideological matrix. The role of the unemployed became a particular and persistent feature of Mosley's political concerns because they offered a discourse for the operative expression of his fundamental ideological matrix: unemployment was perceived as a symptom of a weak and declining Britain and its cure could make a move towards a greater Britain. During Mosley's early political years he expressed all the elements indicative to his ideological matrix: dynamism, modernism, platonic coordination of act, action, and actor, a strong sense of nationhood, and notions of elitism. Mosley went on to formulate his idea of 'nation' in terms of an economic unit created and perpetuated through the labours of its workforce whose employment or unemployment were palpable traits of Britain's well being: unemployment represented a fall from the greatness Britain had achieved. This economic analysis was preceded by Mosley's concern that the nation lacked strong leadership and this provided the second expression of his ideological matrix and was played out in Ireland.

Three

Ireland "an appropriate hell": a case study of Mosley's nation

Mosley's concerns and involvement with the Irish issue appear unsurprising in the light shed by his ideological matrix which crucially exhibits a commitment to nationalism. With his fundamental drive to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness, Mosley was drawn to issues associated with a conflict of British national interest which were so close to home. Furthermore, the involvement of soldiers whose actions were affected, if not determined, by their experience in the First World War, created for Mosley an affinity with them, despite the real chasm of divergent backgrounds. Mosley described in his autobiography how he was first made aware of the atrocities being carried out in Ireland by the Black and Tans on behalf of the British Government from a childhood neighbour of Mosley's first wife Cimmie. The man had been drafted into the 'Black and Tans' and was astonished at the tortuous and terrorist methods employed against the Irish people.¹ Following this on November 3rd 1920, Mosley crossed the floor of the House of Commons to sit with the Independents in order, he says, to be heard. His remarks were critical of Government policy and Mosley preferred to: "face my enemies rather than be surrounded by them".² Skidelsky has written that there was the permanence of an idea about the 'proper' way to wage a war in Mosley's thought which stemmed Mosley's aristocratic background; a principle broken by the Government's counter-terrorism

¹Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, paperback ed. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970) 151-2

²Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982) 27; and *ibid.* 152

policy. To Mosley this was an the inefficient political method which was symptomatic of a weak, muddled national leadership that was abhorrent to him.³ In this chapter a connection will be established to link Mosley's explanations to his ideological matrix with its core myth of a dynamic, futurist great nation.

Mosley's parliamentary involvement with the Irish question lasted a relatively short period from his first parliamentary question on the subject during the autumn of 1920 until 11 July 1921 when the truce with the Sinn Fein was arranged. Despite the briefness of this period Mosley was very active and dedicated to expose government policies and actions speaking about little else in parliament and this is an indication of how much this issue caused some resonance with his ideological matrix. But it is the background to the problems in Ireland which signal the depth they had become a symbolic part of the governing of Britain and perceptions of British strength which were both issues germane to Mosley's ideological matrix.

Background to the Irish question

The source of the twentieth century problems in Ireland can be found in the Parliament Act of 1911 which removed the power of veto from the Lords, the traditional seat of opposition to Irish Home Rule. The Irish Home Rule Movement had been launched in 1870 and sixteen years later Gladstone presented his Home Rule Bill to parliament and,⁴ while a variety of special emergency acts in Ireland became permanently established on

³Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 3d. ed. (London: Papermac, 1990) 98

⁴Paurk Travers, *Settlements and Divisions: Ireland 1870-1922* (Dublin: Helicon, 1988) 33 & 48

the statute book in the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act 1887,⁵ the 1912 Bill for limited home rule attracted opposition from the extreme Irish Republican Brotherhood while stimulating the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, threatening the authority of the British government and resulting in the Currah Mutiny, where 85 army officers preferred to resign rather than obey orders to move against the UVF.⁶ The 1914 promise of Irish Home rule was quashed with the coming of war, and the seeds of an Ulster rebellion were sown.⁷ Long established traditions of distrusting the English were reenforced and the planning of militant action to bring about independence ensued. Militant sentiments were further encouraged by both the execution of fifteen of the leaders of the failed 1916 Dublin Rebellion and the imposition of conscription in Ireland in 1918.⁸ Furthermore, the British believed there was a plot against them from Germany which was using the anti-British sentiment in Ireland and this belief resulted in the arrest of several Sinn Fein leaders undermining any confidence in the British government. Brought together, these events strengthened the nationalist sentiment in Ireland and 'justified' extremist methods to end British rule in Ireland.

A different perspective suggests the Irish distrust of Britain reflected a fundamental difference of national identity, one where the notion of 'union' becomes a contradiction

⁵Colm Campbell, *Emergency Law in Ireland 1918-1925* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 8

⁶incidentally, Mosley was stationed at Curragh in 1914, after training at Sandhurst and before any direct experience of the war. From there he joined the R.F.C., see *My Life*, 44-49.

⁷J.C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) 423 & 435

⁸ibid, 441-446.

and, arguably, the Irish people were forcefully subjugated by the British, yet contained within the idea of a 'union' of the Irish and English people and this carries with it an assumption of an equal relationship.⁹ Yet these unspecific signals, combined with the internal manoeuvring of the IRA, along with the enduring perception of the British as 'foreign', together destroyed the chance of any consensus of opinion, resulting in an intractable situation where the British could not transform the government of Ireland from one of power to one of authority.¹⁰ In the years after the First World War, which had severely tested all ideas surrounding the human cost of maintaining national boundaries, Ireland provided Britain with a chance to examine the extent, and value, of its borders. These issues of nationality were germane to Mosley's ideological matrix seeking to sustain national greatness.

Without doubt there were fundamental differences between the two communities which underpinned the Ireland/Britain conflict. Each community was developing a national identity in contrast to the other community. For example, in 1918 the British decided to render the Irish liable to military conscription; this had little effect in Britain but in Ireland the antagonism it created towards the British assisted the rise of De Valera and the withdrawal of the Irish Parliamentary Party.¹¹ In this light, the two nations were at odds over a sense of identity and the expression of their nation, a situation which could not fail to provoke a response from Mosley given his deep preoccupation with conserving

⁹Oliver Macdonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 52

¹⁰Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 200

¹¹Macdonagh, op. cit., 126 and passim.

and strengthening the power of Britain, especially as he had been stationed in Ireland.¹²

The 1918 December General Election secured seventy three Sinn Fein representatives seats in Parliament making the party the largest faction in the non-coalition opposition. These representatives refused to sit in parliament claiming that Westminster was not the place to further the cause of the Irish.¹³ The election had demonstrated that the majority of the Irish did not wish to continue with the Union and a self-constituted Irish Parliament was set up in Dublin on 21 January 1919. Attempts were made at the Paris peace conference to gain recognition for Irish autonomy but these failed and the fight to win independence evolved in to a war against the British rule. The IRA stepped up its attacks on the 'occupying' forces and the government decided upon a policy of counter-terrorism and the I.R.A. was proscribed from March 23 1920.¹⁴

The Irish police force was strengthened by increasing its members through the recruitment of both ex-Service men and officers who were known as the 'Black and Tans' and the 'Auxies' respectively, but these notoriously undisciplined and violent troops

¹²Mosley was based at Currah Ireland before moving from Sandhurst to the war in Europe, and again just after the 1916 Dublin uprising, *My Life*, 66, 46, & 158

¹³*The Times*, Monday December 30 1918, published the results of the General Election in graph form which gives some indication of the effect the absence of the Sinn Fein members would make in the opposition benches.

¹⁴The exact date of the decision to increase the militarisation of the police by the British government is difficult to discern but the move towards the increased use of force can be dated around the time of the Restoration of Order Act in August 1920, see Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) 201-2.

became collectively known as the Black and Tans.¹⁵ As republicans extended their hold on Irish state apparatuses, such as the courts, and took over the running of the country, the real British act of governing Ireland began to slip away. Following the unsuccessful Restoration of Order in Ireland Act of August 1920 the British imposed military rule. Official reprisals began in January 1st 1921 but had been 'unofficially' occurring for some time and the four page news-sheet *The Weekly Summary*, first published by Dublin Castle on 13 August 1920, supplied the troops with incitement to carry out reprisals.¹⁶ For example, an early issue encourages the Crown Forces in their 'rough and dangerous task' and to make 'an appropriate hell' in Ireland.¹⁷ Inevitably the terrorist and counter-terrorist activities escalated and led to the war becoming a fight over who could inflict the most terror in Ireland.¹⁸ The liberal voice in England became increasingly repulsed at the policies of its government, set as they were against a background of conciliation

¹⁵For an account of the little training and life as an auxiliary see James Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday* (London: Peter Davies, 1962) Ch. 5, 56-78; and for an impressionistic description of the types of men recruited see Edgar Holt, *Protest in Arms: The Irish Troubles 1916-1925* (London: Putnam, 1960) 200-205; *The Nation* published an article in 1920 'The Black and Tans' describing them as a 'barbarian force' and their actions could not be compared to the Germans in Belgium because Britain was not at war with Ireland, reproduced in *The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Protest*, Brian MacArthur, ed. (London: Viking, 1998) 72-73

¹⁶Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans*, revised edition (London: Severn House Publishers, 1976) 81; and David Hogan, *Four Glorious Years* (Dublin: Irish Press, 1953) Ch. 53 'An Official Journal', 290-296.

¹⁷Michael Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1968) 68; and Edgar Holt, *Protest in Arms: The Irish Troubles 1916-1923* (London: Putnam, 1960) 216.

¹⁸Lloyd George speaking at the Lord Majors Guildhall Banquet talks of the success of the reorganisation of the police: "it has been built up recently, and when the Government were ready, we struck the terror, and the terrorists are now complaining of terror." *The Times*, Wednesday November 10 1920.

and appeasement both at home and abroad,¹⁹ and this pressure along with the weakening effect on Sinn Fein resources of maintaining the war led to the Truce which took effect at noon Monday July 11th 1921.

Mosley and Ireland

Mosley's parliamentary involvement with the issue of Ireland began in October 1920 when he embarked on a tactic of disclosing the government's policy of counter-terrorism. Concern over reprisals had already been voiced by two conservatives, Samuel Hoare and Edward Wood, who warned against the sole use of coercion to establish law and order in Ireland.²⁰ Mosley took the opportunity of the Ireland-Vote of Censure to express his concerns about the practice of reprisals which not only offended basic humanitarian principles but ran counter to his ideological matrix. To Mosley the activities of the notorious Black and Tans were symptomatic of the same failure of leadership which was seen to both betray the troops in the First World War and to present Britain as a land fit for the returning heroes. This failure was symptomatic of a more general failure to sustain the greatness of Britain and over Ireland Mosley sought to highlight both the common soldiers plight and those who should take responsibility for the atrocities.²¹ Mosley said he spoke "on behalf of the troops stationed in Ireland, whom I believe to be entirely

¹⁹The editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott, broke off a long standing friendship with David Lloyd George when as Prime Minister he had condoned the methods of the Black and Tans in Ireland, see Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 125; and for background 130

²⁰This warning was made on 6 August 1920; D.G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918-22* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972) 63

²¹Mosley expresses his belief that each has their defined role to play by providing an example from his experience at Currah camp in Ireland, *My Life*, 46-7

innocent of anything of the nature described this afternoon, that I wish to see the demand for an inquiry [into the reprisals] pressed."²² Mosley was convinced evidence was available for examination from the "officers in charge and the men concerned" without fear of witness harassment. Mosley called for an inquiry "for the sake of the troops concerned. The Government throughout have been extraordinarily unfair in the matter."²³

Mosley's immediate ambition was to expose the role of the government in the decision-making process which advocated reprisals. He was aware that any unreliable witnesses could obscure the truth and, without an inquiry, the ordinary soldiers would take the blame for a policy inspired by politicians echoing the sense of betrayal expressed in the 'Hotel Bolo' mentality experienced in the war. Mosley believed he could establish a link between government and reprisals through the lists naming Sinn Fein members and available to the common soldier: he wanted "elucidated how these lists of leading Republicans get into the hands of private soldiers to wreak their vengeance."²⁴

Mosley was not alone when he crossed the floor of the House of Commons over the policy of reprisals. Lord Robert Cecil had demanded an enquiry into the reprisals and he voted against his own front bench on the issue, Lord Hugh Cecil, Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentinck and Brigadier-General Sir George Cockerhill also crossed the floor.²⁵

²²Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 October 1920, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 133, col. 1006

²³*ibid.*, col. 1009.

²⁴*ibid.*, 1010.

²⁵Mosley provides a different account in his autobiography saying Bentinck did not cross the floor of the House and offered his opposition from the conservative side while both the Cecil's spoke from the opposition benches for some time, *My Life*, 153.

Additional opposition to government policy in Ireland came from the trade unions. Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentinck acted as the chairman of the Peace with Ireland Council, for which Mosley was the honorary secretary, seeking, "a just and lasting settlement between the two countries"²⁶. The apparent strength of the Peace with Ireland Council came from the nature of its members who were, in the main, English, an attribute designed to curb any criticism that the Council as working in the interest of Sinn Fein. One of the two founding Council members, Basil Williams wanted "a purely English movement ... [an]... English protest against the policy of the Government".²⁷ Mosley's close involvement in Irish politics presents a theme which repeats through his political career and was exaggerated in his fascism of the Thirties and centred on the antagonism between the 'English' and the government.

The method of reprisal

Mosley saw the government's response to Sinn Fein terrorism as inefficient and this was not unlike the inefficiencies apparent during the war. He claimed that while the use of collective punishment had a precedent set by the Germans in occupied Belgium during the war it was inappropriate in the Irish context where a terrorist was not likely to stay in the same place for long enough. As a method to implement the will of the British state, Mosley argued the policy of reprisal did not portray a strong civilised nation:

"Our method is far more reminiscent of the pogrom of the barbarous Slav, and represents a far greater breakdown of law and order and justice than did the German method in Belgium...We merely have a promiscuous devastation of

²⁶Boyce, op cit, 64.

²⁷ibid., 65.

whole communities, some members of which may or may not be guilty of crime." This ran counter to his ideological matrix because it was destructive, reactive behaviour deleterious to national greatness. Mosley named the day unofficial reprisals came to an end and official reprisals began as 27 April 1921, and suggested it was a policy adopted *en bloc* from German military writers.²⁸ Collective punishment had worked in the war for the Germans because, Mosley believed it was carried out with efficiency, to attempt such a manoeuvre in Ireland would be counter-productive, an act of stupidity, sullyng the name of Britain in America and giving Sinn Fein the propaganda it sought there.²⁹ Furthermore, Mosley displays an acute sense of 'nation' when he describes the reprisals as stimulating nationalist sentiments and compared this situation with those which served to create Italian nationalism. "Indeed," Mosley suggested, "the only way of creating nationality, in these days of economic internationalism, is by political repression of this sort."³⁰

Mosley interpreted government policy, from inception to implementation, as providing a space within which the common soldier could respond without direction from any source other than his reflexes: justice was administered according to the rights of the moment and was not scrutinised by liberal rationality. He said, "Judgment upon that matter [of guilt] rests entirely in the hands of the private soldier, who is able to break out

²⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 1 June 1921, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 142, col. 1174

²⁹*ibid*, col. 1175.

³⁰*ibid*. col. 1176; it is interesting to note Mosley's contrast between nationalism and economic internationalism which would later become exaggerated when he was a fascist.

of barracks."³¹ Policy making was apparently being devolved to the common soldier and away from the leadership resulting in a decline in the effectiveness of actions taken.

Mosley composed and targeted his parliamentary questions to expose the Government's abandonment of decision making responsibilities. Instead of counter-terrorism Mosley favoured, "catching the assassins, breaking up their gang and bringing them to justice." To achieve this Mosley saw the need for an intelligence gathering system and efficient bureaucratic process. The method was straight forward:

"You must obtain information of their movements. You must elaborate a system to obtain that information, you must act upon it, and you must introduce greater efficiency into Irish administration than we are witnessing today."³²

Mosley preferred war of intelligence rather than counter-terrorism. The intelligence war had begun on the Irish side under the guidance of Michael Collins whose agents in Dublin Castle kept the IRA leadership informed of the British plans.³³ In contrast the British had allowed its policy to be dictated by the reflexive responses of ex-servicemen who had recently experienced the nightmare of trench warfare. Mosley continued: "They merely laugh at the incompetence of your administration, which so frequently fails to bring the assassins to book, and which so frequently visits the spleen of its inefficiency upon the innocent inhabitants of the neighbourhood."³⁴

³¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 October 1920, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 133, col. 1011

³²*ibid.*, col. 1012.

³³Thurlow, *The Secret State*, 98.

³⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 October 1920, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 133, col. 1013

Mosley blamed the failure of the British government to produce a coherent policy on the bureaucratic process and this hindered the implementation of policy and its subsequent translation into action. This caused the government to pursue a policy which contradicted his ideal of civilization that Britain should embody. He concluded his speech:

"The British Government surrendered to the Sinn Feiners when it emulated their policy of assassination. It has surrendered something which I, at any rate, believe to be more important in this world even than outrages in Ireland. It has surrendered the very root principle of British justice."³⁵

Much more was at stake than the mere holding of a territory and national influence. Achievements indicative of an advanced society were being let go.

Mosley persistently questioned the Government about the 'Irish Question' until a few days before the truce with Sinn Fein was arranged.³⁶ Mosley interrogated the Government demanding detailed answers to a series of indirect questions: for example, he asked for the number of attacks? were they on lives or property? carried out by the police or military, how many were subject to a court of enquiry? The Government responded by saying exact numbers were unknown but some were awaiting trial. Mosley asked if ordinary military Courts were inquiring? The Government said that in certain cases yes. Not in all cases? Mosley asked. Not in police cases, the government agreed. In all military cases? Mosley persisted. In certain cases yes the government admitted.³⁷ Such

³⁵ibid., col. 1013.

³⁶The period in which Mosley questioned the Government on Ireland was 20 October 1920 until 28 June 1921 and the truce with Sinn Fein was arranged on 11 July 1921.

³⁷Mosley, Oral Answer House of Commons, 21 October 1920, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* Fifth Series, vol. 133, col. 1048-9

detailed questioning sought to expose government inconsistency, if not connivance, with the reprisals.

If the devil is in the detail Mosley sought to expose it at Parliamentary Question Time. For example, he asked whether reprisals command the support of the Government,³⁸ and whether the Prime Minister would admit that the Cabinet discussed the continuation of the policy of reprisals in Ireland.³⁹ In a question asking for the numbers of police and soldiers murdered and the number of suspects arrested, charged, convicted and executed, Mosley attempted to disclose the inefficiency of Irish policy and suggest that the very presence of the Crown Forces was bound up with the disorder problem they were sent to solve.⁴⁰ The involvement of Crown Forces in attacks, such as those on the printing works at Athlone, were a target for Mosley's questions despite the lack of evidence; the asking of questions continued scrutiny and voiced misgivings with the Government's role in the Irish problem.⁴¹

Crown Force involvement in a series of indiscriminate shootings, thefts from a house they raided, and the number of men escorting a prisoner when he was killed typified Mosley's Question Time tactic to cast a shadow of doubt over the Government's aspirations in Ireland. Mosley was evidently in possession of a reliable source of

³⁸Mosley, Written Answer, *ibid.*, col. 1111.

³⁹Mosley, Oral Answers *ibid.*, 3 March 1921, vol. 138, cols. 1990-1991.

⁴⁰Mosley, Written Answer House of Commons, 11 November 1920, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 133, col. 1380

⁴¹*ibid.*, col. 1382.

information,⁴² for example when he asked about disturbances and the trial of the five men arrested, and whether they to be tried in public, hinting at the clandestine implementation of the legislative procedure.⁴³ Mosley asked about men arrested on a charge of murder and the fate of the rest of the Crown Forces involved; he asked for the number of Crown Forces arrested for offenses against the criminal law and the number of Crown Forces and civilians killed and wounded.⁴⁴ Later Mosley requested compensation rights for those whose property was damaged by the Crown Forces acting in an 'undisciplined manner'.⁴⁵ The Irish had little doubt about the partiality of the legislature in practice in Ireland and the answers Mosley attempted to extract from the Government painted the same picture described in Michael Collins writings.⁴⁶

Mosley was preoccupied by the "gross inefficiency...largely responsible for the death of many gallant men",⁴⁷ and he placed the onus of responsibility in the Government and not with those who translated policy into action.

"Whenever assailed on the subject of his tactical disposition in Ireland, [the Chief Secretary]⁴⁸ hides behind the gallant officers in command....it is the custom of the

⁴²ibid., 8 March 1921, vol. 139, cols. 261 & 262, and 10 March 1921, col. 692.

⁴³ibid., 12 April 1921, vol. 140, col. 943.

⁴⁴ibid., Oral Answers, 14 April 1921, cols. 1266-7 & 1271.

⁴⁵ibid., 2 May 1921, vol. 141, col. 670.

⁴⁶Michael Collins, *The Path to Freedom* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1968) 70-71

⁴⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 24 November 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 135, col. 518

⁴⁸Harmar Greenwood (1870-1948), from April 1920 he was the last chief secretary for Ireland who defended the actions of the Black and Tans in Parliament. The truce arranged between Lloyd George and de Valera went above Greenwoods head and

Chief Secretary to shelter himself behind the soldiers. No one, least of all myself, would attack the soldiers. It is the Government whom we impugn in this matter."⁴⁹

Mosley saw policy distorted by political intrigue with blame apportioned to those implementing the policy and a decline in civilized standards: "I wish only that he [the Chief Secretary] had taken steps before, and thus saved the name of the country under which it now labours."⁵⁰ For Mosley the government had blurred the distinction between a right to respond to attacks and a right to seek revenge on innocent people and in this confusion the recently demobbed soldiers acted reflexively, and relied on their instinct. Mosley traced the cause of violence, meted out by the soldiers and police, to the speeches of Government Ministers, it was simply "not their [the soldiers] fault", it was the fault of the Government:

"If you afford superior Government authority, the small minority that exists in any body of men, the black sheep who are to be found in any corporate bodies, of course take advantage of the licence afforded to them, and under the stress of great provocation commit the sins for which the Government of this country must assume responsibility. There is overwhelming evidence...that this policy of reprisals is a deliberate policy carried out by the Government with a deliberate purpose."⁵¹

although he was a signatory of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 he did not actively participate in its formulation.

⁴⁹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 24 November 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 135, col. 518-519

⁵⁰*ibid.*, col. 519.

⁵¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 24 November 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 135, col. 520

It would be surprising if Lloyd George was unaware of the reprisal policy in Ireland. His official biography suggests he knew of the policy although he did not accept responsibility and refused to withdraw the offending troops.⁵² Any implication of weakness in leadership arose after Lloyd George had admitted the Crown Forces overreacted in their response to Sinn Fein actions. In his speech to constituents at Caernarvon on 9 October 1920, Lloyd George said that in the face of such high numbers of police killed "at last their patience had given way, and there has been some severe hitting back."⁵³ Either the authority of the government had failed, allowing such reprisals, or it had sanctioned the reprisal policy.

A degenerate policy

Inefficient policy provided advantages to the murderers by providing "propaganda against this country all over the world."⁵⁴ Martyrs to the cause of Irish self-rule served to strengthen opinion against England and can be illustrated by the death of a veteran of the 1916 Dublin Rising, Terence MacSwiney, at the end of a 74 day hunger strike in Brixton Jail which was followed across the world. This was a death which was believed to swing British public opinion against the government.⁵⁵ But these events were, from Mosley's perspective, symptoms of a fundamental national weakness brought about by a failure of leadership. Likewise, reprisals were further manifestations of national

⁵²Malcolm Thomson, *David Lloyd George: The Official Biography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1948) 318-319

⁵³quoted in Frank Owen, *Tempestuous Journey: Lloyd George his life and times* (London: Hutchinson, 1954) 568

⁵⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 24 November 1920, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol.135, col.520

⁵⁵MacSwiney died on 25 October 1920

weakness.⁵⁶ And, as if to shake the government into realising their weakness Mosley could only suggest the politics of despair, "the evacuation of the interior of Ireland and the holding of the ports on the coast."⁵⁷ This he argued would protect the police and maintain strategic safety for Britain. Yet he still held to a belief in a simple solution because "There is agreement with the vast mass of the Irish people compatible with the safety of this country and the aspirations of Irish nationality."⁵⁸ Mosley saw British policy at least exacerbating, if not creating, the Irish problem because its policy obscured, what he considered the uncontested truth that resolution lay in the release or 'true' expression of national sentiment. This belief emerged from the dynamics of his fundamental ideological matrix and its engagement with the political reality of the Irish problem. Fundamentally Mosley's ideological matrix demanded national strength:

"I submit that government in Ireland and the administration of our government has so hopelessly broken down that we must adopt some change or continue in a policy of despair....The Government has set in motion, forces and passions in order to achieve a temporary purpose, and fulfil a hazardous expedient, which may yet overwhelm, not only the creators, but the very stability and security of our country."⁵⁹

⁵⁶the precedent of Napoleon's actions against terrorism in Spain, where revolts marked the beginning of the Empire's break-up, were example for Mosley of the effect of reprisal tactics in generating nationalist sentiments, Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 1 June 1921, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol.142, col. 1176

⁵⁷ibid., 24 November 1920, vol.135, col. 522

⁵⁸ibid.

⁵⁹ibid., col. 522 & 523.

Mosley noted Government policy as it was expressed in the speeches of ministers, and he cited Lloyd George's Carnarvon Speech. To him the policy struck at the heart of humanity and the evolution of the human spirit, "They tore into shreds the elaborate growth of the centuries, that sense of justice which separates man from the animal, in that it enables him to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent in exacting retribution."⁶⁰ Ireland was a symptom of a poor, if not degenerate, policy and indicated to Mosley a move contrary to the civilizing process. The British governing of Ireland had failed by substituting "frightfulness for efficiency"; efficiency would have allowed the unhindered expression of the nation and Mosley detected a decline in morality and sought to restore it: "Let us recognise that we have lost in the catastrophic competition [of fighting terrorism with terrorism], and must start again on a new basis, to rebuild the efficiency of our civil administration, and restore our discipline."⁶¹ Despite all else, Mosley was positive and having identified the decline in policy standards he articulates a theme of reconstruction.

Mosley continued his attacks on the government by suggesting they had developed a 'habit' of hiding behind the soldiers, and he used evidence in the press to indicate a change of opinion outside Parliament: "We find everywhere a growing realisation that some things are taking place in Ireland which disgrace the name of this country"⁶² and the Prime Minister's Carnarvon speech simply misrepresented reprisals and gave licence

⁶⁰ibid., col. 523.

⁶¹ibid., col. 523.

⁶²ibid., 7 March 1921, vol. 139, col. 162.

to the forces to carry them out.⁶³ Mosley cites a four page news sheet *The Weekly Summary*, first published by the police authorities in Dublin Castle on 13 August 1920, as proof of government encouragement for reprisals. *The Weekly Summary* was provided free to the police and it provided Black and Tans with a view of events more favourable than available elsewhere,⁶⁴ while its true nature was conveyed in articles urging police to make Ireland "an appropriate hell" for Sinn Feiners.⁶⁵ For opponents of the government this 'official journal' slandered the independence movement and invented atrocities to which Crown Forces could respond.⁶⁶ Mosley saw the whole affair as counter-productive with, "the whole terrible breakdown of discipline in Ireland... The only result has been to drive hundreds into the ranks of the Sinn Fein."⁶⁷

In negotiations with Sinn Fein the Government used Archbishop Clune of Perth Australia to mediate between the two factions and he noted the failure of reprisals which simply worsened the problem. Mosley seized upon his comments and argued that if "the ordinary processes of civil life, in conjunction with a proper intelligence system, had been utilised in the very first instance" the problem could have been solved.⁶⁸ Irish policy was against

⁶³ibid., col. 164.

⁶⁴Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans*, revised edition, (London: Severn House Publishers, 1976) 81

⁶⁵Edgar Holt, *Protest in Arms: The Irish Troubles 1916-1925* (London: Putnam, 1960) 216

⁶⁶David Hogan, *Four Glorious Years* (Dublin: Irish Press, 1953) 290; see also Ernie O Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (London: Rich and Crown, 1936) 242.

⁶⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 7 March 1921, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 139, col. 166

⁶⁸ibid., col. 168.

the tide of history:

"the Government's administration in Ireland to-day is striking at the very roots of human existence. I believe they are traversing and challenging the immutable laws that have governed the destinies of man from the very infancy of the human race, that the trustees of civilisation cannot commit murder with impunity"⁶⁹

And this represents the nub of Mosley's critique of the policy of reprisals: the nations leaders were not fulfilling their tasks, performing their role in the historical civilizing process pioneered in the West, unlike the humble soldier. The crimes of Sinn Fein were, "a less indelible blot upon the features of humanity than the scar which has been wrought by the weapons of murder in the hands of British Government... with denials on its lips and blood on its hands....[the government now] stands silent and convicted before the tribunal of world opinion."⁷⁰ This charge would leave a damning legacy "demonstrating conclusively to future generations, if not to the present, that they have been guilty of organising to commit political murder."⁷¹

The Economic waste of Irish policy

If the neglect of national morality was not a sufficient objection to the reprisals Mosley extended the argument into the economic realm. Using a debate on Supplementary Estimates Mosley drew attention to money wasted over the Irish Question "because the policy it was designed to support was reversed without achieving one of those objectives

⁶⁹ibid., col. 169; Mosley drew on the authority of the League of Nations by using the expression 'trustees of civilisation' which is a part of the Covenant of League of Nations

⁷⁰ibid.

⁷¹ibid., 14 June 1921, vol. 143, col. 355.

it set out to secure."⁷² Beyond accounting details Mosley bound together the issue of finance with nationality:

"We are invited to discard services which are vital to the life blood of our country and imperative to its industrial recovery ... for a policy which was reversed with no results achieved, I am not condemning the morality of the Government, I am pointing out to him [the Lord Chancellor] that on the grounds of the lowest expediency this money was utterly wasted."⁷³

The extra expenditure on Ireland was due, in part, to the cost of paying for extra men "in a way which was detrimental to the interests both of that country and of this"⁷⁴ Mosley correlated numbers of the increased casualties in Ireland with the employment of these men to demonstrate their violent conduct: "Instead of a steady decline in outrage in Ireland, as men in this special category were imported into Ireland, a progressive increase in crime as the repressive principles of the right hon. Gentleman grew in force and application."⁷⁵ The employment of these men had cost the country and the bill would be paid in money, lives, and honour. Mosley concluded: "We now have to pay the bill for an epoch in English history which will for long be a shame and a reproach to every Englishman."⁷⁶ Two days later he highlighted a policy designed to recompense law-abiding citizens in Ireland for casualties and loss of property due to the period of troubles which he saw as a measure of failure and disgrace. Mosley saw it as a bill for the

⁷²ibid., col. 1616.

⁷³Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 February 1922, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 150, col. 1616-7

⁷⁴ibid., col.1618.

⁷⁵ibid.

⁷⁶ibid, col. 1619.

Governments blunders and one that is due to all Ireland except for a very few Sinn Feiners.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Mosley's compulsion to enter the political fray over the Irish issue can be superficially accounted for as a simple desire for an emotive issue which his political reputation could be made. Yet the empirical evidence of his speeches indicate an operative expression of the fundamental ideological matrix as Mosley interpreted the policy in Ireland as a symptom of failed leadership, and this impinged on British status abroad. The method employed by the British government to implement policy, by countering terrorism using reprisals against civilians, did not demonstrate the strength Mosley believed Britain possessed. To Mosley, 'Ireland' acted as a catalyst bringing to the surface the deterioration at the heart of policy making. There was a fundamental flaw preventing Britain from achieving its potential and maintaining its strength. British policy in Ireland lacked genuine strength of leadership resulting in the creation of circumstances in which the brutalised personality of a war veteran, epitomised in the 'Black and Tan', who could be let loose to shape Government policy. In short, the British policy in Ireland demonstrated to Mosley a lack of strength in leadership, an inadequate apportionment of responsibility, and inappropriate allocation and limitation of duties. Later Mosley recalled, "Ireland in the autumn of 1920 evoked intense moral feeling. I felt that the name of Britain was being disgraced...".⁷⁸ Furthermore, Mosley linked the reprisals in Ireland with those methods of an uncivilized, or de-civilizing, society; a method displaying an

⁷⁷ibid., 22 February 1922, vol. 150, col. 2023, 2027, and 24 Feb. 1922, col. 2284.

⁷⁸*My Life*, 150

apparent regressive historical process. In addition, Mosley argued the economic token of the nation was being squandered by the whole of the mistaken policy in Ireland: British decline was apparent in the Irish problem and planning was the key to reverse this decline and genuinely represent the nation's heart whose pulse was the economy.

Four

Mosley and economic men: the drawing of Mosley's imagined nation

Mosley used economic arguments to support his criticism of the British policy in Ireland, and these can be seen as an operative expression of his ideological matrix, one which would occupy a far more dominant position in his later utterances. Economic thought came to represent a consistent theme in the expression of his ideological matrix suggesting similar economic ideas underpinned all Mosley's politics from his membership of the Labour Party to fascism and beyond.¹ Summing up his career in 1970, Mosley described himself as "a man who committed his political life to the disturbing belief that sooner or later an economic crisis of this basic nature was inevitable" and "in the life and death question of economic survival government must decide and act."² This preoccupation with economics, and the association of vitalism with nationhood can be seen as an exoteric, operative, expression of an ideological matrix charged with the fundamental drive to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness.

Without doubt the First World War created the emergency conditions which demanded a pragmatic recasting of economic ideas to further the progress of the war. Suppression

¹Compare Mosley's *Revolution by Reason* (London: I.L.P., 1925) with the second section, 'Book Two', of *The Greater Britain* (London: Greater Britain Publications, 1932); see also Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982) 219.

²Oswald Mosley, 'Inflation and Depression: The Worst of Both Worlds', *Broadsheet no.1*, 14 September 1970.

of economic individualism was one method in the conditions of 'total war' which affected the thought of both Mosley and John Maynard Keynes to the extent that Mosley's would later reject the idea of 'economic man' in his permutation of fascist politics. Mosley's economic ideas can be seen as a channel through which his idea of 'nation' could be approached and manipulated. Mosley's parliamentary remarks on economic matters sought to highlight inaction by the Government yet they also indicate Mosley's determined belief in rational/scientific analyses. His 1925 *Revolution by Reason* displayed economic ideas influenced by theorists promoting new and credit based economics divorced from the older mode fixed to the Gold Standard. Mosley has been described the politician who "first introduced the concept of 'economic planning' into the vocabulary of British politics in the 1930s,"³ further supporting the pivotal role of economics in Mosley's politics.

Mosley's expression of the ideological matrix at the heart of his political utterances contains a core element of dynamism, fundamental to aviation and linked a sense of personal heroism in opposition to paralysis.⁴ This demand for dynamic solutions was part of his fundamental ideological matrix and was incorporated with the urge to strengthening and revitalise Britain.⁵ Mosley's sense of 'nationality' is central to the

³Daniel Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning: the Debate on Economic Planning in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 50

⁴Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973)

⁵For example: "Our hope is centred in vital and determined youth, dedicated to the resurrection of a nation's greatness and shrinking from no effort and no sacrifice to secure that mighty end", Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 25; "The whole problem is to secure that mobilization of the Government machine, and ultimately the resources of the Nation, in a co-ordinated and consistent effort of economic reconstruction", Mosley letter to Prime Minister, Ramsay McDonald, 23/01/31, quoted in W.R

ideological matrix and crucial to understanding his later adoption of fascism. He emerged from holding a traditional, conservative sense of patriotism, common, if not expected, among aristocracy, to becoming an ultra-nationalist.⁶ Economics provided Mosley with a zone where an idea of 'nation' could be expressed and also an area which provides a mechanism through which the revitalisation of 'the nation' could operate. At an operative level, nationalism and economics provided Mosley with the theoretical strategy to dynamically rebuild Britain. In this scheme the nation was perpetually renewed in individual, and discrete, economic transactions.⁷

As a fascist, Mosley accounted for the decline of Britain by blaming the wrong road taken by the British since, for example, the Elizabethan period. One who signalled this road was Thomas Hobbes whose *Leviathan* (1651) identified self-interest as the most powerful impulsive force in man, but recognized that in a state of nature this would lead to an isolation and perpetual warfare of man against man. Hobbes proposed an absolute sovereign empowered to rule over men to resolve this dilemma. Adam Smith built an

Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A study in public policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 365

⁶Hans Kohn in 'The Genesis and Character of English Nationalism' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.1 no.1 (January 1940) traced the awakening of English national consciousness to the 14th century which become intense national pride during the Elizabethan period, incidentally this period was considered an important example of British greatness in BUF critiques of twentieth century Britain.

⁷This interpretation of thought resembles the ideas of the eighteenth century economists, the physiocrats, who believed they had identified a natural law underlying society, recognising a social hierarchy to which reasonable people felt bound to obey because it represented some inherent truth. To the physiocrats wealth stemmed from the land and effective agricultural management by land owners could increase this value, Charles Gide and Charles Rist, *A History of Economic Doctrines From the Time of the Physiocrats to the Present Day*, 2nd. ed., trans. Ernest F. Row (London: George G. Harrup & Co., 1948, 1st Published 1915) 54

economic theory on Hobbesian individualism notably presented in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Adams argued the individualism inherent to liberalism could serve the common good through economic self-interest. Self-interest was the mainspring of social wellbeing and the ideas of Smith found their most fertile ground with the advent of industrialisation.⁸ The emphasis on individual self-interest had created great wealth and an Empire but for Mosley the decline too was rooted in self-interest: the national interest had been fragmented and decline ensued. It was the First World War which recast Mosley's thoughts about his nation.

The First World War gave birth to the concept and reality of 'total war'. The nation became a war machine rather than a territory with a defensive army. The administration of this war machine required the suppression of liberal ideals along with compulsion and creative economics rather than the free-play of markets.⁹ As early as August 1914 'currency notes', not backed up by gold reserves, were issued and by 1916 and it was demonstrated that the free price mechanism failed in times of war.¹⁰ Keynes wrote in *The Economic Consequences of War* (1919):

"The most serious problems for England have been brought to a head by the war...the forces of the nineteenth century have run their course and are exhausted.

⁸Milton L. Myers, *The Soul of Modern Economic Man: Ideas of Self-Interest, Thomas Hobbes to Adam Smith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 3 & 130.

⁹Mosley had direct experience of war-time administration after being invalided out of the war with his leg injury, Mosley *My Life*, 70; Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 65.

¹⁰Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1950* (London: Edward Arnold, 1962) 68 & 46. Arthur Kitson called these currency notes 'paper bullets'.

The economic motives and ideals of that generation no longer satisfy us: we must find a new way and must suffer again the *malaise*, and finally the pangs, of a new industrial birth."¹¹

The sense of renewal is important here, particularly when Mosley's later adoption of fascism, an ideology of national renewal, is anticipated.¹² Keynesian ideas were widely respected in Germany for his position with regard to the post-war Treaty of Versailles and even Hitler was advised to read him.¹³

Keynes can be considered as the succeeding economist to emerge from the struggle to find theoretical solutions in the post-war era and he is important to an understanding of Mosley's economic thought. Mosley and Keynes had similar class backgrounds and moved in coinciding social circles,¹⁴ later they would occupy allied positions with revolutionary ambitions; Keynes advocating a revolution in macroeconomics while Mosley sought a revolution in the machinery of government.¹⁵ Mosley once congratulated Keynes on his 'fascist' economics and Keynes is said to have offered Mosley advice and encouragement on his Memorandum on unemployment when Mosley was Chancellor of

¹¹*The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, vol.II, *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, 1st published 1919 (London: Macmillan, 1971) 161

¹²see Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, Routledge, 1993) 35

¹³Avraham Barkai, *Nazi Economics: Ideology, Theory and Policy*, trans. Ruth Hadass-Vashitz (Oxford: Berg, 1990) 65-6

¹⁴Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968) 178

¹⁵Peter Clark, *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making 1924-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 158

the Duchy of Lancaster, although written evidence of this is not reported.¹⁶ Despite these suggestions any revolutionary alliance between these men can be overstated and it is difficult to believe that either of these characters ever intellectually `needed' the other.¹⁷

Although deserving of attention, the influence of Keynes on Mosley can be overplayed: Keynes was the front runner in the race for a general economic theory and Mosley wrote that he developed his economic thinking from conversations with Keynes,¹⁸ but he was by no means the only participant in the race and a more relative balance of influences on Mosley's economic thought has been offered by Richard Thurlow whose examples provide a starting point for an appraisal of the persistent criticisms of liberal democracy in British society.¹⁹ Furthermore, beyond the economic analyses, it is useful to bear in mind others, for example Patrick Geddes who responded critically to industrialised society. Geddes saw humanity as degraded by the unharnessed exploitation of modern technology and looked to a new way of thinking to be installed which would break the intellectual mould set by industrialisation. Similarly Cannon Barnett also wanted to use practical means to institute his utopia of a higher civilisation.²⁰ The whole critical

¹⁶Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 3rd ed. (London: Papermac, 1990) 305n & 193; Clarke, *The Keynesian Revolution*, 144

¹⁷ibid. 144 & 158.

¹⁸Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, 178.

¹⁹Richard C. Thurlow, 'The Return of Jeremiah: the rejected Knowledge of Sir Oswald Mosley in the 1930s', in *British Fascism*, R. Thurlow and K. Lunn (eds) (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 100-113

²⁰Helen Meller, *The Ideal City* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979); Helen Meller, 'Patrick Geddes. 1854-1932', in *Pioneers in British Planning*, Gordon E. Cherry ed. (London: the Architectural Press, 1981) 46-71

phenomenon which may be designated the term 'cultural despair', or 'cultural pessimism', was not irrevocably negative as Geddes demonstrates. Fascists would use the criticism of despair to provide an impulse supporting their solution, the British fascist writer A.K. Chesterton has been described in these terms.²¹ The cultural world itself produced a whole generation of intelligentsia who, despairing of the levelling effect brought about through the democratisation of society, looked towards elitist politics and fascism in Britain.²²

The prime role economics played in Mosley's political thought may appear enigmatic in the light of Continental fascism, with their attempts to replace the economic man of Adam Smith with the idealism of ultra-nationalism and heroism.²³ The supplanting of one mythic conception of human motivation (economic / pragmatic / rational) with another (heroic / romantic / irrational) can be seen as a part of the fascist enterprise to combat national decline by promoting the intuitive 'known' truths whose which they believed had been suppressed resulting in national decline.²⁴ Mosley evolved his fascist politics from an economic argument, and in this sense never fully left the 'economic man' tradition

²¹For 'cultural despair' see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the rise of German Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) a theory used in the biography of a leading British fascist and writer by David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A.K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (Tauris Academic Studies, 1996)

²²John R. Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966)

²³Tracy H. Koon, *Believe Obey Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-1943* (Capel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 3; Peter F. Drucker, *The End of Economic Man: The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1969, 1st edition 1939)

²⁴See Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 36; Mosley wrote: "the men who can think are not enough, and I must go out to find the men who can feel, and do. It was a recognition of a truth beyond the intellectuals", Mosley, *My Life* , 318

which may suggest his 'fascism' was superficial, if not opportunistic, and based on arguments and structures of the very system he wanted to overturn. Furthermore, Mosley's economic analysis was not couched in inspirational themes such as, for example, the nazi 'Strength through Joy', his was a more pragmatic economic programme.²⁵ Any confusion Mosley's politics raised can be illustrated by the ridicule he received from the Labour Party who believed his economic plans betrayed the workers and demonstrated to them that Mosley was simply reverting to the class interests of his birth in the pursuance of naked ambition.²⁶ Such contradictions can be resolved when Mosley's economics, and his fascism, are both viewed as operative expressions of a consistent and fundamental ideological matrix. From this position Mosley's politics are using the language of conventional economic methods but were, nonetheless, revolutionary expressions of a belief which denied, and challenged, the existing boundaries of the 'possible'; boundaries seen as part of the reality which was perceived as in need of change.²⁷ Mosley evoked the emotion of 'revolution' and combined it with 'reason', in the title of his pamphlet, in a manner he would repeat later with 'nationalism' and 'socialism'.

Mosley's economic thought

Mosley's thought was utopian and revolutionary in common with other fascist ventures: he wanted to overturn the existing, declining, structure of Britain and replace it with a

²⁵see Robert Ley, extract 75 'The Joy of the National Socialist Economy', in *Fascism* ed. Griffin (Oxford: OUP, 1995) 142-143

²⁶D.S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 18

²⁷Krishna Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991) 107

better, perfected Britain. In order to do this Mosley used his political utterances to draw attention to, and amend, the discrepancy between the portrayal of Britain and the real experience of Britain. An economic term developed in the early 1960s is useful to illustrate this: Mosley's political utterances were attempting to voice 'bounded rationality' which is the acceptance of the existence of the discrepancy between (neo)classical economic theory and the reality of human behaviour. These 'new' economic theories incorporate apparently irrational elements into their calculations. For example, the influence of organisations on decision making by individuals, which operates as institutions simplify the decision making procedure for those within the institutional framework.²⁸ Keynes was one of the first to recognise the influence of elements which had not been noted before in economic decision making and he suggested these elements, which had frustrated the standard economic thinking based on Say's Law, stemmed from a rational base.²⁹ Hobson also rejected the determinant of Say's Law which argued production/supply created its own demand.³⁰ Hobson described under-production and under-consumption as "the plain register of certain 'irrational' factors in the operation of the economic system" such as rent, surplus profit or chance gains whose excess is saved

²⁸Herbert Simon, 'Introductory Comment' in Herbert Simon ed., *Economics, Bounded Rationality and the Cognitive Revolution* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992) 3-6

²⁹For an introduction to Keynes see John Kenneth Galbraith, *Money: Whence it Came, Where it Went* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975) 216-234; also of interest but dated in it praise Michael Stewart, *Keynes and After* (London: Penguin Books, 1967); and for the historical, as opposed to the theoretical perspective see Clarke, *The Keynesian Revolution* in addition to the many biographies of Keynes including Robert Skidelsky's two volumes; Say's Law derived from the economic theory of the French economist and businessman Jean-Baptist Say (1767-1832)

³⁰For an introduction to Hobson see Michael Freedman ed., *J.A. Hobson: A Reader* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988)

without the thought of present or future consumption.³¹

Mosley's thinking followed a similar course to both Keynes and Hobson yet he presented different solutions to similar problems. Mosley introduced the institution of 'nationhood' into the economic equation so that identification with this institution could act as a buttress to individual self interest.³² Benedict Anderson has convincingly argued that the idea of the nation is an imagined community both limited and sovereign.³³ This conceptualisation of a nation as existing in the minds of each member is useful in developing an understanding Mosley particular imagining of nationhood. Mosley's utterances were operative expressions of his ideological matrix, with elements seeking to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. His answers were found in the realm of economics where the 'irrational' wild-card could be contained within the concept of the nation.³⁴

In his autobiography Mosley wrote that "a crisis of the economy can accelerate the

³¹J.A. Hobson, 'Underconsumption: An Exposition and a Reply', Appendix to *The Problem of the Unemployed* (1896; appendix 1933; reprint Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992) 416

³²The development of 'game theory' has demonstrated the difficulty in defining rationality under certain circumstances and rests on the incapacity of humans to access all the necessary information available to determine the outcome of transactions, Herbert Simon, *Economics, Bounded Rationality and the Cognitive Revolution*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992) 15 & 24-25.

³³Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, (London: Verso, 1991) 1st ed.1983, 6; see also Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York, 1944) 10

³⁴See George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fetting, 1980) 229-245

acceptance of new ideas at the present time",³⁵ economics were simply the operative means to an end represented by his fundamental ideological matrix. Mosley designed economic arguments in support of his 1925 Birmingham Proposals along with "the dynamic conceptions of our age from which they originate", a remark confirming the broader ambition of his fiscal ideals.³⁶ This was the nub of Mosley's economic thought which does not conflict with a dissatisfaction with the existing system; it merely expresses a need for economic management to facilitate national regeneration. Mosley wanted to use the dynamic action of money as a tangible representation, or token of, the nation.³⁷ His emphasis was on an economy led from the bottom up, an economy driven by the minutiae of exchanges made between individuals as they undertook their daily activities, and these exchanges, in total, constituted Britain.³⁸ Mosley then, sought to reduce the distance between micro and macro economics; between individual/group choices in a single market with those of the broad aggregate markets. The purpose of Mosley's state would be to maintain a balanced economy in order to allow the free expression of the individual actions of its people to build the national character. Laissez

³⁵Oswald Mosley, *My Life*, 178.

³⁶Oswald Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 5.

³⁷see Chapter Seven for Mosley's concept of 'nation'

³⁸Mosley describes his move to fascism as a move beyond the world of the old party's and into a "direct appeal to the mass of the people", *My Life*, 316. Mosley's mythic conception of the nation could be contained in the following description: "The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture...The people are neither the beginning or the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population", Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed) *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) 297

faire economics had unleashed forces that overwhelmed the distinct national character that had once made Britain great. With a strong state these outside forces could be controlled and the 'true' national character could again shine through. One target in Mosley's sights was the Gold Standard which he believed was an out-dated foundation for modern economics and he looked at new economic theories for answers to the stalemate of the tried and tested options which he believed resulted in national decline.

Economic apprenticeship

Mosley put a considerable amount of his energies into the problem of governing in Ireland then his attention turned, almost exclusively, to matters of finance. These interests began with an early comment on finance in 1920 when he reminded the House of Commons the country beyond the House waited for concrete suggestions to cut down expenditure.³⁹ Using financial arguments Mosley disclosed what he believed was a return to old style, pre-1914 diplomacy through an interpretation of a supplementary estimate of just £500.⁴⁰ He criticised an attempt to safeguard British industry and suggested instead "some other system" for greater Treasury control over national finance.⁴¹ His broad intention was clear if not in detail: the old and haphazard system needed replacing with a new one organised and under control.

Mosley has been criticized by his son Nicholas for using arguments which relied on a

³⁹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 13 February 1920 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 125, cols. 415-416

⁴⁰ibid., vol.139, col.1909, 2 March 1921.

⁴¹vol.140, col.2175, 21 April 1921.

particular reasoning process and excluded the variable of human nature.⁴² This is illustrated in Mosley's argument that the taxable capacity of the country could be calculated through the application of reason and if the people could be shown this truth, then the rest would follow, even if this attracted the criticism of being pessimistic and unpatriotic. He said: "to speak out, to tell them the truth, to state the real hard facts; then you will meet with a more ready response, the response you met with when a similar appeal to the country was made not so many years ago."⁴³ This was not the simple application of rational thought to gain understanding, but the use of rationality as a method of inspiring and motivating the nation to act. Mosley's ideological matrix sought the realization of a greater futurist nation and used rationality in an operative manner: reason, was a tool to be used to make the nation great and was not necessarily used to uncover any essential truths.

Echoing Gaetano Mosca, who identified the existence of a ruling elite who held power even within a representative democracy, Mosley pointed to the bureaucratic structures which he believed obscured a larger framework which was evolving. This development would result in a parliament full of 'economists' scoring points off each other and reducing government to a passive role and doing nothing.⁴⁴ This was abhorrent to his ideological requirement for dynamism and Mosley concluded, "Our old system is failing entirely, and the moment has arrived when we must have a new system, an unprecedented

⁴²Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game*, 69.

⁴³Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 18 August 1921, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 146, col. 1759

⁴⁴*ibid.*, vol.140, col.780, 11 April 1921.

system, to meet a situation which is without parallel in the financial history of this country."⁴⁵ Mosley sensed a watershed period had arrived where the nation was stagnating with economic lethargy. This jarred with his ideological matrix and its drive for a revitalized economy as an operative route toward a strong nation. Mosley maintained that with a rational economic management system, structural weaknesses could be detected, identified, manipulated, and repaired. Seven years later Mosley repeated this belief when describing rate reduction schemes as: "another smoke screen behind which the Government conceals the fact that it is doing nothing at all."⁴⁶ In a crisis the dynamic conception of finance could only be brought about by 'revolution' and this is evident in *Revolution by Reason* where Mosley referred to dynamism at regular intervals. For example, he wrote of the "bold and vigorous use of national credit... the new demand will have mobilised the service of men and machines now idle".⁴⁷ The old is portrayed as stagnant with the new as vigorous, and this is a futurist sentiment.⁴⁸ Mosley repeatedly called for action while he interpreted the parliamentary processes as bureaucratically constrained and inert. And it was this constraint, so at odds with his ideological matrix which would lead Mosley to be increasingly disaffected from parliamentary politics and eventually to depart from it.

⁴⁵ibid., col.786

⁴⁶ibid., vol.223, col.710, 29 November 1928.

⁴⁷Oswald Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 12.

⁴⁸see F.T.Marinetti, 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism' (1908), published in *Le Figaro* 20 February 1909, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, edited by Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 284-286, this dramatic explosion of statements contains a distaste for the old and inert which is echoed in restrained political utterances by Mosley.

Mosley's economics can be seen as striving to condense the ideological space between the individual and the nation: the idea of an individual as an autonomous being is revised to expose the individual as inseparably bound up with the nation.⁴⁹ This can be seen expressed by Mosley as he drew attention to the apparently unfair distribution of pay rises between state officials and the country's workers.⁵⁰ This gap exaggerated the perception of the Government concerning itself with foreign policy ventures paid for by the working man in the form of weekly taxation and this dissatisfaction was detrimental to the country.⁵¹ Mosley blamed the Treasury for failing to control finance and he demanded "some drastic, some root revision of the whole system of national finance,"⁵² to prevent the capital of the nation being bled away while the Government did nothing. This was important: from this early period in Mosley's career, 1921, he associated the individual worker with the 'nation' and the government as turning to concentrate on foreign affairs.⁵³

Mosley described foreign policy as, "enmeshed in the traditions and financial customs and prejudices of the past" and as an artificial system "created by man for his own convenience" and, as such, could be replaced by a new system.⁵⁴ There was no doubt that this would constitute a massive undertaking: "The world machinery has broken down.

⁴⁹for the concept of 'space' see Andrew Kirby, *The Politics of Location: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1982), 5-6

⁵⁰Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 14 April 1921 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 140, cols. 1393-4

⁵¹ibid. vol.146, col.1765, 18 August 1921.

⁵²ibid. vol.141, col.294, 21 April 1921.

⁵³see Chapter Seven for Mosley's concept of 'nation'

⁵⁴ibid. vol.142, cols.1595-6, 6 June 1921.

That must be remedied before we can find a solution to this [unemployment] problem."⁵⁵ Mosley's holistic solution included limiting foreign policy options to allow for a concentrated effort on social reform.⁵⁶ The importance of domestic finance increasingly drew Mosley's attention, overriding any of the preoccupations with foreign matters, as it encapsulated his sense of crisis. He said "the greatest risk of all confronting us to-day is the risk of bankruptcy. There is a serious financial position in this country to-day. Other risks are of minor importance in comparison with it."⁵⁷ Throughout, Mosley's political ambition to rebuild Britain was inevitably conditioned by the possession of the Empire. Any ideological demand for territorial expansion was replaced by strengthening territorial possession. The symbolic use of territorial expansion to display an assumed, inherent, national virility was not realisable for a nation already possessing a large Empire. Mosley detected Britain's decline as the result of an inner weakness which he planned to overcome. For Mosley finance became: "the paramount issue before the country to-day. It is the one burning question that really counts, and even more important than the time-honoured rights of private members."⁵⁸

Aware of the psychological impact of economic policies and the regenerative possibilities available through the manipulation of taxation, Mosley suggested reducing taxation to stimulate incentives and fresh enterprise, "and in the event of success may open up vast

⁵⁵ibid. vol.143, col.530, 15 June 1921.

⁵⁶ibid. vol.145, cols.844-7, 29 July 1921; it is interesting to note Roger Eatwell's description of generic fascism as a 'holistic-national radical Third Way', in *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 14-15

⁵⁷ibid. vol.150, col.258, 8 February 1922.

⁵⁸ibid. cols.1096-7, 15 February 1922.

new sources of work for the development of mankind",⁵⁹ while excessive taxation could bring about disorder to the extent of endangering the fabric of the Empire.⁶⁰ Economics usefully acted as an operational expression of Mosley's ideological matrix because it could represent a spectrum of concerns; from individual experiences and choices, to issues of a national concern, including both scientific rationality alongside the irrational, unpredictable, 'human' element.

The futurist element of Mosley's ideological matrix demanded the removal of the 'old' to allow the machinery of economics to function properly but this would not occur, "until politicians set about removing the political blunders which they have made",⁶¹ and Mosley vividly described post-war Germany as a "putrefying corpse" at the centre of Europe 'poisoning' the commercial atmosphere. The unemployed provided palpable evidence of decline and Mosley believed nations could not face these conditions of unemployment "in a state of paralytic tranquillity.... You have to get busy. We must have policy. We must have a plan for things such as this."⁶² Action and dynamic policy were factors in Mosley's ideological matrix and in his opinion it was not the relative weights of taxation which resulted in unemployment but the results of the government management of market and currency.⁶³

⁵⁹ibid. vol.155, col.1156, 20 June 1922.

⁶⁰ibid. vol.156, col.1101, 11 July 1922.

⁶¹ibid. vol.159, col.3288, 14 December 1922.

⁶²ibid. col.3289, 14 December 1922.

⁶³ibid. vol.163, col.98, 23 April 1923.

Mosley pleaded to parliament for a committee to be set up to examine at unemployment and the link between the "effect of a reform in monetary policy upon employment" which he read as highlighted in new economic studies.⁶⁴ Mosley wanted the adoption of scientific and socialist solutions to monetary problems with a greater scientific and conscious control of credit to be expanded to deal with the large scale unemployment problem.⁶⁵ Finally, before Mosley's enforced break from parliament and the publication of *Revolution by Reason* his last parliamentary remarks included a mention of the Labour Party's method of finding solutions as the "display of reason" in contrast to the Conservative's answer of a "display of force" when it came to the curing industrial disputes. Superficially these remarks appear ironic in the light of Mosley's later affiliation with fascism commonly portrayed as a collection of thugs with the philosophy of the brute.⁶⁶

Revolution by Reason

Mosley's pamphlet *Revolution by Reason* was based on a speech he delivered at an ILP summer school during August 1925. His argument set out to "weld together the Socialist case with modern monetary theory, and upon that solid foundation aspire to build a whole structure of Socialist proposals."⁶⁷ *Revolution by Reason* was an exposition of ideas

⁶⁴ibid. vol.170, col.706, 8 Feb 1924.

⁶⁵ibid. vol.174, cols.2424-5, 19 June 1924; and vol.175., col.1964, 8 July 1924.

⁶⁶ibid. vol.175, cols.644, 26 June 1924.

⁶⁷Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 5; it is interesting to contrast this citation which forges a theoretical tradition of the past (Socialism) with the modern theory, with a text Mosley wrote ten years later: "a movement emerges from a historic background...carrying certain traditional attributes derived from its glorious past, but facing facts to-day armed with the instruments which only this age ever conferred

bringing into about Mosley's utopian vision, and as such was simply a means to an end. To understand this vision it is useful to look at the influences upon this document which Mosley has consciously, or not, drawn upon.

Revolution by Reason began with a rhetorical claim that 'we', and here the implication is not the country or nation but 'socialists' in general, are under threat of "dangers scarcely paralleled and suffering seldom equalled in our long history";⁶⁸ an apocalyptic vision of impending crisis. It is only in the context of defining economic power as "the credit system of the nation" does the term 'nation' first enter the document.⁶⁹ Economic planning and monetary policy are proposed to fill the apparent gap in existing socialist theories and this is the novel aspect Mosley wishes to bring to socialism.

Mosley predicted that evolutionary socialism had little opportunity to implement its plans because they would need, at least for a while, to operate under the: "shattering guns of Capitalism directed from their innermost fortress of the banks. What prospect have we of successful experiments in Socialism until that key position is in our hands?"⁷⁰ The ambition was to capture the banks for the people to take away the "obscure and secret working of the hidden bankers' hands, [whereby] wealth is thus flinched from the poor

upon mankind", 'The Philosophy of Fascism', *Fascist Quarterly*, vol.1 no.1 (January 1935) 46

⁶⁸Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 6.

⁶⁹ibid. 7

⁷⁰ibid 7.

and poured into the coffers of the idle rich."⁷¹ Mosley is expressing some insight about the nature of money as a transmitter of signals.⁷² Perceived this way, money must maintain a state of perpetual motion positioning the institution, which sustains that condition, central to the monetary system; precisely the ground Mosley intended to capture.⁷³ The banking system was the target of Mosley's campaign in order to gain hold of the seat of power; "Banks for the People" Mosley cried taking them away from the mysterious 'hidden bankers'.

It was at the transactions between individuals that the thrust of Mosley's economic arguments were aimed. Mosley wanted to infuse economic transactions with the essence of social relations; to implicate the individual agent in the exchange process and to avoid a complete divorce between exchange and social relations which has been described as fulfilled in the 'ethic of the supermarket culture'.⁷⁴ His analyses elucidated two types of demand; 'real demand', the need for commodities, and 'effective demand', the possession of the purchasing power to command the production of goods. Under this categorisation a mechanism of lowering wages to reduce prices would lessen effective demand and so purchasing power.⁷⁵ Mosley demanded the: "bold and vigourous use of the national

⁷¹ibid 24-5.

⁷²For example supplying enough information for an exchange to successfully occur and be completed.

⁷³Thomas Crump, *The Phenomenon of Money* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 291. The idea of perpetual motion in an economic system also satisfies the dynamic element in his ideological matrix.

⁷⁴Crump, *The Phenomenon of Money*, 54.

⁷⁵Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 9.

credit. We propose first to expand credit in order to create demand." The result would be an injection of activity in to the economy: "the new demand will have mobilised the service of men and machines now idle in the production of urgently wanted goods."⁷⁶ The theme of a sleeping industry and immobility was a regular feature: "Consumers' credits are a special expedient in time of industrial stagnation and collapse to stimulate effective demand in the right quarter and to re-start the dormant mechanism of production."⁷⁷ The strengthening of Britain, a characteristic of Mosley's ideological matrix, could occur through the revitalisation of the economy, that is, if it was made dynamic.

Mosley's proposed an Economic Council to oversee the economy and ensure a balance between supply and demand in order to constrain any emergent inflation resulting from the boost to demand. The Economic Council would estimate the country's potential productivity and plan for its realisation through "the instrument of working class demand."⁷⁸ This further demonstrated the manner Mosley expressed his concept of the nation as situated in the constituent members of the community. In this imagined community the demands of the individual agent carried with it a trace of the identity of the nation and the view of this trace could be clouded by uncontrolled elements, such as the 'hidden bankers' of laissez-faire economics, and unplanned economic practice. In this light Mosley's opposition to the Gold Standard can be seen as congruent with his conception of the nation, Mosley summed it up as "Gold verses People"⁷⁹

⁷⁶ibid 12.

⁷⁷ibid 14.

⁷⁸ibid 14-5.

⁷⁹ibid 23.

The ambitions presented in the Birmingham Proposals, which *Revolution by Reason* represented, Mosley summarised thus: "If our nation has effective purchasing power equal to its full productive capacity, men and women capable of employment can be given employment upon terms which make possible a civilised life."⁸⁰ This utopian vision represents an operative expression of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix: a link is forged between 'service' to the nation by working and the reward of a 'civilised life'. But Mosley did not want to deal in lofty abstractions preferring the concrete facts of exchange , and so he wrote:

"Let us state the problem in the safer terms of economics. We buy our imports either by rendering services or by exporting goods, not by exporting money, as Mr Churchill thinks. These goods are exchanged abroad for other goods of the same economic value."⁸¹

Mosley was replacing 'money', the abstraction of value and the symbol of debt, for what he saw as the reality commodities represented. In this Mosley was displaying a feature which is common, if not a condition to, operative expressions of his core ideological matrix, that of correlating notions of truth and reality with direct experience. Much later, in 1947, Mosley would encapsulate these ideas in his concept of a Thought-Deed man.⁸²

In the concluding passages of *Revolution by Reason* Mosley demonstrated clearly, as in

⁸⁰ibid 26.

⁸¹ibid 25.

⁸²The Thought-Deed man was Mosley's post Second World War conceptualisation of the 'new-man', saviour, figure: "living in the company and inspiration of scientists part Statesman and part Scientist the supreme artists of action and of life: the instruments of Destiny, and the servants of any people who willed high things", *The Alternative* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1947) 135, 284 & 293

many other of Mosley's tracts, his switch from the analytic to the rhetorical method of argument. So while he argued against the protectionism of the Conservatives, he also derides gradualist, evolutionary, socialism and in doing so exposes a core preoccupation which would eventually lead him away from democratic politics.⁸³ Mosley proclaimed:

"Labour must go forward to early triumph in the steel machine of ruthless Realism with the motive power of a soaring Idealism.....We stand, indeed at the cross-roads of destiny. For good or ill we live in an epic age. Once again the lash of great ordeal stings an historic race to action...We must awaken and mobilise our country to save itself by heroic measures before the sands of time and run out ...In our hands is the wakening trumpet of reality."⁸⁴

Long term promises would simply put off the day of action and, "not the battle-cry by which those who *dedicate their lives to the service of the working class could hope to arouse the masses*".⁸⁵ If the populace could be shown the folly of their political leaders in the light of the reality of their experience they would be compelled to overturn the existing political structure.

Influences on *Revolution by Reason*

Mosley's economic thought did not exist in a vacuum. His ideas were extended by John Strachey in his book *Revolution by Reason* with whom he had collaborated. In addition, there was a background of ideas which attempted to revise the basic rational of modern economic thought whose traces can be detected in Mosley's economic ideas, for example

⁸³*Revolution by Reason*, 28

⁸⁴*ibid.*, 28 & 29

⁸⁵*ibid.*, 28.

Kitson, Douglas and Stoll.

Arthur Kitson writing as early as 1903 suggested a link existed between 'panics' in the industrial world which had been precipitated by financial disorder. Kitson identified the antagonistic classes, which divided society, as the false basis of society and he proclaimed that, "A true system will make society a unit in production and a unit in distribution."⁸⁶ For Kitson money was a token with a particular social function; a "means to an end providing a right to demand satisfaction in commodities and services" and not simply a value tied to gold. He proposed a system of stable prices because the supply could always match demand.⁸⁷ Mosley's argument was similar: "price stabilisation is a cardinal point of the [Birmingham] proposals."⁸⁸ Again in parallel with Mosley, Kitson believed the real credit value of a nation would include, not just the capital resources of machinery and the like but, the qualities imbued in the workers, skills, education the moral character of its people and physical geography: "They are the gift of nature and of generations of past ages. Every British citizen should be entitled to a share in what is clearly the inheritance of the whole nation."⁸⁹ When Mosley later wrote of: "that vague and much abused word 'market' means the power of ordinary people to buy" he echoed Kitson's affinity between the individual and nation.⁹⁰ Kitson's conceptualisation of 'the

⁸⁶Arthur Kitson, *The Money Problem* (London: Grant Richards, 1903) xxiv & 32

⁸⁷ibid., 213-225.

⁸⁸Oswald Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 26.

⁸⁹Arthur Kitson, *Unemployment: The Cause and Remedy* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1921) 92

⁹⁰Oswald Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 9.

nation' is also remarkably close to that of Mosley as he linked the soul of the nation, comprising of its people, to money as a tool for social expression and manipulation:

"The nation is an aggregation of millions of individuals, it is *per se an organic whole*, and the moral, economic and physical condition of the individual agents affects the entire organism...The claims of the nation are now regarded superior to those of the individual...Union is strength in every department of human activity"⁹¹

In addition, there was a degree of harmony connecting Mosley's and Kitson's thought in the relationship between economics and moral conduct, and Kitson did describe economics as a moral science.⁹² Although Kitson argued against the Gold Standard it does not automatically follow, as Richard Griffiths has implied, this was a reaction to the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* if only because his first formulation of this argument was published in the same year as the *Protocols* were 'discovered'.⁹³ The claim of anti-semitism unites Kitson and Mosley who both held ideological positions which predisposed them to adopting such anti-semitic positions under the influence of outside structures, Mosley's anti-semitism, though, was not determined by his ideological

⁹¹Arthur Kitson, *Trade Fallacies: A critique of existing methods and suggestions for a reform towards national prosperity* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1917) 224-7

⁹²Kitson, *The Money Problem*, 24-32.

⁹³The *Protocols* were a forged document which supposedly issued instructions to the Jewish peoples to overthrow the Christian world. For those of an anti-semitic disposition this was proof of international Jewish conspiracy. The historic impact of the *Protocols* did not occur until it was issued in a revised edition in 1917, Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the World-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967) 67. Kitson was apparently suggesting monetary reforms as early as 1894, see C. Marshall Hatersley, *This Age of Plenty - its problems and their solution* (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1929) 7

matrix.⁹⁴ This does not dilute the sincerity or the menace of these anti-semitic utterances at the moment they were made. Kitson's anti-semitism was, on balance, a stronger prejudice than Mosley's and this was demonstrated by his prominent membership of the anti-Jewish group 'The Britons' and his influence over Arnold Leese who would go on to form the violently anti-semitic Imperial Fascist League in 1929.⁹⁵

The influence of the Social Credit movement on Mosley may owe a little to the fact that both Mosley and Social Credit's originator, C.H. Douglas, served in the Royal Flying Corps.⁹⁶ Like Mosley's fascism, with "triumphs over all material things...[and] a new morality, and a new attitude to life,"⁹⁷ Social Credit was more than a simple economic doctrine as Ezra Pound noted, Douglas dealt: "so little with economics and so greatly and generally with the philosophy of politics."⁹⁸ The similarities to Mosley's thought continue in Douglas's belief in building systems from individuals up, men making systems not men

⁹⁴in his *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9* (London: Constable, 1980) 62, Richard Griffiths rightly describes Kitson's life work as a campaign for a new monetary system, and also connects him axiomatically with anti-semitism using a 1933 citation. But when this evidence is compared to Kitson's earlier writings the contextual influence of a conspiracy theory on the citation is thrown into relief suggesting his anti-semitism represented the operative dimension of an ideological matrix with a fundamental dimension centred on the social aspects and role of money, rather than a fundamental dimension dominated by the idea of an economic conspiracy. Contrast Griffiths with, for example Kitson *The Money Problem*, 220-1.

⁹⁵Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers*, 61-2 & 97.

⁹⁶Douglas was a Major in the RFC and later the RAF

⁹⁷Oswald Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1933) 7

⁹⁸Quoted in John F. Finlay, *Social Credit: The English Origins* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972) 1

simply for the systems;⁹⁹ both men saw the true nature of independence, or freedom, as based upon economic factors and criticised the system for allowing poverty in an age of plenty; both saw the bankers holding the country to ransom and the sham of democracy.¹⁰⁰ Douglas held stronger conspiratorial beliefs than Mosley writing of a "doctrine of Sabotage i.e. the conscious restriction of output, [which] has permutated all sections of society",¹⁰¹ and while he 'accepted' the doubts cast on the authenticity of the *Protocols* Douglas disregarded them pointing to the "fidelity with which the methods by which such enslavement might be brought about can be seen reflected in the facts of every day experience."¹⁰² Despite differences over the role of the League of Nations which, unlike Mosley, Douglas did not support, there were real grounds for a convergence of ideas. What ruled it out was sentiment, the 'feel' of Social Credit which would prove unsuitable for fascists, particularly in the Social Credit argument describing work as an out-dated concept and income need not be based on effort.¹⁰³ This difference though should not be taken as a superficial one. Mosley sought dynamic solutions in order to rebuild Britain from within, and he linked to the idea of service to the nation through work as an indication of value or worth. Mosley placed 'service' to the nation in a vital position in the relationship between the individual and the national body which

⁹⁹Major C.H. Douglas, *Economic Democracy* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1920) 6 & 7; Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 6 June 1921, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 142, col. 1595

¹⁰⁰Finlay, *Social Credit*, 100, 106, & 211.

¹⁰¹C.H. Douglas, *Social Credit* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1924) 86

¹⁰²ibid 166.

¹⁰³Finlay, *Social Credit*, 213.

could most commonly occur through the process of `work'.¹⁰⁴ In this light, the differences between Mosley and Douglas become fundamental, not sentimental, but they both share themes of national rejuvenation through the mechanism of new economic methods.

Both Mosley and Douglas also presented critical reviews of the parliamentary system in Britain. Douglas saw money exerting the greatest power and this power enabled a minority to hold power over a majority. It followed that the monopoly of money power should be attacked and Mosley's `Banks for the People' would constitute such an manoeuvre.¹⁰⁵ Douglas proposed a "return to the springs of action in individuals" which was, in effect, represented by Mosley's ideological matrix, that being the power which constitutes the nation lay in the actions of individual's who have a `real demand' but no `effective demand'.¹⁰⁶ It is also interesting to note how Douglas, writing in 1924, inadvertently sets the stage for Mosley when he wrote there was "no party, group or individual possessing at once the power, the knowledge and the will, which would transmute the growing social unrest and resentment...into a constructive effort for the regeneration of society."¹⁰⁷ Enter Mosley.

¹⁰⁴The power of factors other than the immediately financial upon economic decision making can be seen with the commitment to the Gold Standard which incorporated an international cooperative element. These factors were eroded by the First World War resulting in the instability of the interwar period, Barry Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 8-12

¹⁰⁵Douglas, *Social Credit*, 196-7; Mosley, *Revolution by Reason*, 8.

¹⁰⁶Douglas, *ibid.*, 196; Mosley, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Douglas, *ibid.*, 215.

The move away from the Gold Standard took on international dimensions in the writings of Oswald Stoll who advocated the use of credit to release the British Empire from the "specialized schemes of International Finance."¹⁰⁸ Stoll advocated a credit policy within an Empire armed to the point of impregnability. This scheme is echoed by Hattersley who proposed a credit system to enable the "industrial community to avoid the evils attendant upon a merciless competition for foreign markets."¹⁰⁹ Later Stoll promoted National Credit as "the cause of, but also the sole remedy for the serious crisis that confronts the British people to-day" and, like Mosley and Douglas, Stoll demanded the financial community to: "treat the financial system as personal to every member of every section of the community in general... Credit in its truest form is national."¹¹⁰ Stoll's construction of the nation, and the nation's relationship to the individual, has a resonance in Mosley's thought and he proposes an extension of credit to liberate the productive and creative powers of the country, "or modern society as at present constituted in this country must perish."¹¹¹ Akin to Mosley's stated beliefs is a fear of war brought about by the hunt for ever diminishing markets. This is a theme which is common to all credit based economic theories whose authors held a dread that the country could be lost to unelected, and anonymous, financiers. And it is this fear of chaos and losing control which brings

¹⁰⁸Sir Oswald Stoll (1866-1942), was a theatrical impresario with an interest in economic ideas; Stoll, *"BroadSheets" on National Finance* (London: William J. Roberts, 1921) 86

¹⁰⁹C. Marshall Hattersley, *The Community's Credit: A Consideration of the Principles and Proposals of the Social Credit Movement* (London: 'Credit Power' Press, 1922) 64

¹¹⁰Oswald Stoll and C. Graham Hardy, *National Credit and the Crisis* (London: William Heinemann, 1924) v

¹¹¹ibid vi.

together these theorists.¹¹² International solutions were seen as surrendering British sovereignty, while the existing system left the nation at the mercy of a minority of (invisible) high financiers. The proponents of credit wanted to remove the economic power base of 'high financiers' through the issue of credit to the general population and to assert a state, scientifically managed economy within the bounds of the nation.¹¹³

Conclusions

One of the operative dimensions which stemmed from the ideal type construction of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix, lay in the sphere of economics. Mosley was far from unique in his particular economic beliefs although in his visionary descriptions he does display a conception and passionate faith in the nation which is not to be found among those other economist proposing similar plans. While the threads of Mosley's thought can be disentangled and demonstrated to have precursors and contemporaries his particular mix of these ideas was an attempt to express some deep seated disquiet.¹¹⁴ Scrutiny of these threads has disclosed a part of Mosley's ideological matrix that was

¹¹²Coming to terms with the slaughter of the First World War, modernity, unrest and chaos provided particular problems during the twenties, see George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fetting, 1980) 71

¹¹³For the main arguments of social credit neatly itemised at the end of each chapter see, Hattersley, C. Marshall *This Age of Plenty - its problems and their solution* (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1929) passim

¹¹⁴operative expressions of this disquiet were noted by Mosse in his analysis of the adoption of radio, film, the motorcar, and the aeroplane as "a means of domination, an *elan vital* appropriate to the new fascist man", and it interesting to compare these with Mosley's description of the 'breakdown' of Britain in which "railway transport has risen and prospered, only to yield place to the still greater revolution of motor transport on modern roads", advances to be reconciled with modern government; Mosse, *Masses and Man*, 230; Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 12.

expressed in economic terms and which could provide solutions incorporating active and dynamic components. These notions were closely connected to perceptions of nationality and a battle against its decline. Failure to implement his ideas and fulfil the matrix demand for action led Mosley to become dissatisfied with the Labour Party and later the democratic system itself. This political movement is the theme of the next chapter.

Five

Waking the Dreamers: Mosley and an Inspirational Creed

In his premier fascist writing *The Greater Britain* Mosley wrote that fascism was led by men "who had forsaken their various *illusions* of progress for the new and orderly *reality* of progress",¹ and almost forty years later he wrote that "to simplify the truth is the art of politics".² The issue, or 'truth', which caused Mosley to unshackle himself from the 'illusion' of socialism was unemployment which attained mythic dimensions and for a time, dominated his politics. Unemployment was a persistent theme in Mosley's journey away from conventional and democratic political activities and was a persistent expression of his fundamental ideological matrix. Unemployment represented the negation of his fundamental ideological matrix which, ideal typically, envisioned maintaining a futurist great Britain. This chapter will discuss the phenomenon of unemployment and a variety of responses to the problem and, after looking at Mosley's association with the ideas of socialism, analyze his approach to the problem of unemployment and the policies which were crystallised in his resignation speech to parliament after quitting his ministerial post. Mosley's decision to directly challenge the Labour government over its rejection of his proposals, and his refusal to accept a compromise solution, will be explained by reference to the political space, expressed in a variety of journals and crossed political boundaries, which enticed the ambitious

¹Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: Greater Britain Publications, 1934) 15

²Oswald Mosley, *Broadsheet no.5*, 27/11/70 (London: Mosley Secretariat, 1970)

Mosley. Finally this chapter shall look at some of Mosley's earliest uses of the term 'fascism' in order to shed light on his ideological matrix before he adopted fascism as an operative expression of his ideological matrix.

At the beginning of his book on British fascism Robert Benewick placed unemployment central to Mosley's reason for turning to fascism by his implications that Mosley was responding to the failure of the British Government to act effectively on the issue.³ Mosley himself considered the Mosley Memorandum and subsequent resignation speech as part of his "second phase of constructive thinking", the first being the Birmingham Proposals.⁴ He also connected his resignation speech to an 1918 speech when he spoke of 'imperial socialism' to indicate a continuity of thought.⁵ References to the innovative aspects of the proposals and their support from, most notably, Keynes are important,⁶ but not least in importance is the context in which these ideas give, and drew, their meaning: the Mosley Memorandum was one among a range of ideas seeking to answer the problem of unemployment presented by authors with a variety of attitudes towards unemployment but maintaining the theme of rejecting *laissez-faire* economics and promoting state

³Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain*, revised ed. (London: Allen Lane, 1972) 11

⁴Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1968) 187

⁵*ibid.*, 253; for imperial socialism see Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960)

⁶Keynes wrote that the Mosley Manifesto 'deserves attention' and despite the possible over optimism of offering advantages to all Keynes liked "the spirit which informs the document [and] looking further ahead I do not see what practical Socialism can mean for our generation in England, unless it makes much of the Manifesto its own", 'Sir Oswald Mosley's Manifesto', *The Nation & Athenaeum*, 13 December 1930, 367.

involvement to solve unemployment. Through these thinkers it is possible to approach the conditions in which Mosley developed his ideas and to shed light on his ideological matrix.

The Problem of unemployment

The problem of quantifying unemployment and its causes are vast. Even the nature of unemployment was being described as 'new' in 1934 despite the fact that Beveridge had written on the subject some twenty five years earlier.⁷ It was not the existence of unemployment which was novel but the size, skill, and quality population unemployed which demanded "new ways of thinking and acting".⁸ Yet accurate empirical details, recording the scale of unemployment were not easily or reliably gathered. The calculation of the number of people unemployed during the interwar period was derived from the unemployment insurance schemes of the Government and Trade Unions, but these statistics often excluded a substantial number of employment sectors while simultaneously represent overlapping groups. Despite this it can be generally accepted that the number unemployed after the First World War was considerably more than before the war and rising steadily throughout the 1920s to peak in 1933.⁹ Above all the other factors it was the speed of the increase in the number of unemployed which set the

⁷W.H. Beveridge, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1909) this study contains a discussion of what counts as unemployment the debate was still continues in 1943 where the question of including machinery and other non-human productive assets in the target of 'full-employment' is raised, G.D.H. Cole, *The Means to Full Employment* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943) 18-29

⁸A.M. Cameron, *Civilisation and the Unemployed* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1934) 148

⁹W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A study in social policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 7

alarm bells ringing. From January 1923 until January 1930 the number unemployed remained around 1.5 million or less, but by July 1930 it was over 2 million; 2.5 million the next January and reaching almost 3 million in 1933.¹⁰ This acceleration in the number of unemployed made the problem conspicuous to society in general and to Mosley in particular who would note this as evidence of the rapid nature of modern economics which, in-turn, denied any return of the equilibrium classical economic theory predicted.¹¹

The world had changed, but the unemployed were not to be passive and organised themselves into pressure groups which, through the particular success of the London District Council of Unemployed (LDC), its newspaper *Out of Work*, and one of its activists Wal Hannington who managed to attract the support of the communists.¹² And so it was with the organisational skills of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) that the National Unemployed Worker's Movement (NUWM) was eventually formed in 1921.¹³ Although the influence of the NUWM on Government policy would prove to be difficult to demonstrate, it has been said that "the NUWM did mobilise hundreds of

¹⁰Source: Department of Employment and Productivity, *British Labour Statistics: Historical Abstracts 1886-1968* (1970) 306-11, quoted in Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Longman, 1994) 88

¹¹see, Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 May 1930 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 239, col. 1356; Mosley would later say "the periods and the rhythm of history move faster" in modern society to enhance a sense of urgency in fascist thought, *Action* no.46, 2 January 1937, 9

¹²Richard Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A history of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1920-46* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987) 34-6

¹³The NUWM started out as the 'National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement' but dropped 'Committee' from its name at its Sixth National Conference in 1929, Croucher, *We Refuse*, 102

thousands of people in large scale-based protests, which in almost every case led to some improvements in government proposals".¹⁴ Yet neither the Labour Party nor the TUC were willing to be seen as fully supporting the NUWM because of its communist leanings, yet nonetheless, the NUWM demonstrated the role organised unemployed people played in defining and constructing perceptions of the unemployment problem.¹⁵

Unemployment existed as a statistical fact and as an agitation force in society, for example in the NUWM. Yet the idea of unemployment existed beyond the experience of an individual, or a small group, and developed a mythic force within the community; a myth which interpreted the unemployed as a threat to the nation. In this light, unemployment could exhibit the trappings of a social disease, a rotting core within an otherwise advanced community. Unemployment was a 'scourge' and an 'evil' which called upon the duty of all of those concerned to reduce its effect.¹⁶ Perceived as a disease unemployment needed a cure and these came in a variety of forms, and are essentially founded on the existing beliefs of their proposers. For example, Earnest Benn's individualist position looked to resurrect the spirit of service, with an individual rendering his/her service to others and incorporating a critical, self-censoring manner. This philosophy underlined Benn's 'master key' answer to the unemployment problem

¹⁴Croucher, *We Refuse*, 206.

¹⁵For the role of the NUWM and attitudes it held see 'The Politics of Political Violence' in Gillian Peele and Chris Cook, *The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975) 146-165

¹⁶J.R. Bellerby, *Control of Credit: As a Remedy for Unemployment* (London: P.S. King & Sons, 1923) 102

which involved the removal of restrictions on the building of houses.¹⁷ Others saw the unemployment problem as a failure to co-ordinate the overall division of labour process leading to a fundamental distrust between the forces of socialism, business, and industrial worlds. Unemployment demonstrated the doctrine of *laissez-faire* had broken down and there was a need for reorganisation through co-operation not compulsion, and to provide a solution by finding "the basis of a Socialist-Capitalist co-operation."¹⁸ Others analysts placed the emphasis on retaining the workforce in the workplace and using Government subsidy from the unemployment fund to compensate for any losses to business.¹⁹ Sir William Beveridge, who wrote on unemployment in 1909, would later describe it as a symptom of society and not a disease. He saw unemployment unavoidably enmeshed with the changes brought about by progress. The individuals suffering would be for the betterment of the community, but the measures used to relieve suffering should not hinder progress. Beveridge harshly continued: "There can be worse things than unemployment in a country."²⁰ And so to Beveridge, the myth of progress held a supreme position over individual experience.

The realization that permanent unemployment was a feature a modern economy had been

¹⁷Sir Ernest Benn, *Unemployment and Work*, Criterion Miscellany - no. 22 (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1930) 37-43

¹⁸Norman Angell and Harold Wright, *Can Governments Cure Unemployment ?* (London: Dent and Sons, 1931) 36 & 44

¹⁹A.S. Comyns Carr, *Escape from the Dole*, Criterion Miscellany - no.19 (London: Faber & Faber, 1930) 23

²⁰Sir William H. Beveridge, *Causes and Cures of Unemployment* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931) 1 & 10

acknowledged by Pigou in 1913.²¹ He saw the cause of unemployment as the artificial raising of wages through, for example Trade Union action.²² But Pigou admitted that even if all of his remedies were put into action there would still be a residue of permanent unemployment which needed attention to counter any `evil' consequences which may arise and therefore palliatives, in the form of payments to the unemployed, were needed.²³ Together these examples illustrate some aspects of the intellectual atmosphere surrounding and defining the problem of unemployment in which Mosley's ideas contextually co-existed and from which they drew their meaning. Mosley's particular solution to the unemployment problem differed in the primacy of idealism attached to maintaining national strength through dynamic action in the face of evidence of decline which unemployment represented. Whereas Beveridge held the myth of progress in a dominant position Mosley's sense of a dynamic nation was similarly influential.

Mosley and Unemployment

Unemployment became a central theme in Mosley's parliamentary utterances from 8 November 1928 when he interpreted the Chancellor's claim of an increase in the number of people employed as indicating an increase in the non-productive sector To Mosley this would simply increase prices and not assist in rebuilding the nation. Mosley wanted planning to combat, "the degeneration and disorganisation of our industrial system,

²¹A.C. Pigou, professor of economics at Cambridge and one of the distinguished economists of his day, Michael Stewart, *Keynes and After*, 3rd edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) 63

²²A.C. Pigou, *Unemployment* (London: Williams and Nargate, 1914 ? preface is dated 1913) 242

²³ibid., 246.

[because] we are piling up our distributive costs, while steadily the number of men employed in productive industry is going down."²⁴

Mosley immersed himself in Labour Party policy and supported the idea of nationalisation of industries.²⁵ America offered Mosley the example of limiting surplus labour through strict immigration laws which forced up wages.²⁶ Mosley translated this into a scheme to increase the school leaving age and remove the aged from industry.²⁷ These ideas were to be combined with a credit scheme to produce a policy which looked toward the home market and direct purchasing from the British Dominions in order to reduce food prices. Mosley needed a combination of long term and short term policies to reverse "the engines on national policy, and when we have got the ship off the rocks, there will be a good deal of drastic repair work to be done."²⁸ These policy ideas would prove to be the economic bedrock of Mosley's ideas into his fascist days.

Mosley's final years in Parliament

²⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 8 November 1928, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 222, cols. 294-5

²⁵*ibid.*, col.296-7.

²⁶Mosley had visited America in 1926 to study the labour conditions, see Mosley *My Life*, 194-209, & Skidelsky *Oswald Mosley*, 147-150: here Mosley met Franklin Roosevelt who would later provide impetus for the New Deal economic programme which used public works programmes and 'direct, vigorous action' to counter the great depression. He also was impressed by the mass production methods at the Ford factories in Detroit which paid high wages for unskilled work.

²⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 26 March 1929, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 226, col.2138

²⁸*ibid.*, 8 November 1928, vol.222, col.305

Mosley's first Parliamentary remarks upon returning as a Labour Member were not directly concerned with unemployment but with foreign policy, and he advocated a resistance to the involvement of British troops overseas.²⁹ Mosley wanted a policy seeking to look inward toward domestic problems where the spirit of the nation could be nourished. "This nation", Mosley said, "will not be inspired in support of war abroad, and it will not be united at home in the interests of one small class. This nation will one day, I believe, again be united in war against poverty." The British electorate would, "strike from their [the Government's] hands the sceptre of power, and in their place demands a Government that will govern and a creed that will inspire".³⁰ Mosley's odyssey through politics can be summarised as a search for that inspirational creed; a creed which can set about "reversing the engines on national policy",³¹ while his policies continually reflected the need for *national self reliance, without looking to the outside world, for rejuvenation*.³²

The purpose of Mosley's inspirational creed would be to provide the necessary impetus required to resist the inertia of accepted illusions and propaganda provided by the Government which Mosley believed obscured the 'reality' of a world fundamentally

²⁹For example over British troops in China which to Mosley: "resisted the appeal to reason, and ultimately surrendered to a successful violence" ruining a chance of a negotiated peace and saving trade, *ibid.*, 10 February 1927, vol.202, col.331 & 4

³⁰*ibid.*, col.338

³¹*ibid.*, 8 November 1928, vol.222, col.305

³²the idea of an inspirational creed must not be confused with the primary and axiomatic core of Mosley's ideological matrix; the 'inspirational creed' was a means toward a desired end, that being the rejuvenation of the nation. The 'inspirational creed' was a myth driving political ambition and conceptualising a range of sentiments and 'feelings'.

changed by total war. In 1927 Mosley said:

"When not realities but words are to be discussed Parliament wakes up. Then we are back in the comfortable pre-war world of make-believe. Politics are safe again; hairs are to be split, not facts to be faced. Hush! Do not wake the dreamers. Facts will wake them in time with a vengeance"³³

And twenty years later he wrote:

"within a year of the end of the war, events had begun to justify us and the feelings of the people had begun to change. In the end, their profound instinct for the ultimate truth always pierces that cloud of deception which the propaganda of the war inevitably obscures every consideration of fact and of reality."³⁴

At a particular moment in his political career, Mosley believed the socialism of the Labour Party was his inspirational creed; the Labour Party usefully expressed his fundamental ideological matrix. Socialism, in its broadest sense does have congruities with Mosley's ideological matrix along with his conception of the nation.³⁵ Socialism, the new political phenomenon of the developing industrial society, emerged from the

³³*Birmingham Town Crier* 23 Dec 1927, Quoted in Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 174.

³⁴Oswald Mosley, *The Alternative* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1947) 10

³⁵We may usefully adopt Andrew Gamble's glossary description of socialism as: "the main counter to liberalism in the nineteenth century whilst sharing many of its assumptions. Socialism diverged most fundamentally by treating capitalism as a new form of class society and the liberal representative state as the guarantor of the power and privileges of the bourgeoisie", *An Introduction to Modern Social and Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 260; this is by no means a definitive description as Antony Wright observes "there is no single socialist tradition. Moreover, there is not merely plurality of socialist arguments, but tension, ambiguity, and even conflict between them", *Socialisms: Theories and Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 35

factories of the Industrial Revolution during the 1780s.³⁶ This derivative of liberalism became the political expression of the newly formed masses who were bound together by their intimate relationship with the machine, in a manner not dissimilar to Mosley's experience of machine powered flight. So, at a level both of sentiment and use of an ambiguous political category, the financially independent and aristocratic Mosley could claim to speak for the working classes. In addition, Mosley's concept of the nation, idealised as a dynamic and organic entity reproduced through the daily interactions of its individuals, rather than set within the confines of territory, further enhanced his personal qualification to speak for these people.³⁷ Finally, and not least, Mosley's war time experiences set in train his belief in the importance of the interaction between individuals as a zone where the 'heroic' and romantic experiences, transcending material discomfort, can prevail.³⁸ This spirit was seen as spontaneously emerged in times of crisis as the example of the Elizabethans threatened by Spain demonstrated to Mosley who commented that, "from the depths of their vital spirit surged up, in response to the life challenge, a great outburst not only of life action, but, also, of triumphant music, drama, and poetry, which was the genius of the Elizabethan mind and the illumination of

³⁶Andrew Gamble, *An Introduction*, 100.

³⁷The nature, or lack, of Mosley's nationalism gains him the honour of being the subject of 'Potted Biography - No.56. "Lest We Forget". A Dictionary of Anti-National Biography' in the overtly anti-semitic *The Patriot* (London) 19 June 1930; this problem of taxonomy is further complicated by Harold Nicolson's description a few months later (6 November 1930) of Mosley's proposed new party as "a party of young Nationalists", Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Collins, 1966) 59; for Mosley's concept of 'nation' see Chapter Seven

³⁸Mosley described as "very much the Romantic looking for Romance through power" in Cecil F. Melville, *The Truth About the New Party* (London: Wishart & Co., 1931) 24; Harold Nicolson described Mosley as a romantic and "That is a great failing." *Diaries*, 106.

Europe."³⁹ And it is this spirit Mosley wanted to revive and maintain in Britain through the use of an inspirational creed.⁴⁰

The First World War provided an alternative political paradigm for purchases on world markets and this impressed Mosley offering, as it did, as possible solution to the dilemma set by his ideological matrix. He described the war time methods as 'successful' and recalled the spirit evoked by the crisis of war which could awaken the slumbering nation, a theme, as we have seen, repeated some twenty years, and more, later.⁴¹ In the absence of war Mosley looked for an inspirational creed to provide an equivalent motivational effect in the community. Mosley attacked those sections of the community which were not productive and serving the community in addition to the rentier class and deflationary policies. Mosley saw these as sapping the purchasing power of the nation while the National Debt was held within an "esoteric banking policy, hidden and concealed from

³⁹Mosley, *The Alternative*, 25.

⁴⁰This description of Mosley as a socialist, along with his conception of the nation, compares favourably with Sternhell's account of the intellectual 'birth' of fascism which is traced to France at the end of the nineteenth century. Sternhell describes Fascism as a revision of Marxism and what emerges in the twenties and thirties "represented a synthesis of organic nationalism with the antimaterialist revision of Marxism", Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asher, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, Trans. David Maisel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 7

⁴¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 15 February 1927, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 202, col.805; twenty years later Mosley can be read repeating the complaint that: "As usual under this system, nothing gets done until supreme crisis made it necessary", 'The Way Out: Africa the Key', *Mosley News Letter*, 15/03/47, reprint in Oswald Mosley, *A Policy for Britain* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1948) 5; see also Mosley, *The Alternative*, 25, cited above; and Oswald Mosley, 'Lost Lib-Lab Opportunity in 1929 Parliament', in *New Outlook. A Liberal Magazine*, May 1966, no.54, 14-17, where Mosley looks to a "Great economic crisis [which] might even achieve in Britain what so far only war has evoked. A real government of the centre might be necessary to meet it; true national concentration".

the view of the masses of this country".⁴² In short, Mosley's sought to extend the principle of dynamism throughout the community; to develop a progressive policy for the post-war world; and shine a light into those shaded areas of finance. A wakeful vigilance was required to prevent the economic fuel of his nation being leached away by a conspiracy of finance while the masses, whose transactions defined his nation and whose support he would demand when he formed his new political party,⁴³ had their view diffracted from the 'truth'. Together this combination prevented the expression of what Mosley believed to be the nation's essential nature; that communing of the emotions and struggle he 'knew' through his experience in the war. And so Mosley's solution to foreign policy and economic problems was of the same order; to retreat, regroup, and retrenchment in true military style,⁴⁴ "the real escape of the nation from its difficulties is the provision of a market at home which will absorb the product of present industry, and, in absorbing that product, will give prosperity to industry, which will in its turn benefit the revenue and afford ...a sound and a proper escape from ... [the] ... present difficulties."⁴⁵ This presented a dynamic and pragmatic solution to perceptions of national decline recreating Britain as an essentially strong nation.

Within the broad church of 'socialism' Mosley's variety of the socialist faith sought

⁴²Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 11 April 1927, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 205, col.107

⁴³Mosley, 'Lost Lib-Lab Opportunity in 1929 Parliament', in *New Outlook. A Liberal Magazine*, May 1966, no.54, 16

⁴⁴Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 July 1927, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 209, cols. 1355-6

⁴⁵*ibid.*, vol.205, col.110, 11 April 1927.

equality between people in opposition to the Conservatives who were, in his words: "consistently serving the interests of one small class of the community as against the interests of the great mass of the population",⁴⁶ fragmenting and weakening the fabric of the nation. Mosley's ideas about 'equality' were not only bounded by national considerations but, increasingly, subordinate to 'the nation'. To Mosley 'socialism' was not concerned with breaking down of *all* that divides men; he perceived of a socialism not fully governed by notions of an international brotherhood, rather his socialism aimed to create a calm water of equality of opportunity inside the harbour of the nation and away from the from the tempestuous seas of internationalism. Such a luxury was afforded Britain because it had no need for a *Lebensraum*, it had living space enough in the empire which may have needed strengthening but not expanding. Mosley was indeed proto 'national-socialist' in his socialist mix but his slide toward the fascist camp was lubricated by the oils of a right wing culture which had created a political space for 'Mosley' to fill.⁴⁷

Resignation Speech

Mosley's resignation speech to the House of Commons outlined the proposals he had made in the memorandum sent directly to the Prime Minister in January 1930 over the head of the Lord Privy Seal, J.H. Thomas with a special responsibility for unemployment,

⁴⁶ibid., 26 April 1927, col.717.

⁴⁷Mosley would later write: "Internationalism and socialism were contradictions in terms. How could we make socialism in one small island, depending entirely on selling goods in open competition on the markets of the capitalist world", *My Life*, 257.

Mosley's Cabinet boss.⁴⁸ Mosley introduced his speech by stating his belief that actual facts would lead directly to the truth of the matter and his qualification on this matter lay in his "pains to examine the facts".⁴⁹ His resignation followed the Cabinet rejection of his proposals which were set out in the memorandum. Mosley handed his letter of resignation to MacDonald on 20 May 1930, but his fight for implementation of his proposals was not over and he raised them again at the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting on 22 May. This action amounted to a vote of censure on the government and this, rather than a lack of support for his arguments, sealed his fate and his proposals were voted out by 29 votes to 210.⁵⁰ Mosley had talked of using the tactic of resignation the previous December over the difficulties he, Lansbury, and Johnson were having working with Thomas on unemployment policies,⁵¹ which suggests an attitude of brinkmanship

⁴⁸James Henry Thomas, 1874-1949, trade union leader and labour politician. Thomas, whose offer of resignation after his clash with Mosley was rejected, went on to become one of only four Labour Cabinet ministers in the National Government of 1931.

⁴⁹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 May 1930, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 239, cols. 1348 & 1351

⁵⁰Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 213; the political manoeuvring which ultimately undermined any chance of Mosley winning the vote at this meeting are intriguing. First, the political stakes were raised by the government who made it known they would resign if Mosley won; secondly, Henderson persuaded Ernest Thurtle to withdraw his moderate amendment, even though it did not act to censure the government as Mosley's did, because Henderson believed Mosley may withdraw his amendment in favour of Thurtle's amendment which would exaggerate Thurtle's anti-government message; thirdly, the combined effect of these actions made the vote one of loyalty to the Labour government and Labour Party which, in the event, overrode any sympathy members may have held for Mosley and his plans, Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, 185-187

⁵¹George Lansbury, 1859-1940, pacifist, socialist, labour politician, and first Commissioner of Works in the second labour government of 1929, with a socialism rooted more in Christianity than Marxism, and Thomas Johnston, under Secretary of State for Scotland, were given the task along with Mosley of assisting Thomas design plans to alleviate the unemployment problem.

and political theatre in Mosley's political outlook.⁵² The general consensus of opinion though suggests it was Mosley's decision to force the vote of censure which cast him out of office and the Party system.⁵³

Mosley's resignation speech and the Memorandum were a distillation of his ideas on unemployment which he had voiced over the previous few years. His speech, presented to the House in a 'polished' manner, was reported as leaving a deep impression not for its content but because Mosley was a clever politician.⁵⁴ Mosley's underlying argument was that the world had changed since the war; both *laissez-faire* and Protection were "utterly irrelevant to the modern world",⁵⁵ and the mechanisms provided by the classical approach were too slow to keep pace with the rapidly changing economic condition: "Now you have this tremendous leap forward in a few years in your productive capacity which has absolutely upset the industrial equilibrium of the world and demands entirely different measures to deal with it."⁵⁶ Mosley wanted to draw attention to what he saw as a fundamental shift in economics which could be harnessed to revitalise Britain.

⁵²David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977) 534

⁵³MacDonald described Mosley's action as: "a dramatic moment when chance of withdrawing his revolution came and he bargained and was smart, and vanity overstepped itself and he missed everything", Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 540; see also George Straus, 'Why Labour Rejected the Mosley Plan', *New Outlook*, no. 55, June 1966; *The Times* reported that "The general opinion among members of all three political parties was that Sir Oswald Mosley had made a very great mistake in pressing to a division his motion", Saturday 24 May 1930.

⁵⁴*The Clarion*, vol.2, no.6, June 1930, 163.

⁵⁵Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 May 1930, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 239, cols. 1354

⁵⁶*ibid.*, col.1356.

Mosley had criticised the return to the Gold Standard at pre-war parity as a fundamental mistake, a backward looking measure, "chiefly responsible for the great struggle of 1926,"⁵⁷ and he demanded "a Measure designed to assist in the great task of bringing Britain up-to-date, to assist us in giving new force and new life to the great public services".⁵⁸ Harold MacMillan recognised the crux of Mosley's argument: "[he] thinks the rules should be altered. I hope some of my friends will have the courage to support his protest."⁵⁹ These new rules would accommodate the developments of international markets and Mosley "urged, that it is to the home market that we must look for the solution of our troubles,"⁶⁰ but he warned:

"if we are to build up a home market, it must be agreed that the nation must to some extent be insulated from the electric shocks of present world conditions. You cannot build a higher civilisation and standard of life which can absorb the great force of modern production if you are subject to price fluctuations from the rest of the world which dislocate your industry at every turn, and to sport the competition from virtually slave conditions in other countries. What prospects have we, except the home market, of absorbing modern production ?"⁶¹

Mosley's eyes were fixed on the creation of a higher, improved, society, one which could

⁵⁷ibid., 23 July 1929 col.1157

⁵⁸ibid., col.1460

⁵⁹Letter from Harold MacMillan, *The Times*, Tuesday 27 May 1930, 12c

⁶⁰Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 28 May 1930, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 239, col. 1353.

⁶¹ibid., col.1355.

correspond to his ideological matrix. Mosley did not believe the machinery to deal with the symptom of national decline unemployment, existed,⁶² and "all initiative [was] coming from the departments and not Ministers".⁶³ Leadership was lacking: leadership decisions and planning were required and they should come from the 'right people', that is those innately able to undertake such responsibilities. Mosley wanted to avoid the failure to place decision making with the right, capable, people as he believed had happened before in Ireland. A revolution in the machinery of Parliament was needed and Mosley believed that what had been done in the conditions of war could be done again.⁶⁴ Planning would be Mosley's key to allow individuals to be released from the crushing responsibility of organising the "the most powerful economic machine the country can devise".⁶⁵ Planning would *provide an efficient use of national assets which would need assessing* "in advance in any national reconstruction, what our resources are and how they are to be allocated."⁶⁶ Mosley saw planning as a means of unshackling the individual from responsibilities extending beyond personal ability or social function; it was planning in order to 'liberate' the individual. Despite Mosley's intention others have viewed Mosley's planning as leading him to the authoritarianism of fascism.⁶⁷

⁶²ibid., col.1349.

⁶³ibid.

⁶⁴ibid., col.1350.

⁶⁵ibid., cols.1357 & 1358.

⁶⁶ibid., col.1363.

⁶⁷Daniel Ritschel, following F. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, argues that the logic of planning itself can lead to authoritarianism and drew Mosley into fascism, *The Non-Socialist Movement for a Planned Economy in Britain in the 1930s*, D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, 81.

Mosley's plans would take time to implement and in anticipation of this he described earlier that year the need for an interim scheme to deal with the immediate problems before the long term plans could take effect.⁶⁸ The aim was to reduce the pool of surplus labour and create work programs paid for with loans drawn "in days of depression and repay[ed] in days of prosperity"⁶⁹ it would be "a modest and a limited programme devised for the situation with which we are met."⁷⁰

Overall, Mosley's plans were truly *national spreading Government assistance across* Britain allowing the local authorities to determine the use to which that assistance is put. Mosley did not want to deny assistance to any section of the national community affirming that "it is a fallacy to say that they are dead."⁷¹ Mosley also rejected the transfer schemes which moved labour away from areas hard hit by unemployment in favour of national schemes. He said:

"transfer should be done away with as far as the Unemployment Grants Committee work is concerned... We have to face realities. In the depressed areas they cannot put up a penny....The only way to secure transfer of labour is by national schemes, in which the State either does the work itself or puts up such a large proportion of the money that it can impose its own terms"⁷²

⁶⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 22 January 1930, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 234, col.101

⁶⁹ibid., 28 May 1930, vol.239, col.1362

⁷⁰ibid., col.1363.

⁷¹ibid., col.1364-5.

⁷²ibid., col.1365-6.

And this broad national planning was essential because "the days of muddling through are over, that this time we cannot muddle through [...] The nation has to be mobilised and rallied for a tremendous effort. [...] If that effort is not made we may soon come to crisis real crisis."⁷³ Although the British character may have become inoculated against the immediate crisis Mosley saw a danger in the crumbling sort of crisis, a "gradual paralysis beneath which all the vigour and energy of this country will succumb". Challenged only if the "great powers of this country [are] to be rallied and mobilised for a great national effort....I beg the Government tonight to give the vital forces of this country the chance that they await."⁷⁴ And all Mosley needed was the political space for his ideas to be given shape.

The political space

The reception of Mosley's ideas expressed at the time of his resignation speech shed light on his decision to push them to the limit at the Parliamentary Labour Party Meeting. Mosley had won sympathy for his ideas but this was immediately lost when he forced a vote of censure against the Government.⁷⁵ Furthermore, beyond Mosley's own ambitions existed a political space available to him with a much more apparent support for his ideas.

⁷³ibid., cols.1371-2.

⁷⁴ibid., col.1372.

⁷⁵George Strauss, 'Why Labour Rejected the Mosley Plan', *New Outlook*, no.55, June 1966; Mosley may even have received the support of the Cabinet if he had not pushed for a division, see Philip Viscount Snowden, *An Autobiography. Vol.2. 1919-1934* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934) 877; Mosley narrowly missed getting his resolution to consider his Memorandum accepted at the Labour Party Conference at Llandudno on 7 October 1930, see conference *Report*, 200-204.

The development of a political space shaped to fit Mosley's ideological matrix can be traced in the right wing journal *National Review*, a journal which would prove to be sympathetic to fascism. *National Review* published an article in October 1929 which connected the decline of Britain to both a fall in the power of the 'Gentleman', the growth of Labour, and the influence of the 'feminine'. There was a call for greater pride, ambition, adventure and a desire to move onwards or "all will not be well with England".⁷⁶ The following January there was a call for protection against world trade and two months later Mosley became the focus of attention in his role of Minister concerned with unemployed. His "silence is ominous and significant - he is an ambitious man... He is a young man and, as such, should have energy, and it would be interesting to hear what he has to say...he is too clever to have believed in the promises made by his party at election time."⁷⁷ And this suggests a space was being cleared in right wing circles for the 'socialist' Mosley whose message was very much to their liking. In reporting the Mosley Memorandum the *National Review* declared, "This policy of the development of our home production has been our policy for thirty years, and we are glad to welcome Sir Oswald Mosely [sic] as a recruit", the Memorandum was "a hopeful document...leading away from internationalism to a more truly national ideal".⁷⁸ This was not a random casting of a line to Mosley, the net size was already set and his political unease already noted.⁷⁹ Thereafter, Mosley could do no wrong in the eyes of the *National Review* and his

⁷⁶Viscount Knebworth, 'The Changing Face of England', *The National Review*, vol. 94, no. 560 (October 1929) 349-357

⁷⁷'Episodes of the Month', *ibid.*, vol.94, no.565, March 1930, 961.

⁷⁸*ibid.*, vol.94, no.566, April 1930, 1125 & 1127.

⁷⁹Mosley had threatened to resign his Cabinet post in December 1929 over the problem of working with Thomas and to the keen observer his discontent could have

resolution on the confidence of the Government following the rejection of his Memorandum by the party was described as receiving "a good deal of support..the substantial number of 29 [votes]" which was the case but it was also defeated by 210 votes to 29.⁸⁰ *National Review* reported Mosley's resignation speech as "thoughtful and showed that he can consider national problems on un-party lines",⁸¹ while his speech at the Llandudno Labour Party Conference was described in a manner which heightened its protectionist arguments.⁸² More pertinent to Mosley's eventual political home in fascism was the revelation of Mosley's interest in a group of some 250 people of the Trades Unions and Labour Movements who planned to start a new Socialist Movement pledged to economic nationalism, rejecting both revolutionary Marxism and gradualist Fabianism and looking instead to corporations under state ownership. These would-be 'National Socialists' were described as able to replace the ineffective socialist creed with something more possible.⁸³ And so Mosley was transformed, though the pages of the *National Review*, from Labour MP to national socialist while the same pages regularly promoted the Boswell Press publication *Potted Biographies* whose 56th 'anti-national' was Sir Oswald Mosley, Bart. MP.⁸⁴

been known, see David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977) 534

⁸⁰*National Review*, vol.95, no. 568, June 1930, 163.

⁸¹ibid., vol.95, no.570, Aug. 1930, 437.

⁸²ibid., vol.95, no.573, November 1930, 875.

⁸³ibid., 811-2.

⁸⁴*The Patriot*, 19 June 1930, 605-606.

On the more extreme and anti-semitic right, *The Patriot* attacked Mosley for his affiliation with Socialism. He supplied 'Money for Socialism' contributing £50 to an ILP special effort fund and could be forgiven a mathematical mistake in a Parliamentary speech because he was an amateur Socialist, while his wife, Lady Cynthia was "one of those idle rich" with inherited wealth on the Labour benches.⁸⁵ Despite the similarity with Mosley in its interpretation of unemployment, as "An outward and visible sign of the national evils", *The Patriot* clung to the idea of an unseen conspiracy suggesting, "the popular imagination may be untouched by more ominous economic symptoms lying at the roots of the disease in the body politic."⁸⁶ Mosley was not at this time ideologically aligned with the extreme and 'conspiratorial' right, and although *The Patriot* saw a "mild concession to sanity" in Mosley's resignation speech over tariffs, his socialist ties prevented any real alliance between them.⁸⁷

Later, when Mosley had formed the New Party, a letter to *The Patriot* described the New Party as a party of mongrel composition and wrote of suspicion over Mosley's talk of patriotism saying that this is the last commodity of Socialists and suggesting that the New Party member, and former Labour MP, W.J. Brown's "whole career is of a revolutionary

⁸⁵ *The Patriot*, 20 December 1928, 581; 11 July 1929, 31; *The Patriot* established in 1922 by the Duke of Northumberland, later controlled by Lady Lucy Houston, held a policy of "supplying briefly striking facts and arguments relating to movements threatening the safety and welfare of the British Empire" and lent heavily on conspiratorial theory. *The Patriot* was anti-semitic and, for example, accepted as a forgery 'the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion' (vol XVII, no. 395, 219) but also described them as 'Prophetic'(vol.XVIII, no.423, 20 March 1930)

⁸⁶ibid., vol.XVIII, no.433, 29 May 1930.

⁸⁷ibid., 16 October 1930, 380; *The Patriot*, fears "the spirit of Patriotism is evaporating from our people under the hot-air propaganda of Internationalists, Socialists, and lop-sided Pacifists", vol.XX,no. 475, 19 March 1931.

type"⁸⁸. The political right represented by *The Patriot* were prepared to adopt the conspiracies exposed by the likes of Nesta H Webster, whose books are described as having an 'educational effect'; and to receive correspondence from J.S. Barnes, Secretary-General of the International Centre of Fascist Studies, Lausanne, on the nature of Italian Fascism; R.L Lintorn-Orman, founder of the British Fascists, on free speech; and were alert to the anti-nationalist forces in the nation. Although these right wingers were superficially travelling the same path as Mosley, they were actually heading in a different direction.⁸⁹ The Right represented by *The Patriot* was fearful of revolution, internationalism, and socialism and, despite the espousal of remarks similar in nature to those which could easily emanate from a later Mosley, it spoke with a reactionary, conservative and extremely patriotic voice, whereas Mosley would become revolutionary, socialist, and increasingly *nationalist in opinion*.

It is interesting to note that the ideology of the right both spurned *and* spurred Mosley's political thought suggesting an inability to 'fit' his political ideas into the existing, and orthodox, political positions available in the left/right spectrum belonging to "various sections in more than one party".⁹⁰ Yet, while the extreme right were cautious of Mosley

⁸⁸ibid., no.477, 2 April 1931, 337.

⁸⁹ibid. (Webster) 31 January 1929, 108 & 6 November 1930, 450; (Barnes) 7 February 1929, 142; (Lintorn) 12 September 1929, 261; a letter describing a radio broadcast complained that "Fascism was represented by a foreigner who could scarcely speak English [but] Communism was represented by one of the most eloquent wireless speakers I have ever heard" this assisted the anti-nationalist forces in the country and was to the disadvantage of the Fascist message, 16 October 1930, 389-390.

⁹⁰*The Times*, Friday 23 May 1930, 17b; Mosley was described by *The Clarion* as "never of the [Labour] Party", vol.III, no. 8, August 1931, 227.

and the more moderate right entranced, it was the extreme left who saw hope in Mosley and the moderate left which felt betrayed. The moderate socialist journal representing Fabian opinion *The Clarion* saw in Mosley no real alternative to the government policy on unemployment arguing Mosley was simply acting to further his career by disassociating himself from the failure of the governments unemployment policy.⁹¹ This opinion is in contrast to that of *The Socialist Review* which saw itself to be in the front of ILP thought.⁹² *The Socialist Review* described Mosley as on the right lines and saw the excellence of his plans as "generally recognised now and there is some hope that the Government will carry it out."⁹³ Supporting Mosley's belief in a concentration on the home market *The Socialist Review* argued to deal with unemployment on a national scale and continued: "If we set out on the path that Mosley indicates - the only path for Socialists - we shall have to do so with the full intention of making it only the first stage of a definitely Socialist career."⁹⁴ Through the pages of the ILP's *The New Leader* the optimism of the newly elected Labour Government of 1929, described by Mosley as a 'live Government',⁹⁵ can be seen to quickly deteriorate from "A Good Start" and a "Promising beginning" in June 1929 to "what he [Mr Thomas] has not done is the ground

⁹¹*The Clarion*, vol.II, no 6, June 1930, 162.

⁹²*The Socialist Review*, new series, vol.II, no. 2, June 1930, 57.

⁹³*ibid.*, vol.II, no. 1, May 1930, 63.

⁹⁴*ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁵Speaking at Newport on Sunday 5 September 1929 Mosley said "You are a live nation. You asked for a live Government, and I can claim that you have got it", *The Times*, Monday 6 September 1929, 9d.

for complaint" just six months later.⁹⁶ This comment was followed by a restatement of the ILP policy hopes which demonstrated a compatibility with Mosley's ideas: "The fact is that Mr Thomas cannot, or will not see, that the development of the home market, the increase of purchasing power among the masses, the undertaking of huge development schemes and the investment therein of a huge amount of national money are the only hopes."⁹⁷ Mosley could seek solace in such remarks.

The next month G.D.H. Cole completed a series of articles titled 'Mr Thomas and the Unemployed' with a plea to look nearer home to solve the unemployment problem: "The great reservoir of unused demand is in the needs of our own people".⁹⁸ But the rupture between Mosley's proposals and that of the ILP are mentioned in a report from the Llandudno Labour Party Conference where Mosley received "a tremendous ovation" for his speech outlining his proposals deviating from ILP policy only in his emphasis of 'Economic Imperialism'.⁹⁹ In a report of a Mosley Parliamentary speech, the worries of the ILP over this policy are repeated: "With its emphasis upon the home market, I.L.P. members heartedly agreed. But its economic Imperialism is dangerous, and particularly significant was its concluding appeal for national unity on an 'above party' basis".¹⁰⁰ In drawing attention to Mosley's emotive appeals the divergence in ambitions is highlighted

⁹⁶*The New Leader*, vol.XVI, new series, no.138, Friday 14 June 1929, 3; & vol.XVII, new series, no.166, Friday 27 December 1929, 3.

⁹⁷*ibid.*, vol.XVII, no.166, Friday 27 December 1929, 3, compare this to Mosley's comments above in House of Commons.

⁹⁸*ibid.*, no.168, Friday 10 January 1930, 10.

⁹⁹*ibid.*, vol. XIX, no.207, Friday 10 October 1930, 11.

¹⁰⁰*ibid.*, vol. XIX, no.210, Friday 31 October 1930, 8.

and Mosley's aim treated with suspicion. Mosley, on the other hand, saw his Memorandum as "simply an attempt to reduce to the practical, to the details of administration, the policy of the Party."¹⁰¹ Any divergence of interpretation stems, in part, from Mosley's attempt to express and forge a link between his fundamental ideology and the ILP at an ideologically operative level. At moments when the results of this communicative attempt are at odds with the contextual structure, such as the ILP, Mosley lost support. It is this fundamental ideological conflict rather than a failure to understand the process of political communication that flung Mosley beyond the pale. And his awareness of the method of political communication is evident in the report of his speech in 1930 reveals:

"If they said that relief works were the only things which could solve the problem, they would get very little public support; but if they could say: 'Here is a great policy of permanent national reconstruction, the building of a great national civilisation, which will solve our problem', then they could say relief works were necessary to bridge the gulf between the present time and the time that policy would be realised".¹⁰²

Mosley repeated his plea to insulate the nation from the chaos of world market in order to absorb the products of the modern machine and, ominously, "by some means or another, to build in their island a higher civilisation than existed anywhere else in the

¹⁰¹Report of Mosley's speech in *Report of the Thirtieth Annual Conference of The Labour Party, Llandudno, 1930* (London: The Labour Party, 1930) 201

¹⁰²ibid., 202

world",¹⁰³ but this required planning and regulation which in itself implied centralisation and control by the state.¹⁰⁴ But the socialist values of the ILP had been offended by what it saw as an anti-socialist buttressing of capitalism implicit in the Mosley plans. What Mosley described as "beginning with economic security for the British Commonwealth, proceeded to the possibility of extending some such system to the whole Commonwealth of Nations, with its vast resource, human and material",¹⁰⁵ the ILP interpreted as opposing their ideal of world trade and not just British Empire Trade and claimed: "These are the conceptions of Economic Imperialism, and have no place in Socialist thought." Beyond these criticisms was a greater concern which feared Mosley was proposing an alternative to socialism itself. Despite being couched in the language of socialism, Mosley's plans were perceived by the Left as dialectically in opposition to their position and, in reality, represented the devious nature of capitalism.¹⁰⁶

Mosley emerged shunned by a section of the Left while at the same time a political space was manifesting itself on the Right where his policy of planning received endorsement. The newly formed *Weekend Review* was consistent in its support for Mosley at this

¹⁰³ibid.

¹⁰⁴Daniel Ritschel, *The Non-Socialist Movement for a Planned Economy in Britain in the 1930s*, D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987, iv-v & 81; Ritschel argues Mosley was among the first to espouse planning as a serious route to reform and unique in his belief the occurrence of a fundamental change in world demand which had undermined Britain's pre-war trade dominance.

¹⁰⁵Report of Mosley's speech in *Report of the Thirtieth Annual Conference of The Labour Party, Llandudno, 1930* (London: The Labour Party, 1930) 202

¹⁰⁶*The New Leader*, vol.XIX, new series, no. 207, Friday 10 October 1930

pivotal period of his career.¹⁰⁷ It described the Mosley Memorandum as "a dark secret kept from the world" and with their anticipation of a public cry for the politicians to 'do something' added to the drama surrounding Mosley.¹⁰⁸ Attacks made by *Weekend Review* on the parliamentary system for its ability to push-aside national emergencies yet allow the performance of artificial debates, and in its demand for action, echo in, or are an echo of, Mosley's ideas.¹⁰⁹ *Weekend Review* demanded a national policy because the people "had voted for action; and they find they have been given paralysis...A good broad toe-cap applied to the body politic would do it a world of good."¹¹⁰ When compared with Mosley's comment in the *Times*, suggesting people wanted a 'live' Government, a congruity of ideas emerges. *Weekend Review* saw Mosley as a leader but not a socialist one; Mosley was a prospective leader of the Conservative Party, not the Labour Party and his Manifesto was described as 'exactly right' proposing the Idea which needs to be "'put across' with force and imagination...to rekindle the inspiration and energy of the nation".¹¹¹ Mosley's self-confidence was encouraged by letters from Harold MacMillan

¹⁰⁷*Weekend Review* emerged from a disagreement between the proprietor of *Saturday Review* and its editorial team over support for Beaverbrook's 'Empire Free Trade' campaign; see Max Nicolson, 'The Proposal for a National Plan', in John Pinder (ed.) *Fifty Years of Political & Economic Planning. Looking Forward 1931-1981* (London: Heinemann, 1981) 5-8

¹⁰⁸*Weekend Review*, vol.1, no.11, 24 May 1930, 365 & 366.

¹⁰⁹see citation from *Birmingham Town Crier* 23 Dec 1927, Quoted in Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 174.

¹¹⁰*Weekend Review*, vol.1, no.12, 31 May 1930, 405.

¹¹¹*Weekend Review*, vol.2, no.40, 13 December 1930, 872; Sir Cuthbert Headlam (1876-1964) a conservative MP from a minor gentry background who became an MP in 1924 and achieved Ministerial office in 1926, commented in his diary, Friday 26 September 1930, on the possibility of Mosley leading the Tories, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries 1923-1935*, edited by Stuart Bell (London: The Historians Press, 1992) 193

in both the *Times* and *Weekend Review* and these massaged his ego with descriptions which contrasted him to other politicians as "a man with the courage and the sense to face the music".¹¹² Thus Mosley's confidence led him to see himself as a force whose proper place was outside what he believed to be the inane atmosphere of conventional party politics; he could draw support from a variety of places on the political spectrum and his New Party could attract membership from this eclectic crowd. Mosley ultimately began espousing a myth of national rebirth as he wrote of "a young renascent and resurgent Britain rising from the dust and ashes of the post-war period - these are the objectives of the modern mind and the challenge to the old order."¹¹³

Mosley's political appeal had crossed the confines imposed by the conventional political spectrum. Ideologically poised to the left of the extreme right and, simultaneously, at the extreme of the left, yet not at its cutting edge Mosley was outside the recognised Party system. This ambiguous political position would confound some academics until the end of the century, leading D.S. Lewis to conclude that: "Fascism represents the *authoritarian* centre", a view bolstering Mosley's claims in his autobiography.¹¹⁴ On the Right Mosley's futurist aspect alienated the reactionary, while to socialists on the left Mosley could be

¹¹²*Weekend Review*, vol.2, no.42, 27 December 1930, 949 & no.40, 13 December 1930, 872; *Times*, 27 May 1930, 12c.

¹¹³Mosley, 'A New National Policy II - Reply to Criticism', *Weekend Review*, vol.III, no.47, 31 January 1931, 138.

¹¹⁴D.S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley Fascism and Society, 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 7-8, Lewis relies heavily on Mosley's reminiscences made at a time he was seeking, and gaining, establishment acceptance; Seymour Lipset also argues fascism is a movement of the extreme centre, see extract 153 in *Fascism* Griffin ed., 285-6.

seen as a replacement leader for the far left wing.¹¹⁵ These paradoxes indicate a problem in categorising Mosley's politics; politics which were operative expressions of a consistent fundamental ideological matrix which can be described, ideal typically, as seeking the maintenance of a strong nation through the utilisation of dynamic futurism.

Mosley's determination to force a vote on his memorandum at the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting demonstrates his personal confidence and self reliance but also drew out his most dogged supporters of which the majority came from the left and the Clydesiders.¹¹⁶ This group were considered by Conservatives to be "the point at which the best troops of the enemy are gathered", a proving ground for young politicians.¹¹⁷ The Clydesiders retained the 'class war' revolutionary zeal which MacDonald had tamed with his adherence to an evolutionary socialist theory. *The Clydesider MP's were felt by Mosley to be his closest Parliamentary associates.*¹¹⁸ To explore this relationship a little further it will be useful to look at the ideas of Kier Hardie who founded and led the British labour movement as an alternative, and in opposition, to the political hegemony of the liberals and conservatives.

The socialist ideals expressed by Kier Hardie expressed a similar core elements as can

¹¹⁵see the report on Mosley's resignation in *The Times*, Wednesday 21 May 1930, 16b.

¹¹⁶*The Times*, Saturday 24 May 1930

¹¹⁷Eric Travers-Hutchin, 'The rebirth of Clydeside Politics', in *The Rebirth of Conservatism*, ed. Dorothy Crisp (London: Methuen & Co., 1931) 123-138

¹¹⁸Mosley, *My Life*, 173; Mosley spoke of his "sympathy with the Clyde people" to Beatrice Webb in 1924, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb. Volume Four: 1924-1943 'The Wheel of Life'* (London: Virago, 1985) 24 March 1924, 20

be found in Mosley's politics. Caroline Benn described Hardie's socialism as culturally defined, "a political force akin to the 'life force' of Shaw's *Man and Superman*".¹¹⁹ He perceived human society as being in a steady state of ever-recurring build-up to communism, followed break-down and renewed rebuilding", capitalism was a "selfish greed of each for himself" and socialism an "instinct" in each of us "that highest impulse to share".¹²⁰ This dynamic conception of society is echoed by Mosley's ideas. Mosley did not have Hardie's faith in the inevitability of a socialist society, rather Mosley saw society continually on the verge of crisis and decent into chaos only avoidable with action from a strong state. Hardie saw 'socialism' as more than politics of economics: "It presents to the modern world a new conception of society" with the state "an expression of the will of the people".¹²¹ The Labour Party could offer the working class an alternative to the apparent squabbling of the existing Liberal and Tory Parties; much as Mosley offered an alternative method which would strive to change the community itself and whose representatives would then change Parliament rather than trying to convert the legislators.¹²² This 'bottom up' approach can be detected in Mosley's ideas of a strong state removing obstructions that prevented the nation being expressed.¹²³ Like Mosley,

¹¹⁹Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardy* (London: Hutchinson, 1992) 243

¹²⁰*ibid.*, 433

¹²¹J. Kier Hardie, *Socialism* (London: I.L.P., 1925) 3 & 6

¹²²Kier Hardie, 'If I were Dictator' in *Kier Hardie's Speeches and Writings (From 1888 to 1915)* 3rd ed., Emrys Hughes ed. (Glasgow: "Forward", 1928) 161 & 162

¹²³Mosley would later suggest that the party system prevented tackling the real problems of this time so that a "new party must grow from the grass roots of the people; action would come not from the lobbies but the streets in a new mass movement", 'Lost Lib-Lab Opportunity in 1929 Parliament', *New Outlook. A Liberal Magazine*, May 1966, 16

Hardie saw the nation threatened by decay:

"if such a movement does not awaken a hearty response throughout the entire nation, then the case is hopeless, and the days of Britain's glory are numbered.

"I would have England a `merrie England'. To-day she is squalid, dirty, beer-besotted, and rapidly decrepit"¹²⁴

To some on the left Mosley embodied a return to the revolutionary spirit which had fired the Labour movement at its inception under the leadership and inspiration of Kier Hardie. This spirit distinguished the ILP from the gradualist reformist socialism of the Fabians. Mosley offered an alternative path away from the gradualism which the ILP had adopted under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald and Snowden; a route which, arguably, diluted the revolt against capitalism and accepted a position of reform from within a capitalist system.¹²⁵ The rump of revolutionary sentiment remained with the Clydesiders, and they supported Mosley.¹²⁶

If Mosley's politics, and his move toward fascism, was the result of naked ambition alone

¹²⁴Hardie, 'If I were Dictator', 162.

¹²⁵G.D.H Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (London: Methuen, 1961) 423-4

¹²⁶In the BUF press Kier Hardie was described as betrayed by the democratic process which made winning an election "more important than Socialism itself", the article by John Emery [John Scanlon], continues "I do not know what Sir Oswald Mosley means by National Socialism. Apart from the anti-Jewish side, I see nothing different from what Kier Hardie preached", *Action*, no.21, 9 July 1936, 11; for the current debate and reviews of a variety of interpretations surrounding the significance of 'Red' Clydeside see Terry Botherstone, 'Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?' in Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor, *Militant Workers. Labour and Class Conflict o the Clyde, 1900-1950* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992) 52-80

without any outside support, its course could have been seriously upset by failure,¹²⁷ but with the development of a political space Mosley's ambition could be encouraged and kept alive. His speedy rise through the Labour Party, assisted by a friendship of MacDonald, led to it being noted that he may well be a future Prime Minister and this suggests Mosley stood a good chance of political fulfilment within constitutional politics.¹²⁸ But with the belief that there was support from the Right, and knowing that his style could draw on a tradition from the Left, Mosley was encouraged to move from his otherwise successful parliamentary career to a position beyond the pale as he sought to build an inspirational creed to fulfil the demands of his ideological matrix and would ultimately transform its operative dimension into fascism.

Mosley and 'Fascism' in 1927

Mosley's earliest use of the term 'fascism' provides a valuable insight to his assumptions about 'fascism' before he became a committed advocate. The only fascist regime was Mussolini's Italy and before this was established in 1922 Italy merely provided Mosley with a holiday destination where he spent his honeymoon at Portofino with his first wife Cimmie.¹²⁹ Later Mosley evolved a greater interest in Fascist Italy as the political logic

¹²⁷Headlam wrote of Mosley in his diary: "The eternal 'ego' is the only thing that interests him" and of Mosley's cynical allegiance to socialism "He is no more a Socialist than I am. He is first and always an 'Oswald Mosleyite'... what the politics of that [Mosley] party might be is quiet immaterial- so long as he is its big noise", 28 & 28 September 1930, *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries 1923-1935*, edited by Stuart Bell (London: The Historians Press, 1992) 193

¹²⁸Mosley was among those who lent MacDonald his car, L. MacNeill Weir, *The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald. A Political Biography* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938) 165

¹²⁹Lady Cynthia Mosley (nee Curzon) 1898-1933

of the New Party unfolded to the extent that he undertook a trip which, according to Skidelsky's, was to 'study fascism at first hand'.¹³⁰ Before this, Mosley was as curious about this new political doctrine as could be expected of any political observer and his use of the term 'fascism' at this time demonstrated his attempt to define this political genus as a type of act, an activity, and not as a political label for a body of doctrine. Mosley's use of the term, in the years before declaring himself as fascist, were, nonetheless congruous with his ideological commitment to activism.

During the 1927 debate on the Trade Disputes Bill Mosley suggested that, "the fact is the Government would like to be Fascists but have not the courage; they have not the courage to wear their blackshirts. They dare not put down in an Act of Parliament what they really mean."¹³¹ Here Mosley returned to a persistent theme which sought the transparent revelation of truths in Government; an obsession fuelled by his belief that exposure to the 'truth' would act as a stimulant and rouse the nation into a mode of committed reconstruction. A hint of respect for the fascist 'courage' to state these truths is carried in Mosley's words, along with the implication, if not a logical connection, that a fascist government is the preferable answer. In other words, from his early comments Mosley viewed fascism as enabling access to 'truths' and for anyone in search of an inspirational creed the fascist experiment in Italy supplied an alluring paradigm. Fascism, though, was never an inevitable ideological destination for Mosley, more consistent features in his ideas were the obscured truth and muddling by the government.

¹³⁰Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 284.

¹³¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 24 May 1927, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 205, cols. 1117

Mosley's was convinced that 'Old Gang' politicians had a tendency to mask the truth and hence depend upon a degree of somnolence among the people to maintain credibility. This conviction extended into a perception of the British judicial system where Mosley attacked the vague and ill-defined nature of many legislative provisions which allowed a large degree of flexibility of interpretation by Law Court Judges. He argued that the Judges were biased consciously or not "in class issues" and that, "It was one of the last illusions that I carried from the [Conservative] benches opposite ... a pathetic belief in the impartiality of British justice ... That illusion is very quickly dissipated when you have passed through any battle, fighting with the working classes."¹³² Aligning himself with socialists he saw the edifice of dominant ideology which allowed for an ambiguity in drafting laws so, "that a Judge or Magistrate can interpret them exactly how he likes, and they are leaving the execution of the Fascist business to the Judges and magistrates of the country."¹³³ And in this use of the word 'fascist' Mosley exposed another facet of his understanding of its meaning, the application of justice.

In this comment Mosley saw the implementation of law, the point where justice is administered, to be 'fascist',¹³⁴ and by extending this idea the implementation of this 'fascist' stimulant to the community, which came through the judicial system, functioned

¹³²ibid., 1 June 1927, vol.207, col.461-2

¹³³ibid., col.462; these comments echo those expressed by Mosley concerning the use by the government of the Black and Tans in Ireland, see chapter three

¹³⁴it is interesting to note here the Platonic idea of justice which denotes a correct balance within a society rather than the modern idea of the relation of equality before impartial laws.

at the interface between the state and the individual, the very site (or conceptual space) where Mosley's imagined nation lay. A weak state, promoting ill defined political aims not clearly spelt out in the law, could nullify state policy through the multifarious interpretations made at a local level and national policy would be dissipated rather than directed and focused. Mosley, driven by an urge to revitalize the nation stemming from his fundamental ideological matrix, demanded a firm and resolute Labour Government to overcome what, "in all human affairs, as well as in law, is a very great difference [which] arises between the results of our actions and the intentions of our actions".¹³⁵ If, by following Mosley's remarks, the 'fascist business' shifted away from the local site of implementation where it was open to gross interpretation, and was placed clearly in the control of the state, this would, by implication, make that state 'fascist' and there would be a transfer of the 'fascist business' from the local to the national level, from the individual to the state. But it is important to note that this interpretation does not imply that Mosley was planning his fascist revolution at this time; far from it, he was enmeshed into the liberal democratic system of Britain in 1927. What his comments do indicate is a simple awareness of Italian Fascism and a willingness to use the fascist model as a paradigm of political method of merit. Yet beyond this Mosley did demonstrate a predisposition to fascism in his ideological matrix, which was marked by a determination to strengthen Britain.

In the context of a communist revolution in Russia, which was to be followed by a fascist revolution in Italy, a precedent for revolutionary politics was provided demonstrating the

¹³⁵Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 13 June 1927, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 207, cols. 736-7

genuine possibility of fundamental change which the young Mosley, already imbued with the 'Hotel Bolo' mentality.¹³⁶ He observed that organising the masses into a revolutionary movement for change cannot be prevented by the passing of a few laws. He argued, "if a violent revolution has any object at all, its first object is to overturn all existing law, and it is farcical to suggest that people imbued with that intention would be deterred by passing one law more",¹³⁷ and it was this spirit of revolution Mosley hoped to tap. Closer to Mosley's home were revolutionary examples: Ireland, where British rule was swept aside, and the revolutionary potential displayed by the General Strike. Mosley's also carried a political affinity with the Clydeside political spirit which was enhanced by their empathy with the Irish Republican cause.¹³⁸ Mosley found himself presented with a rich source of examples from which he could gain an understanding of revolution while, simultaneously, the unemployed remained as a symptom of national decay. Mosley believed the mass of unemployed people, like their counter-parts a decade earlier found in the heat of war, were suffering the results of an indecisive Government and were tangible representations of a mythic degeneration of a once great community which demanded and inspired revolutionary activity.¹³⁹

¹³⁶see Chapter Two

¹³⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 20 June 1927, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons) Fifth Series*, vol. 207, col. 1562

¹³⁸see James D. Young, 'James Connolly, James Larkin and John Maclean: the Easter Rising and Clydeside Socialism', in Duncan and McIvor, *Militant Workers*, 155-175. For an overview Ireland see C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1968) 57-89

¹³⁹In his autobiography Mosley wrote of the unemployed as fellow-countrymen who were betrayed by Westminster and abandoned and left to starve and suffer. He reacted emotionally as their trust in Government was dishonourably betrayed, *My Life*, 260.

Conclusion

Mosley moved through the ranks of the Labour Party and maintained an allegiance with the Left wing ILP while maintaining a useful friendship with the moderate MacDonald. Mosley also received encouragement from the conservative Right and was at times considered a candidate for leadership of both Conservative and Labour Parties. Together these examples suggest Mosley held political appeal which operated at a level which could overrun Party boundaries and find resonance at the level of myth, emotion or even instinct. Here Mosley could find a political space and the necessary encouragement to commit himself to a path which would take him into the political wilderness although that is not how he would, or could, have seen it. Mosley was following the trail of an inspirational creed to raise the nation from its slumbers. Without the structural presence of a political space Mosley may have remained within the confines of conventional party politics, accepted Arthur Henderson's offer to withdraw his censure motion, maintain the sympathetic following gained at the Party meeting of 22 May 1930, and aimed at becoming the Prime Minister.¹⁴⁰ With the existence of this political space and the apparent wide range of opinion to which he appealed, the self-assured Mosley was driven by an ideological matrix and temperamentally impelled to follow the apparent flow of support from within influential political circles. This flow, which very soon became a trickle, eventually dried up.

Mosley joined the Labour Party because it represented to him a dynamic form of politics and provided an opportunity to correct the betrayal of promises offered to the war

¹⁴⁰see note 50

generation.¹⁴¹ Once in Government and given a Ministerial role, Mosley saw the Labour government incapable of `decisive action', which was an essential component of his fundamental ideological matrix: without decisive action there was decline. Ironically, Mosley's departure from the Labour Party was anything but decisive. The other Labour Party supporters of Mosley tendered their resignations,¹⁴² but Mosley waited to be expelled by a NEC meeting presided over by the Prime Minister for "this act of gross disloyalty", that was forming the New Party. In his defence, Allan Young had written saying Mosley was too ill to deal with political matters even though his wife, Cynthia Mosley, had tendered her resignation.¹⁴³ Mosley had politically moved on and, unable to command sufficient attention in the existing parties, he created his own and new, New Party.

¹⁴¹Mosley, *My Life*, 173.

¹⁴²The resignations were recorded as Mr Oliver Baldwin (Dudley) 26 February; Mr W.J. Brown (West Wolverhampton) 4 March; Mr. E.J.St.L. Strachey (Aston) 24 February; Dr. Robert Forgan (West Renfrew) 24 February; Lady Cynthia Mosley (Stoke) 3 March 1930, *Report of the Thirty-Third Annual Conference of The Labour Party. Scarborough 1931*, (London: The Labour Party, 1931) 30

¹⁴³NEC meeting March 10 1931, *Archive of the British Labour Party*, Series 1, National Executive Committee Meetings, Part 2, Card 144.

National Warrior and Messenger Boy: Mosley and the New Party

Oswald Mosley often characterised himself as an 'old soldier' fighting for Britain, a soldier betrayed by his rulers, by those who believed they held real power but who were to his eyes, unwittingly, or knowingly, in the pay of international finance or working for its advancement.¹ In such a guise Mosley was a warrior fighting for his nation but a warrior whose battles were fought under the colours of the different political armies, Conservative and Labour, and in each case the battle plans were believed by him to be flawed; while the battle planners were asleep to his 'truth'; or he was a lone and independent voice. Such a soldier, convinced of the righteousness of his beliefs, became an ideologue who sought out his own army in order to awaken the nation into realising the 'truth' of his vision. This chapter describes the evolution of Mosley's New Party; his own political party which developed more than a fleeting resemblance to an 'army' as Mosley strayed away from conventional politics.²

Mosley's New Party did not develop from an ideological void, there were other similar political solutions offered to solve the economic problems of the nation and fascism had been on the British political scene for a number of years. Since 1923, Rotha Lintorn

¹Mosley still spoke in such terms 44 years after leaving the armed services, for example 'Mosley predicts the crisis', 1962 speech, cassette, *Chaos and Crisis: Mosley's Way Out*, side one (London: Action Society, 1983)

²Nicholas Mosley aptly called the first volume of his parents biography *Beyond the Pale* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982)

Orman's British Fascisti did little beyond providing a group of members predisposed for Mosley's fledgling BUF in 1932, and politically priming and facially scarring the infamous William Joyce.³

More moderate options also existed such as Beaverbrook's Empire Free Trade and this will be viewed here before an analysis of the connotations inherent in the name 'New Party' are made to provide a guide to Mosley's ideological concerns. The policies which rationalised these concerns will be described and will proceed a discussion of the elite myth of the New Party and the axiomatic role played by 'action' in its policy. Following an outline of the relationship between the New Party and fascism, the violence and street politics associated with the New Party will be described as an expression of ideology, albeit one bearing the hallmark of fascism. Finally we approach the question of whether the New Party was indeed fascist by comparing it to an *ideal type model of generic fascism*.⁴

³British Fascisti was formed in 1923 and stirred socialist emotions as they would again in the thirties, R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 51-57; see also a communist anti-fascist pamphlet which details Fascist Italy and reports on fascism in other countries. English fascism is described as 'the object of laughter' and unnecessary because their 'governing classes' in England have reformist trade unions and labour leaders rendering the workers docile. The English Fascisti would remain only a 'glorified Boy's Brigade' unless a "vital change takes place in the situation", L.W., *Fascism Its History and Significance* (London: The Plebs, 1924) 31 & 34

⁴this corresponds to the ideal-type described by Griffin initially in *Nature of Fascism*, 26, and later in his *International Fascism: Theories and the New Consensus*, 14; the general thesis of Griffin's argument has received endorsement from leading academics in the field, see Stanley Payne, 'Review Article: Historical Fascism and the Radical Right', *Journal of Contemporary History*, volume 35, no.1 (2000) 109-118

In December 1929 Lord Beaverbrook launched his Empire Crusade which campaigned for Empire Free Trade and protection for the Empire countries from outside trade. The Crusade sought to "break down the barriers within the Empire and to raise up tariff barriers against the foreigner".⁵ Unlike the Chamberlain plan of 1930, which had sought to place a tariff wall around Britain, Beaverbrook planned to place "a tariff wall around the whole Empire".⁶ Throughout, Beaverbrook expressed a fear of the foreigner who 'free trade' favoured because, to him, this implied nothing but free imports flooding the home market.⁷ In his appeals to the young and for consumer power Beaverbrook referred to the First World War and denied any party affiliation suggesting, rather, that he was simply promoting the interests of the country.⁸ Contained within this rhetoric are similarities which can readily be found with Mosley's argument of 'insulation' while the major difference lay in the emphasis Mosley placed upon the nation.⁹

Mosley described his duty at this time as "to awaken the will to live and to live greatly,

⁵Lord Beaverbrook, *My Case for Empire Free Trade* (London: The Empire Crusade, 1930) 3

⁶*ibid.*, 5.

⁷Beaverbrook, *My Case*, 16-17.

⁸His Crusade was feared because it could have split the Conservative and Liberal Parties, Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, ed. Nigel Nicolson, (London: Collins, 1966), 23 January 1930, 41.

⁹Beaverbrook, *My Case*, 23, 29 & 54; Mosley wanted to 'capture' Beaverbrook from the outset of the New Party because he saw the political need for a compliant press. It has also been noted that Beaverbrook was 'femininely jealous' of Mosley, Harold Nicolson, *Diaries*, 6 November 1930, 2 November 1931, 59 & 96; Mosley received letters from Beaverbrook which offered Mosley support and work writing for his papers following the New Party debacle at the 1931 General Election, *My Life*, 275 & 288.

to dedicate myself to a national renaissance",¹⁰ yet despite apparent similarities with Beaverbrook's arguments, Mosley's ambition was, in essence, of a different category with Mosley conjuring images of a future of utopian dimensions to support his policies. This 'reality' ran in a mythic dream-time; in an alternative conceptual sphere where problems could be solved by the application of a different logic stemming from a different mind-set or worldview. In this light, and in line with our study of Mosley's ideological matrix, it is a useful starting point to study this interim phase of his career by unravelling the influences and connotations on its name 'The New Party', but first a brief history of the New Party will provide some context.

The brief life of the New Party

Mosley was thirty-five years old when he founded the New Party. The New Party was a brief political flicker that emerged smouldering from the Mosley resignation rather than blazing onto the political scene. Beginning life on 28 February 1931, the New Party developed within seven months out from its democratic roots to form the 'athletic clubs' and a militant attitude which would later be associated with its successor the British Union of Fascists (BUF). The New Party totally failed in the 1931 October General Election to place a candidate in Parliament and its journal *Action* ceased publication in December after a brief 3 months. The surviving rump of the New Party then, eventually, merged with, and into, the BUF.

In his autobiography Mosley gave scant attention to the New Party despite the pivotal

¹⁰Mosley, *My Life*, 288.

position it held between his liberal/democratic politics and his fascism. This though, may not be reticence on Mosley's behalf but simply a reflection of continuity in his thought: rather than representing a novel phase in his political evolution the New Party represented one operative expression of Mosley's persistent ideological matrix, from which all his exoteric political combinations emerged and therefore, not attracting any special attention from him. Arguably, though, the New Party was simply a miserable failure and Mosley's lack of attention to it may simply reflect an unwillingness to dwell on this party whose existence was so easily snuffed out by the same electoral system it claimed to be rotten.

Public responses to the New Party usually came in the form of open hostility. When Mosley gave a speech he would regularly be received in a militant and violent way which he believed was due to a few Communist agitators, and there was some truth in this.¹¹ Significantly for Mosley, these reactions demonstrated the demand for a defence force to protect him and his message, and thus opposition enabled him to discuss the merits of fascism and the development of a uniformed 'disciplined force' in terms, and in the name of 'free speech'.¹² Mosley wrote the New Party "had to develop a different character to meet an entirely new situation. New men came to us, who were ready to fight for their beliefs, in type the dedicated blackshirt".¹³ And on reflection, Mosley saw the seed of fascism already planted in the New Party by, and through, the character of its recruits,

¹¹Mosley, *My Life*, 285; for reports of singing Socialist/Communist songs as protests at New Party meetings see *The Times*, 21 September, 7c & 19 October 1931, 18b; Communist's in Britain had opposed fascism for many years before Mosley's fascism emerged following the belief, for example see, L.W., *Fascism Its History and Significance*, (London: The Plebs, 1924), passim.

¹²Nicolson, *Diaries*, 21 & 22 September 1931, 91.

¹³Mosley, *My Life*, 285.

those who came to him and not indoctrinated by him, and this would concord with our theme that Mosley's fascism was perceived as providing a channel for the 'true' expression of the people, the nation. At the time Mosley denied any fascist ambitions for the New Party saying he had no use for it or anything else which came from abroad, rather, the New Party was a British party for the British people.¹⁴ Whether or not the New Party was fascist shall be discussed later, but as has been shown above, Mosley was very aware that the phenomena of fascism existed beyond the nation of its birth and was an independent political force, yet was still one which possessed particular foreign connotations.

New Party policy was dominated by the need to do something, to reconstruct the British nation. The New Party depicted the existing party system of democratic government as stifling the vitality of the nation:¹⁵ a nation whose voice could not be heard and whose actions could were uncoordinated. To the New Party, Labour opposition to the government served to block the policy of the National Government without offering an alternative to it. In contrast, the New Party were a party of action, offering an alternative policy with leadership and strong Government.¹⁶ Ideologically this would not be a dictatorship from the top down, with a few holding executive power over the many (which of course it was), but was designed to allow a bottom up dictatorship of the nation over itself with the executive body acting merely to provide leadership. The nation was

¹⁴*The Times*, 19 October 1931, 18e.

¹⁵Mosley wrote: "Communism must be met not by a flabby negative, but a virile positive.", *Action*, 'Class Struggle Must End', vol.1, no.8, 26 November 1931, 1.

¹⁶Mosley, *A National Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1931) 46-7

free to express itself under this leadership, having shed the veneer of liberal democracy and puritan ethics which were believed to be holding back a modern economy and hindering national growth. In this way Britain could revitalize itself and be Great again. Before the crisis had run its course the country would welcome "far more drastic measures than it is even yet prepared to contemplate"¹⁷ and of course, as we have already suggested, any national planning idea flirts with dictatorship to impose those plans.¹⁸

'Party'

Unlike Beaverbrooke's 'Crusade' which placed itself outside of the party political arena Mosley's New Party was a political Party:¹⁹ The New Party formulated policy and represented itself as a point around which those sympathetic to its aims could gather.²⁰

¹⁷*The Times*, 21 September 1931, 7c.

¹⁸It is interesting to note that Keynes made his first explicit use of the term 'planning', in relation to his own ideas, in a 1930 comment on the Mosley Manifesto, R.M. O'Donnell, *Keynes: Philosophy, Economics and Politics: the philosophical foundations of Keynes's thought and their influence on his economics and politics* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 311

¹⁹Jean Blondel argues that political parties exist where there is a perception of social conflict; a need for popular support; and the assumption that a party means strength through size, *Political Parties: A Case for Discontent?* (London: Wildwood House, 1978) 13-15. More simply James Judd suggests that any organised group, calling itself to be a party and aiming to exert some control over political institutions of its society must be a 'party', *Political Parties* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) 5; it is interesting to note Winston Churchill's opposition to Beaverbrooke's Empire Free Trade was that it would destroy the Conservative party despite his belief in free trade, Harold Nicolson, *Diaries*, 23 January 1930, 41.

²⁰Mosley wrote at the inception of the New Party:

"We already have great evidence of support for a new policy of action from the nation. It can only be put into practice through the methods of political organisation.

"Therefore to achieve these purposes we appeal to the nation to assist us in the formation of a new political organisation, without which they cannot be achieved",

More interestingly, and telling, is the congruity between the New Party and the criticisms of party organisation espoused by Robert Michels in his 1915 book *Political Parties*.²¹ Michels in his study of the left-wing democratic parties analyzed the growth of a political party and how it squeezes out the idealism upon which it was founded. As a party grows in size so does its reliance on bureaucracy and bureaucrats who are not necessarily committed to the cause of social change. In addition, working class leaders soon emerge from a process of embourgeoisement as middle class. To counter this Michels argued for a heroic style of leadership to withstand political compromise. He accepted the necessity for political parties to overcome disorganisation favourable to the adversary but that this "brings dangers in its train" concluding that all organisations have oligarchical tendencies that is 'the iron law of oligarchy', the tendency for rule by the few.²² Mosley's career mirrored the narrative of Michels *Political Parties*; he experienced the party political 'dance' of parliamentary government snuffing out the flame set alight by the original and innovative ideas.

Mosley's New Party voiced a range of policies which can be seen as 'new', that is of the post-war era, but they were not unique to the New Party. What was particularly new was

'Why we Left the Old Parties: Statement by Sir Oswald Mosley Announcing the Formation of "The New Party.", *New Party Broadcasts*, no.2, 4.

²¹Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden & Cedar Paul (New York: Dover, 1959) 1st pub. 1915

²²ibid., 22; Michels was not a lone voice and other such as Pareto and Mosca made contributions to elite theories of government which together have been described as a part of those "innovations of the 1890's" in social thought described as 'a revolt against positivism' by H.S. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 1959) 33-66, esp. 37

the emphasis on implementation of these policies; on putting ideas into action, on dynamism, and on getting things done. This principle of 'action' could take precedence over ideas of 'democracy' and 'liberty' defined by the liberal tradition in favour of a much greater, myth inspired, 'freedom'.²³ The idea of a five-member executive Cabinet represented the desire to bring about change. 'Party' signified the means to implement change; it was an organ of action and structured to avoid the apparent pitfall of political inertia, incessant argument, resulting in dissipation of national forces and national decline.

'New'

Notions associated with the 'new', with innovative ideas, were recurrent themes in Mosley's thought. The 'new' is an essential feature of the myth of the *airman* and, for Mosley, was located after the First World War.²⁴ Delineating the new in this way marked out the pre-1914 period as 'old'; it distinguishes between the modern and the new, between the industrial and the innovative; something could be 'modern', industrial but not necessarily 'new'. Mosley wanted to challenge "the 50 year-old system of Free Trade...and also the century-old system of protection"²⁵. To be 'new' denoted an object's position at the front edge of progress. New items left their mark in the material world, acting as concrete evidence of progress and mapping the course of this otherwise abstract

²³see 'Election will Annoy You-But keep your Eye on 1933', *Action*, vol.1, no.1, 8 October 1931, 10; Mosley, 'What is Personal Liberty', *Action*, vol.1, no.9, 3 December 1931, 1.

²⁴see chapter 2 above for 'myth of the airman' and Colin Cook, 'A Fascist Memory: Oswald Mosley and the Myth of the Airman', *European Review of History* v.4:2, (1997) 147-162

²⁵*The Times*, 2 March 1931, 14d.

concept. Progress, Mosley said, was "a river to which may be harnessed, in due course, all the energies of our now adolescent science to lift from mankind the burdens of poverty and toil".²⁶ Progress was believed to be as natural as the flow of a river and represented by an arrow directing civilisation on an evolutionary route to a higher plane. Mosley believed his policies were aimed at unleashing this evolutionary potential and not restricting choice or inhibiting expression, yet to a 'liberal' mind Mosley's talk of 'planning' and a 'five man executive Cabinet' were precise expressions of such a restriction on choice.²⁷

On a national level 'new' could be represented by a nation at the forefront of progress; a nation advanced on an evolutionary scale and moving towards a higher plane of existence.²⁸ Mosley pursued this goal and he wanted to tackle "the great task of bringing Britain up-to-date...[and]...giving new force and new life to the great public services".²⁹ 'Up-to-date' here would mean being in harmony with an assumed evolutionary process which was following a 'correct' historical direction. The 'new' nation would emerge from the old, but the traces of the old must be swept away to allow the green shoots of the new

²⁶Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 6 July 1927 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 208, col.13425

²⁷Mosley, *National Policy*, 48.

²⁸This interpretation follows post-Darwinian's such as Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) whose ideas on evolution, under the influence of Lamarck - who argued an individual organism is altered by individual life experiences - extended the idea of evolution as an organising principal to **all** realms of existence and not only creatures: The 'survival of the fittest' applied equally to societies and nations as to animals, Scott Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1991) 412-438.

²⁹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 23 July 1929, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 230, cols. 1160

to bloom.³⁰ And so the 'old gangs', the old monetary system symbolically presented in the Gold Standard, would all have to go. The Gold Standard which was "chiefly responsible for the great struggle of 1926", was also seen as the root cause of unemployment through the strangle hold it placed on the supply of credit for industry.³¹ The First World War not only drew a line dividing the old from the new but also demonstrated to Mosley the existence of a spirit and energy which could be harnessed to rejuvenate the national body. Mosley spoke of the need to:

"mobilise whatever resources of intelligence or vigour this nation possesses.... to overcome the problem. It is necessary to have the same spirit of unity and vigour which this country showed in its vast efforts in the late and catastrophic war"³²

And so Mosley, as a parliamentarian, evoked memories of the past war as a paradigm for the future; a source of inspiration to add impetus to policy. The distinction between the old and the new is a firmly entrenched, and a structurally powerful element in Mosley's ideological matrix with a fundamental dynamic futurist core, and so the foundation of the New Party represented not simply a 'new' party in the political spectrum but one which believed that it had a policy fundamentally of the new; 'new' was axiomatic to the New Party programme and to the expression of Mosley's ideological matrix.

In the second *New Party Broadcasts* Mosley published a statement announcing the formation of the New Party and he argued that the electorate did not have the opportunity

³⁰Mosley, 'Have We A Policy? - Yes!', *Action*, vol.1 no.12, 24 December 1931, 2

³¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 23 July 1929, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 230, cols. 1157

³²ibid., 4 July 1929. vol.229, col.269

of supporting new men and new measures. The other parties were by implication the 'old' parties while the New Party had a national policy providing plans to "transfer industry from a pre-war to a post-war basis."³³ The New Party was not 'new' for its own sake but for the nation: New Party policies were to re-new the nation and return Britain to its position previously at the cutting edge of the 'new' and evident in Industrial Revolution. In addition, the Empire also reflected the greatness of Britain and it was this attribute which was slipping away and it was the Empire Mosley wanted to protect while returning the nation to the forefront of progress. To Mosley the war signified Britain's entry into a new age, but he believed the nation and its government had failed to realise this. The New Party would act to bring about this realisation and kick-start Britain onto the road to a renewed futuristic greatness. Mosley's statement concluded:

"We appeal to all who love their country to join in a policy of action before it is too late. We ask for a mobilisation of energy, vitality and manhood to save and to rebuild the nation."³⁴

³³Sir Oswald Mosley, 'Why we left the Old Parties', *New Party Broadcasts*, 3.

³⁴*ibid.*, 4.

Policy of New Party

By 'unpacking' some of the connotations and meanings bound-up in the name 'New Party' two consistent ideological strands of Mosley's political thought have emerged. The perception of an irreversible break between the old and the new which had been marked by the war. Secondly, a belief that the nation needed 'awakening' and shown this development despite apathy on the part of the Government. The old/new dichotomy was aligned with the Government/nation. A party was required to organise, make decisions and to implement decisions without hindrance. If the nation was to recover 'greatness' and strength these issues needed to be addressed.

Mosley summarised the failings of the Government as an attack on the national standard of life. The crisis, underpinned by unemployment and wage reductions, was destroying the home market and Mosley offers two solutions: his policy, or any policy, just as long as there was "some policy to avert the disaster that immediately threatens the people of Great Britain."³⁵ The main policy document of the New Party, *A National Policy*, was issued on 24 February 1931 and Mosley followed this with a series of public meetings to spread the New Party word.

In essence, *A National Policy* was a reformulation of the Mosley Memorandum. This "programme of disciplined national effort to meet the emergency with which it is faced...[and] evoke a response that will impart a new impetus to British politics". The effect of the fall in general price level had shifted wealth from the active part of the

³⁵*The Times*, 14 February 1931, 7d.

economy, workers and employers, to the idle non-productive economic sector of rentiers and bondholders. Mosley described the rentier class as the "pampered darling of the present Government" and he admitted he was one of them.³⁶

Mosley described the need for a stable price level, and this held a position of over-riding importance to the extent that nothing should stand in its way. Stable prices were essential for successful national planning which would help to prevent economic forces from wasting their potential through misdirection. The policy looked to insulate Britain against world price fluctuations and dumping on the British economy which tariff method could not accommodate and which Mosley saw as outdated.³⁷ Mosley wanted to "mark off this area from the chaos of present world economy."³⁸ His ambition was to "safeguard the

³⁶Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 12 February 1931, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 248, col.689

³⁷Mosley maintained a fear of 'dumping' throughout his political career: In 1962 he argued the Soviets were a threat with their ability to drive down prices at the expense of their own people and dump excess production on the West in an attempt to undermine these economies, 'Mosley predicts the crisis', 1962 speech, cassette, *Chaos and Crisis: Mosley's Way Out*, side one (London: Action Society, 1983)

³⁸Mosley, *National Policy*, 24; cf. policy of Beaverbrook's Empire Free Trade outlined above. As early as 1921 Lord Rothermere, who would later use his newspaper the *Daily Mail* to support the BUF in its early days, was voicing similar words: "What we have got to do is to keep calm and mind our own business instead of worrying about the affairs of every other nation.... We must get back to the boundaries of our Empire... We have done enough crusading... We mean to have no more wars." Unlike Mosley though Rothermere called for a tightening of the fiscal belt following the expense of the war. Rothermere wrote "The first step towards regeneration must be a change of policy on the part of the Government, who are eating up the national resources" and this desire for national rejuvenation combined with a distrust of Government and in addition to the 'mind our own [Britain's] business' idea displays a remarkable parallel to features in Mosley's thought, see Lord Rothermere, *Solvency and Downfall: Squandermania and its Story* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921) 90, 95, & x. A further parallel with Mosley came later with Rothermere's interest in rearmament and especially of the air. He established 'The National League of Airman' which stood for election in 1935 and aimed at "awakening the country to its dangers

national interest, as distinct from a simple taxation device which may merely increase the profits of a sectional interest".³⁹ Commodity Boards would control importation and the Empire would be seen as an economic unit with centralised buying to "compel the rapid development of Empire economic unity."⁴⁰ The use of the new and technology were to be essential: "Science must be mobilised and applied by organised and systematic methods if any plans of national revival are to bear fruit."⁴¹

Beyond national and economic regeneration Mosley believed control over the economy would serve to fulfil his ambition of avoiding future warfare.⁴² Governments, he wrote, are not bellicose by nature, but in their struggle to find new markets interests clash and therefore, "anything which tends to put the economic life of nations on to an assured and stable basis will certainly promote the peace of the world."⁴³ To implement this policy Mosley saw a need to reform the machinery of Government "to ensure that the Government elected by the people should be in a position to implement the national

and the need for rearmament in the air". By 1938 "The Government of the day was then alive to the need for speedy rearmament. The nation was wide awake again" and the League folded. Rothermere also paid for a new aeroplane to be designed and built which was to be "best in the world" which he called 'The Britain First' the prototype of the Blenheim Bomber and in 1935 he wrote an article calling for an Air-Dictator, a British Goering, to be the Air Minister, *My Fight to Rearm Britain* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939) ch.9 'The National League of Airmen', ch.10 'The Britain First', ch.12 'Improving the Air Force'.

³⁹Oswald Mosley, *National Policy*, 19 & 20.

⁴⁰Mosley, *ibid.*, 27.

⁴¹*ibid.*, 38.

⁴²Again echoing the sentiments of Rothermere, see note 38

⁴³Mosley, *National Policy*, 32.

will."⁴⁴ To do this an inner Cabinet Committee of five or six men would be given charge of decisions; they would be ministers without portfolio, that is in his view, without the need or burden to run a department.⁴⁵ This is consistent with his earlier demand, during his early parliamentary days, that men in executive positions should be free to make the major decisions and not to be burdened with bureaucracy or detailed planning: the man and his task should be matched.⁴⁶

Mosley's proposed a number of work creation schemes to ease unemployment to be funded by loans.⁴⁷ These programmes carried in their design a socially [re]constructive ethos and included, housing and slum clearance, and the rationalisation of farming and agriculture. These measures went beyond a simple pragmatic approach to solving the unemployment problem by work provision schemes; they would function to revitalise the workforce of the nation by improving health and housing conditions in order to produce a healthier and invigorated nation.

The ambiguity of the term 'modernisation' was not lost on politicians and each wished to make it the exclusive property of their party. The New Party, as its name would suggest, had its claim on modernisation and demonstrated this in the 'Electricity and

⁴⁴ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ibid., 47.

⁴⁶Mosley had argued, in relation to the Air Ministry, that the political Head of Department should have sufficient time to examine and deal with the big problems and be relieved of excessive detail or responsibility beyond that achievable in a single full-time position. A single Head for two Departments was not, in Mosley's eyes, beneficial to the Government, see Chapter Two above.

⁴⁷Mosley, *National Policy*, 50.

Transport' section of *A National Policy*. The New Party, though, differentiated itself from the Government over these issues despite the apparent congruity in their claims over the modern nature of their proposals: the New Party demanded a far more speedy implementation of policy than the government. Mosley's party put the blame for this sluggishness on the machinery of Government which acted as a brake on the implementation of policy: the New Party would change this machinery of Government to facilitate a direct and quick implementation of policy decisions.⁴⁸ The emphasis was on action and dynamism as pivotal factors around which the machinery of government could organise itself and this emphasis distinguished the New Party from others and it is this principle which was central to the ideological matrix of Mosley.

Mosley emphasised invigorating the economy and putting it above all other concerns arguing that a nation fully at work would reduce the burden on the Insurance Fund, reduce taxation, leave more money circulating in the economy with the effect of vitalizing the economy. The full payment of the War Debt was to be put on hold in the belief it was 'pure folly' to attempt repayment without strengthening the national economy first and then, with full employment and the subsequent creation of wealth, the conditions would be made for the repayment of the debt. C.D.H Cole thought that although Mosley's policies were 'right' the Government were unable to sanction them because they were too expensive, inconsistent with Gold Standard economics, and involved giving up 'Free Trade',⁴⁹ the very obstructions Mosley's New Party plans would

⁴⁸Mosley, *National Policy*, 57.

⁴⁹G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948) 237

have removed.

Elite myth of the New Party (Action and the messenger-boy)

Having founded the New Party and published *The National Policy* Mosley ambitiously announced that some 400 candidates would stand at the next election, although in the event only twenty four seats were challenged.⁵⁰ Mosley's strategy was simple and conventional; to overthrow the existing system from within by using the democratic process. He believed the existence of a national crisis would lead to a crisis mentality driving a demand for action, decisive government, and the leadership offered by the New Party. The existence of the 'crisis', and Mosley's ideological imperative for immediate action, together demanded the New Party attempted its *coup* at one election rather than gradually building support over a number of years.⁵¹ Mosley believed his interpretation of the electorate's mind was the correct one. In addition, Mosley's interpretation of the nation as fundamentally existing in, and created by, the actions of its people, impelled him to conclude the nation would vote for the New Party as a reflexive response to the crisis: as a form of national self-defense, an automatic immune response to the threat of 'crisis'. This understanding of the situation meant that the voting pattern would cut across intellectual barriers and operate at an instinctive and reflexive level and the idea of 'saving the nation' would replace all notions of traditional democratic representation. With this ideological prejudice Mosley was impelled to believe the New Party **would be**

⁵⁰For the names of the New Party candidates and their constituencies see Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 273-4n.

⁵¹Mosley had already argued this point some years earlier in *Revolution by Reason* (London: ILP, 1925) 7

elected and that the rest **would** follow. Such grandiose plans, and belief in his own vision, point to an ideological mindset marking Mosley and a few others out as part of an elite cadre of visionary men prepared, inspired, and who would not perpetuate the "idle game into which politics has sunk without an effort to rouse the nation to action. It is necessary for a few to take the risk".⁵² While there is an element of bravado in these comments it is important to note that while Mosley's ideological matrix predisposed him to express particular opinions, it did not act as a determinant on his actions because there would always be more than one operative expression of the fundamental ideology in any given context. Mosley's political equation did not allow for the emergence of the 'National Government' which drew the emotive response of the electorate regarding the apparent national extent of the crisis which the New Party assumed would be theirs. Furthermore, the actual Conservative bias of the National Government gave the electorate a greater sense of security than Mosley's newly formed party could offer.

Mosley presented himself as the leader of a new elite and he correspondingly selected the leader of the Government as worthy of his attack. He described the Prime Minister as 'complacent', a trait which was "one of the most serious dangers the country has to confront".⁵³ Here he was in agreement with Bernard Shaw who saw MacDonald's move

⁵²*The Times*, 2 March 1931, 14d; Mosley's belief in the necessity of an enlightened elite cadre to lead the way for the masses can be seen as an expression of the process described by Michael Billig in his study of the British National Front described how a coterie keep alive the traditions of the organisation in order to preserve the core ideology from the contextual adjustments necessary in the face of the prevailing political standards, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) 98-99 & 174

⁵³Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 12 February 1931, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 248, cols.1686

to the nationalist idea as a move away from any socialist ambition, but also more of a threat to Britain than to Mosley.⁵⁴ Mosley's elite were prepared to take risks in the name of the 'ordinary' people, those "who have no political careers to lose, but who do love their country and are not willing to see her ruin and their own." Here the rhetoric of nationalism entered Mosley's remarks under the guise of a milder 'love' for one's country. The populist approach, appealing directly to the people in the name of the nation, could offset any image of Mosley as a domineering Leader/Dictator figure and this leadership position would be filled by 'the nation' dictating its needs through its constituent subjects. In this light Mosley appears as the nation's enlightened messenger-boy. Mosley made assumptions on the basis that a crisis would emerge and he avoided making promises beyond the New Party offering members an "opportunity to take part in a disciplined effort of national reconstruction, an effort to avert those disasters which are already coming upon us".⁵⁵

'Action', as we have seen, is a primary keyword in Mosley's ideology. *Action* was the name of the New Party's newspaper and the need to do something, anything, was an

⁵⁴Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: Vol. 3 The Lure of Fantasy* (London: Penguin Books, 1993) 110-1; MacDonald attracted criticism from socialists but not for cutting unemployment benefit, or for the formation of the National Government, but for the apparent and deliberate plotting he masterminded to bring the National Government into being. Furthermore, MacDonald was perceived to be turning his back on the unemployed and aligning himself with their class enemy, David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977) 642 & 654

⁵⁵Letter from Oswald Mosley to audience at Memorial Hall Farringdon Street London when he was unable to speak because of attack of pleurisy, *The Times*, 6 March 1931, 16c.

essential feature of Mosley's thought.⁵⁶ Mosley identified waiting or standing still as tantamount to succumbing to the process of decay and part of a process which inevitably resulted in national decline. From this position he perceived the economic power of the nation as stagnating and settling in the hands of the non-productive sectors of the nation such as the *rentier* class. Mosley saw the Treasury and banking policy buttressing this trend and claimed it favoured "the idle against the worker and producer".⁵⁷ One post-war analysis of the economics of this period does suggest Mosley was thinking along the right lines, adding that the 'hard core' of unemployment could only be absorbed with a "vigorous policy designed to increase production for the home market", and that opportunities to modernise and improve the home market base had been missed and Britain did not recognise the fall in its proportion of the export trade.⁵⁸ Mosley's writings do indicate an awareness of these economic trends and express his frustration with the British Parliamentary system which prevented the implementation of effective action; a criticism which encouraged Mosley to the politics of popular activism and away from parliamentary politics. The policy of deflation infuriated him:

"These suggestions to put the nation to bed on a starvation diet are the suggestions of an old woman in fright. The exact reverse is what is needed; a policy of manhood which takes the nation out into the field and can build up its muscles and its constitution in effort....It is a policy of planning which can only

⁵⁶*Action* would be revived as a newspaper title for the BUF during the second half of the 1930s.

⁵⁷Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 12 February 1931, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 248, col.690

⁵⁸W. Arthur Lewis *Economic Survey 1919-1939* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949) 87-89

be entrusted to executive Government. The way to meet this situation is not by the negative of panic but by the positive of action."⁵⁹

A loathing and fear of inactivity led Mosley to place 'action' in an axiomatic position in his formulation of policy to rejuvenate the nation. Dynamism and action were characteristics of the myth of the airman and were constant influences on Mosley's operative ideology.⁶⁰ Mosley's economic theory favoured a dynamic economy, a view endorsed by the economic modernisers such as Keynes, even at the expense of economic balance and free trade conventions. Keynes wrote of economic rebirth at the end of the First World War:

"The forces of the nineteenth century have run their course and are exhausted. The economic motives and ideals of that generation no longer satisfy us: we must find a new way and must suffer again the *malaise*, and finally the pangs, of a new industrial birth."⁶¹

In his 1935 formulation, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*,⁶² Keynes refuted the classical approach to unemployment which advocated wage reduction to deal with unemployment. Keynes depicted unemployment as the equilibrating

⁵⁹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 12 February 1931, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 248, col.691

⁶⁰see Chapter Two and Three above

⁶¹J.M Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes. Volume 2: The Economic Consequences of The Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1971) 161

⁶²J.M Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes. Volume 7: The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1973, 1st. published 1936)

mechanism in the economy between capital outlay and savings. When savings outran capital outlay there would be a reduction in stock value reducing profits and causing unemployment. And Mosley's interpretation of the nation as generated at the site of productive employment drew him to Keynesian ideas.⁶³ Positing the idea of 'nation' in the activities between individuals, encapsulated in a shared cultural knowledge rather than in any particular physical environment, demanded perpetual activity without which the nation would begin to atrophy and die.

What emerged during the days of the New Party was a shift in emphasis of the operative dimensions of the ideological expression of 'action' and 'nationality' stemming from Mosley's ideological matrix. These themes, action and nationality, can be read as consistently informing Mosley's utterances and texts to varying degrees. In his earliest remarks the influence of 'action' and 'the nation' are *less pronounced in his texts and utterances*, but they can be seen to generally organise Mosley's thinking. During the life of the New Party these two themes move from a fundamental to operative dimension and become evident in the 'real', exoteric world, that is, they become expressed in Mosley's utterances and writings rather than simply influencing them. 'Action' and 'nationhood' amalgamate producing a policy of national action and action as nation; the purity of action transcending barriers to 'truth' which exists for Mosley in the nation.⁶⁴ At the

⁶³R.F. Harrod, *The Life of John Maynard Keynes* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972, 1st. published Macmillan 1951) 536-542 and passim

⁶⁴Mosley's first words in the first edition of the New Party's newspaper *Action* reads "The Nation demands action" under the headline: 'Crisis: by Oswald Mosley. The Nation Calls for Action at Once - But Our Rulers go on with the Game', 8 October 1931.

delivery point of action, where an idea becomes transformed in the material world, barriers to the expression of the nation would, in Mosley's opinion, dissolve and in that moment the nation could be 'truly' expressed. The site of financial exchange is parallel to the site of Mosley's nation.⁶⁵ The nation which Mosley was experiencing after the war was a simulacrum; to him it represented a formation which did not possess those properties he would attributed to Britain. Yet Mosley did not want to return to a pre-modern past, which was not only impossible but would repeat the failure of the existing Government, rather he used such a history of Britain to summon up the emotional forces which could release the national mind from the shackle of dogmatic individualism which, in modern times, he charged with bringing about national decline. Later when openly fascist, Mosley used an idealised, mythical, past which appeared 'uncontaminated' by the deficiencies he saw in the contemporary world.⁶⁶

During his brief life as a parliamentary representative of the New Party,⁶⁷ Mosley attacked the Government for lacking any 'real' policy suggesting the Government merely stumbled from measure to measure.⁶⁸ He attacked the Opposition for simply blocking policy and not offering a constructive policy to replace it. Mosley's solution was an

⁶⁵see Chapter Four above

⁶⁶Antony Smith describes nationalism, at its broadest level, as: "More than a style and doctrine of politics, nationalism is a *form of culture* - an ideology, a language, mythology, symbolism and consciousness - that achieved global resonance, and the nation is a type of identity whose meaning and priority is presupposed by this form of culture", *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991) 91-92

⁶⁷New Party members never became MP's in their own right and their presence in Parliament was simply as defectors from the other major Parties.

⁶⁸Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 8 July 1931, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 254, cols.2145

increase in the power of the executive to allow the implementation of a policy of "rapid action". He proposed a General Powers Bill and denied that it would lead to a dictatorship because Parliament would retain the power to dismiss the Government by a vote of censure.⁶⁹ Mosley believed the need for rapid action by the government was one idea generally held by the nation and that his solutions were rooted in the general will of the people.⁷⁰ Mosley held views which conflicted with both sides of the House and this illustrates how he was beginning to shift the focus of his politics away from the closed debating chambers of Parliament and out to the nation as he began to find his ideas gaining a greater resonance outside of Parliament than within Parliament. Mosley believed the crisis was an 'obvious fact' which demanded action and a determined policy.⁷¹ With ideas of 'action' and 'nation', combined with a distrust of the prevalent notion of democracy, Mosley did "not believe in the cure of fasting, but in the cure of effort" to escape from the slump, and he continued:

"I believe that the way out is not the way of the monk but the way of the athlete.

It is only by exertion, it is only by endeavour, by a great attempt to reorganise our industries, that this country can win through."⁷²

⁶⁹ibid., 9 September 1931. vol.256, col.159-160

⁷⁰Mosse describes the basis of fascist politics in the 18th century idea of popular sovereignty expressed by Rousseau in the concept of the 'general will', George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fetting, 1975) 1-2

⁷¹Mosley, Speech to the House of Commons, 8 September 1931 *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) Fifth Series, vol. 256, cols.73-74

⁷²ibid., col.82.

Two weeks later in the Gold Standard (Amendment) Bill, Mosley appealed for a policy of decision after he had repeatedly expressed a fear of national disaster and his belief that a crucial moment had arisen. In his speech he emphasised the importance of that moment for action and said:

"The Government by the action which they have take and the vigour which they show have the future position of this country closely in their hands at a very crucial moment [...] If this situation is allowed to drift, we shall fall into hopeless, irretrievable disaster. If, on the other hand, it is gripped and seen as an opportunity which may be taken, I believe that this nation may emerge from the troubles of this moment in a stronger position that it has known for many years past."⁷³

Among his last words in parliament Mosley's fundamental ideology was seeking dynamism and action *through the operative description of events in term of a watershed moment of crisis, combined with the possibility of renewal*. From here it was a short step to fascism.

The General Election of 1931 denied the New Party any representation in Parliament. The government called the election because the Labour members of the National Government failed to support its policy of deflation, cuts, and hence the country came off the Gold Standard. The election did not produce a single New Party MP and the National Government resumed with a policy Mosley saw as complacent. To him, the National Government tinkered with a system of Protection and Import Taxes, introduced a

⁷³ibid., vol.256, 21 September 1931, cols. 1319-1323

humiliating Means Test, and were presented an image of purposelessness despite stumbling into a supply of cheap money. Dominated by conservatives, the National Government provided the political context for Mosley's infamous political manoeuvres.

Ironically, it was the moment of electoral defeat which saw the New Party's newspaper *Action* coming into the world, under the editorship of Harold Nicolson. The paper demanded the creation not only of a new political force but also one that "transforms every phase of national life to post-war purposes".⁷⁴ To Mosley the electoral rejection of the New Party held symbolic significance because of policies which rejected the "transient labours of a Nineteenth century Parliament" to allow the advancement of a new [Mosley] creation "far more relevant to the modern age".⁷⁵ The sense of renewal pervaded Mosley's article. He could now write free from the conventions of Parliamentary debate and Party allegiance. Even at this early stage the term 'fascism' was connected with the New Party as his political associate John Strachey observed: "Mosley began more and more to use the word Fascism in private" after the Ashton by-election, and fascism was openly discussed in the pages of *Action*.⁷⁶

The New Party and Fascism

The main reference point generally used to mark Mosley's move to the fascist camp came from John Strachey who recalled the scene on the steps of the Town Hall at Ashton-

⁷⁴Mosley, *Action*, vol.1, no.1, 8 October 1931, 1.

⁷⁵ibid.

⁷⁶John Strachey, *The Menace of Fascism* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933) 161; *Action*, vol.1, no.1, 8 October 1931, 10

Under-Lyne following the by-election May 1931 called after the death of the Labour MP Mr. A. Bellamy. The New Party put up their candidate Mr. A. Young who received 4,472 votes (16% of total votes) and was seen, by Labour supporters, to have allowed a Conservative win by splitting the Labour vote and losing the Labour majority. The Labour candidate Mr. A Gordon summed up the bitter feeling of defeat saying, "We have here a small group of deserters who have handed the seat to the Conservatives". Parliamentarians had greeted Mosley's entrance with an "outburst of ironical cheering from Government benches mingled with loud cries of 'Blackleg'",⁷⁷ but in contrast, Mosley was "Greatly impressed with the result at Ashton",⁷⁸ and when faced by the angry jeering crowd at Ashton after the results were announced, and being unable to make his speech, said to Strachey: "that is the crowd that has prevented anyone doing anything in

⁷⁷*The Times*, 9 July 1931, 7c.

⁷⁸*The Times*, 1 May 1931, 14e. The results suggest that, if anything, the New Party took the Liberal vote. The 1929 election results were:

Labour	13,170	44.5% (majority 3407)
Conservative	9,763	33.0%
Liberal	6,693	22.5%

The 1931 results were:

Conservative	12,420	44.5% (+11.5%) (majority 1415)
Labour	11,005	39.5% (- 5%)
New Party	4,472	16% (- 6.5% against Liberal vote)

The Conservative 1931 vote took from both the Liberal and the Labour voting pools suggesting it was as much the absence of the Liberal Party as it was the emergence of the New Party which brought about the Conservative victory. Skidelsky suggests the 8.4% swing to the Right during 1930-31 would have handed the seat to the Tories anyway, and without the New Party intervention, Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 253. Despite the statistics Mosley was portrayed by the Left as a traitor of Socialism which provided 'justification' for future socialist assailants. Furthermore, this incident demonstrates the historical power of myth over more tangible and easily quantifiable variables.

England since the war." Strachey continued:

"At that moment British Fascism was born. At that moment of passion, and of some personal danger, Mosley found himself almost symbolically aligned against the workers. He had realized in action that his programme could only be carried out after the crushing of the workers and their organisations."⁷⁹

Strachey's voice appears to come from another evolutionary branch of socialism stemming from the same political genus as Mosley's ideology but developing in a different way, towards communism. Yet, both Strachey and Mosley had their roots were in similar ground and Strachey in 1931 had suggested the formula of the New Party should be 'National Socialism'.⁸⁰ Strachey's split with the New Party came after he submitted a memorandum *The New Party and Russia* which proposed looking at other planned economies for trading arrangements and breaking with those powers attempting to restore prewar international capitalism, being those led by France and the USA. To Mosley Strachey's proposal of "close economic relations with the Russian Government" would be "contradicting the whole basis of the policy we had agreed together."⁸¹ Although Strachey described Mosley's objection as a coming from a fear of losing Conservative and capitalist support, a pragmatic response to prevent the withdrawal of funding, but this alone does not account for the purpose of Mosley's political actions.⁸²

⁷⁹Strachey, *The Menace of Fascism*, 161.

⁸⁰Harold Nicolson Diaries (unpublished) 16 June 1931; Mosley's BUF added 'National Socialist' to its name in 1936; see also chapter five for 'proto-national socialism' in Mosley's thought whilst a Parliamentarian.

⁸¹John Strachey *The New Party and Russia* (unpublished, 1931); Mosley, *My Life*, 285.

⁸²Strachey, *The Menace*, 164.

These are far more usefully understood by reference to the ideal type ideological matrix which represents a persistent demand to progressively strengthen Britain through a variety of operative measures.

The split between the left wing and the centre of the New Party had been foreseen by Robert Forgan, Mosley's first deputy in the BUF and came to fascism from the political left,⁸³ who described Strachey and Allen Young, who supported Strachey's memorandum, as "embittered bolshevists going into the Communist fold", and their resignations from the New Party came within a few days.⁸⁴ The departure of Strachey and his claims that Mosley had positioned himself in opposition to the workers set alongside Mosley's claim that the crowd at Ashton-Under-Lyne were the sway of, "experienced and entirely dedicated agents of communism always play[ing] on the anarchy inherent in the Left of labour to secure confusion", indicates a fundamental break between the two men stemming from their divergent comprehensions of the nation.⁸⁵ While Strachey held a great concern attacking the inequalities within the nation and supporting one class of workers, Mosley held a broader vision of a holistic and corporate nation, with all sectors acting to express that nation with 'equal' opportunity in the face of the nation, but with inherent stratification among its people. Strachey sought to enhance the sectional interests of the 'workers' against the other 'Capitalist' sections of society, whereas Mosley sought

⁸³Forgan left the BUF over his mismanagement of party funds and his disagreements with Mosley over violence and anti-semitism, see Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 133

⁸⁴Harold Nicolson Diaries 22 July 1931 (unpublished); and for events on the day of resignation 23 July 1931 (published) 82-3, and Skidelsky *Mosley*, 260-1

⁸⁵Mosley, *My Life*, 284-5.

to maintain the nation as the organising principle from which all else followed. Their fundamental difference was over the idea and role of 'the nation' in policy, with Strachey compressing the national component and Mosley inflating it.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Mosley's holistic national corporatism allowed him to work and deal with capitalists, he met William Morris, described as "a right-wing Conservative of an imperialist stamp" who saw the need for a 'real Leader' and provided the New Party with £50 000 to finance *Action* along with support for the youth clubs.⁸⁷ But Mosley was a pragmatist and prepared to approach any possible benefactor such as the American Randolph Hearst.⁸⁸ Strachey wrote in his resignation letter to Mosley that they had "obviously quite different conceptions of what the New Party ought to be and how it could succeed".⁸⁹ Mosley, who publicly showed little remorse at the departure of those leaving his party, claimed they simply saw the New Party as a factional break within the Labour Party rather than seeing the New party as "a new national movement", and this comment indicates the operation

⁸⁶The degree to which each, Mosley and Strachey, influenced New Party policy, and earlier policy generally associated with Mosley, is difficult to discern, for example Hugh Thomas in his biography *John Strachey* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973) moves Mosley from the centre of policy making in favour of Strachey, 92-94; Skidelsky favours his biographic subject, *Mosley*, 138; and it is of little surprise to find Mosley considering himself to provide the creative partner in their relationship, *My Life*, 185.

⁸⁷Martin Adeney, *Nuffield: A biography* (London: Eolbert Hale, 1993) 120 & 124-6; Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 242.

⁸⁸see Skidelsky *Mosley*, 255; it was Nicolson, not Mosley, who thought that to be "financed by a foreign source" was a bad idea, Nicolson *Diaries* (unpublished) 23 June 1931; it is interesting to note that Mussolini kept in close contact with Hearst who had praised Mussolini "for his outstanding ability", Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London: Longman, 1976) 13; in his autobiography Mosley mentions meeting with Hearst's wife on social occasions but did not meet with William Randolph Hearst, *My Life*, 196-8; of course Mosley forged an important association with the British press baron Rothermere.

⁸⁹Letter to Mosley, 22 July 1931, Nicholas Mosley, *Rules of the Game*, 189.

of the fundamental ideological matrix seeking operative dimensions to function in the world. Mosley believed those who deserted him "would not bind themselves to any country in the world" and this fact was demonstrated to Mosley in the Strachey memorandum.⁹⁰

Mosley's politics, informed by his ideological matrix, created the impression that Mosley held a rare and fortuitous knowledge and insight into the 'true' nature of the British nation and if that 'truth' could be presented to the people of the nation they would awaken and rise up spontaneously to set about rebuilding the nation.⁹¹ Mosley saw himself as one among those "who have forsaken their various *illusions* of progress for the new and orderly *reality* of progress".⁹² His message sought to describe fundamental and irreversible changes in the world economy, *but it was not the orthodox message at that time* when all was being sacrificed to remain on the Gold Standard.⁹³ Mosley described how the relationship between scientific production and consumption was balanced in the nineteenth century but altered "under the stress of War and post-War development". Now,

⁹⁰*The Times*, 25 July 1931, 14c.

⁹¹Skidelsky describes Mosley's attitude to life, in contrast to Strachey's, as pagan accepting life as it came without remorse for 'lower' impulses or any thought that may block the path to higher things, Skidelsky, *Mosley*, 137, and this concurs with the notion of Mosley as 'romantic', seeking "romance through power" Cecil F. Melville, *The Truth About the New Party* (London: Wishart & Co., 1931) 24; or romance as his "great failing", Harold Nicolson, *Diaries*, 106; Beatrice Webb believed Mosley was originally attracted to the Labour Party for the "Rhetorical, picturesque and emotional aspects...which may become his snare", *The Diary of Beatrice Webb volume four: 1924-1942 'The Wheel of Life'*, eds. Norman & Jeanne Mackenzie (London: Virago, 1985) 20.

⁹²Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: BUF, 1932) 15

⁹³Britain finally moved off the Gold Standard during September 1931

Mosley argued, "Without precedent or parallel in history ... The effective demand of the world ... [was to be] hopelessly outstripped."⁹⁴ Mosley's special national vision was reported in *The Times*: "He said that those associated with him were trying to create a new political psychology, a conception of national renaissance, of new manhood and vigour which denied the whole thesis of national surrender to which the present House of Commons was attached".⁹⁵ Mosley's aristocratic upbringing; his membership of the elite Flying Corps; his awareness of the limitation of action relieved only through a correct correspondence of, and innate resonance between, actor and action; his perceptive analysis of post-war economic developments; and his understanding of 'the nation'; the cumulative result of these elements elevated his self-belief to that of Leader and national saviour. Of greater significance to this study is the role of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix which is expressed through these operative modes. All these strands came together in the black fabric of 'fascism' woven on the loom of the New Party.

Mosley can be described as possessing a belief that he was at the vanguard of a new world, a political futurist, dedicated to the rejuvenate Britain. This created, at an operative dimension, a zeal and purpose of missionary desire to spread his word with demands for a Government with 'guts' that would put Britain first before the rest of the world,⁹⁶ and in a letter to all the branches of the New Party Mosley called for big open-air demonstrations in London, in all prominent centres before the opening of Parliament to

⁹⁴Mosley speech on 'The Policy and Aims of the New Party', *The Times*, 1 July 1931, 16c.

⁹⁵*The Times*, 1 July 1931, 16d; the language of renewal here is similar to Keynes after the War, see above

⁹⁶*The Times*, 3 August 1931, 12c.

demand 'Action from Parliament'.⁹⁷ He had begun to use the technique of the spectacle and of the emotions to advance his 'scientific' cause.⁹⁸ Having found the Parliamentary system unable and unwilling to act to save the nation Mosley sought a direct appeal to the nation; to the man and woman on the street - the masses and to raise them out of their poverty by revealing the, Mosley interpretation of, reality of national decline which they unknowingly perpetuated but could still halt and reverse.

Violent meetings and street politics

The recruitment of Ted 'Kid' Lewis to the New Party marked a strategic and ideological development in Mosley's ideas. *With this appointment Mosley moved towards the politics of the street and the fist which would lay the ground for his future notoriety.* Ted Lewis was an ex-welter weight boxing champion of the world to whom Mosley was drawn after seeing him fight.⁹⁹ In his speech announcing the selection of Lewis to contest the seat at St. George's-in-the-East Mosley described the closeness of sport and politics in English national life and would help create the spirit of a national 'come-back' the New Party would appeal directly to the youth of the country.¹⁰⁰ This association between politics and sport is not surprising in the light of our description of Mosley's nation and the conceptual site of its construction, that is, between the actions of individuals and

⁹⁷*The Times*, 28 August 1931, 12c.

⁹⁸cf. Beatrice Webb's 1924 remarks on Mosley, note 91 above

⁹⁹*My Life*, 302.

¹⁰⁰Mosley's sport was fencing and he was a member of the British team for the last time in Paris World Championships in 1937; according to Mosley, the blackshirted uniform of the BUF represented a classless comradeship styled on the fencing jacket as a tribute to Mosley, *My Life*, 368 & 302.

displaying only traces in the material world but not its essence: sport promoted action and participation opposing lethargy. The New Party Youth movement would be organised to promote athletics throughout the country but each member would give some time to the study of politics and the problems confronting the country.¹⁰¹ Peter Howard, a rugby hero was also welcomed into the New Party and this gave a further impetus to the physical aspect of the organisation whilst those associated with the 'intellectual' development of the Party's image clustered under the wing of Nicolson as he worked on their party newspaper *Action*.¹⁰²

Violence at New Party meetings was directed at Mosley who, in one incidence, was hit by a stone on the back of his head at a rowdy meeting in Glasgow just a fortnight after the announcement of Lewis as New Party candidate. This attack followed Mosley's attempt to outline the causes of his resignation from the Labour Party when a chorus sang the 'Red Flag' and 'International' amid cries of 'Traitor'.¹⁰³ New Party meetings were often the centre of such attacks and were characterised by banter and violence; chairs were flung, free fights broke out to the singing of socialist anthems, to which Mosley once responded to by singing 'Land of Hope and Glory'. For his part, Mosley made no

¹⁰¹*The Times*, 11 September 1931, 7e; see advertisement for NUPA, the 'Youth Movement of the New Party' which appeals to 'Young Men!' offering a number of sports and 'Debating, speech-making, political training. The 'talks' give an indication of its political direction:

"December 22nd Sir Oswald Mosley
29th Hitler's nephew on Hitler
January 5th Bennett on 'The March on Rome'
12th Randolph Churchill"

Action, 24 December 1931, back cover.

¹⁰²Peter Howard wrote on sport for *Action*.

¹⁰³*The Times*, 18 September 1931, 7c.

attempt to calm the audience, and he would willingly attack those in his way and apparently revelled in the events. Explaining his actions Mosley said:

"I went down into the body of the hall in order to appeal to free speech and to deal with interrupters. They began to fight, and, as is the custom of the New Party, we fought back. We broke up the meeting ourselves rather than have it broken up."¹⁰⁴

Yet despite a willingness to adopt a violent response to opposition Mosley was obedient in the face of the law and when he went outside a hall meeting and climbed on a vehicle to speak to the waiting crowd outside he returned to his hotel immediately after the police said he was contravening a by-law. Again, later, the Battle of Cable Street would provide a more notorious example of this obedience to the police when he obeyed the police request to re-route his march to avoid a confrontation with anti-fascists.¹⁰⁵

Mosley was using two political techniques at two different venues: in Parliament, where he demanded a policy of vigour and decision, and on the street where this message was

¹⁰⁴*The Times*, 19 October 1931, 18b; compare this citation with the statement of Walter Jennings and Richard Thomas Cornwall who claimed Mosley assaulted them at a meeting at the Rag Market Birmingham on 18 October. Their description of Mosley's behaviour concurs with Mosley's words quoted here. Mosley claimed he used a minimum of force in self-defence and both summonses against him were dismissed, *The Times*, 11 November 1931, 1931, 6d.

¹⁰⁵During the life of the BUF Mosley's awareness of surveillance by the State may account his adherence to the law but his imminent and secret marriage to Diana in Germany may also influenced his behaviour at the 'Battle of Cable Street', Robert Skidelsky, *Interests and Obsessions: Selected Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1993) 223-4; The evidence of the New Party would suggest Mosley instinctively obeyed the law and would not openly flout it, see Richard Thurlow, *The Secret State: British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995) 206-7

put into action, engaging with the nation directly. The development of the action orientated and violent politics of the street seemed to be inevitable after the New Party failed to be democratically elected and the move towards a 'fascist' style of political activism was well underway before the electoral disaster of 27 October, not least because it readily fulfilled the demand for a direct operative dimension to Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix.

In the event of the 1931 General Mosley's election campaign was "burning to spread a new creed" with such enthusiasm he may have spread himself a little thin on his own territory of Stoke.¹⁰⁶ His New Party creed appealed to the younger generation offering a national plan for a national crisis, and to Parliament a group of "live men who new their own minds, who had a definite policy, and who would put some life into the House of Commons",¹⁰⁷ in contrast to the apparently feeble pretence offered by the National Government.

At a New Party meeting Mosley said it was the violence against them which forced them to be fascist and that a trained and disciplined force was necessary. Uniforms were discussed along with the New Party youth movement which was to be VOLTs (vigour, order, loyalty, triumph).¹⁰⁸ This force was already being formed in the New Party clubs and was justified through the ideological connection Mosley had made between

¹⁰⁶*The Times*, 16 October 1931, 8c.

¹⁰⁷*ibid.*, 23 October 1931, 7g; 26 October 1931, 14d.

¹⁰⁸Nicolson, *Diaries*, 21 & 22 September 1931, 91; *Action*, vol.1, no.1, 8 October 1931, 29.

athleticism and politics.¹⁰⁹ And so Mosley's politics were adopting the paramilitary trappings and leadership principle associated with fascism in its drive to regenerate Britain. But was the New Party 'fascist'?

Was Mosley's ideology 'fascist' at the time of the New Party?

Mosley had tried and failed to use the democratic system to bring about change. At bottom he wanted to invigorate the nation; for Britain to regain some its former glory but, and in order to do this, the nation needed to face the fact that an irreversible and fundamental change had occurred in the world; that the past could not be returned to and that the nation must renew itself by bathing in the invigorating waters of up-to-date technological and economic knowledge. Existing political parties could not, or would not, make substantial advance on his schemes and so he created his own New Party which preceded his move to fascism. As discussed earlier in this chapter Mosley saw the New Party as attracting new men "in type the dedicated blackshirt"¹¹⁰ but it was also noted that Mosley tactically denied being fascist during this period. The question here is simple: was the New Party 'fascist' in all but name?

Using Griffin's ideal type definition of the mythic core of generic fascism as a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism, signs of fascism in the New Party can be detected.¹¹¹ The New Party was populist. The New Party looked to the people as the site

¹⁰⁹see *Action*, 24 December 1931, rear cover.

¹¹⁰Mosley, *My Life*, 285.

¹¹¹Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 26 & passim; and *Fascism* (Oxford: OUP, 1995) 1-12, & passim.

of the national regeneration. Mosley was aware of the New Party's weak electoral position and said that New Party members could only seek to 'influence' parliament from within. In the event the only New Party MP's were to be those who defected from the other Parties and they all failed to return to parliament at the General Election. "Meanwhile," Mosley wrote, "in the country, the fundamental task of new creation can proceed, which is far more relevant to the modern age than transient labours of a nineteenth century Parliament." The real site of national regeneration was among the people, in the streets, so to speak, and Mosley looked to create a movement to "transform every phase and aspect of national life" not to simply capture political power.¹¹² Mosley and New Party fulfils the 'populist' category of Griffin's ideal type of generic fascism.

The writings of the New Party members, including Mosley, held at their core a palingenetic myth, the rebirth component of our ideal type. The nation was perceived as in decline, "from the first position in the world to our present [1931] situation", and politicians are blamed for this fall. Despite this Mosley spoke directly to the nation and its apparent 'knowledge'. He said: "All this humiliation we suffer while we know that the real strength, vitality and loyalty of the nation is as great as ever before if only it can be mobilised for the constructive purpose of national reorganisation"¹¹³ The New Party outlined its belief "that the old world is dead", continuing: "We believe that from its ashes will rise a new world more scientific, more human, and far more enjoyable.... Week by week you will see the sunlight glimmering at the end of this dark forest."¹¹⁴ The myth

¹¹²*Action*, vol.1, no.1, 8 October 1931, 1.

¹¹³*ibid.*

¹¹⁴*ibid.*, 3.

of rebirth is evident in these writings. The national crisis is, to the New Party, a symptom of a flawed political system. The National Government superficially stole the limelight by playing the national card but Mosley was keen to point out the Ministers in the National Government were the same men who had been in power, and in Government, for a number of years and were themselves part of the national problem.¹¹⁵ For Mosley this represented proof of the self-perpetuating failure of the system. It is out of the chaos and crisis, described in New Party texts, that the New Party predicted the emergence of a new world creating images of national re-birth common with those espoused by fascist ideologues on the Continent.

The New Party has fulfilled two criteria essential to our chosen ideal type model of generic fascism - 'populist' and 'palingenetic'. The third main feature 'ultranationalism' is the area where, at first sight, a study of the New Party is inconclusive. The New Party presented itself initially as an alternative to the existing parties and, as such, sought to obtain power through the existing democratic system. Aware his policies were criticised for being undemocratic Mosley argued that his policy was determined by the problem it addressed. In the face of what he perceived as a crisis there was a necessity for immediate action even if that demanded the overriding of traditional democratic methods which would anyway, in time, become overwhelmed by the crisis.¹¹⁶ Ultranationalism, that extreme nationalism whose nature rejects liberalism and its institutions,¹¹⁷ was an undercurrent in New Party policy but there is a tendency to mute the 'national' and

¹¹⁵ibid., vol.1, no. 11, 17 December 1931, 1.

¹¹⁶Oswald Mosley, *A National Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1931) 61

¹¹⁷for 'ultranationalism' see Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 37.

present it under the guise of a 'patriotic identity' or 'love of ones country', rather than a nationalism which acts as an overriding, dictating principle filling the lacunae in social existence left by the 'death of God',¹¹⁸ the religious source of normative values in society, and the disenchantment of society under the attack of modernism and science. At the outset the central political focus of the New Party was on a revision rather than revolution in government and parliamentary systems to enable the country to be brought up-to-date in contrast to the British Union of Fascists policy which was distinctly and openly revolutionary.¹¹⁹ This analysis was in-turn based on an interpretation of the crisis as existing nationally and therefore demanded 'national' answers.¹²⁰ By the December of 1931 following the overwhelming electoral defeat in October Mosley placed more emphasis on apparently 'romantic', irrational, and emotive aspects of his appeal to the nation, and ideas of revision and reform were replaced by revolution and the sacrifice of youth to the nation. "Yes" Mosley wrote the New Party is fascist, but not by following the Italian example but through possessing the same ideological goal of national

¹¹⁸Nietzsche wrote in paligenetic mode: "The greatest recent event - that 'God is dead', that belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable ... We philosophers and 'free spirits' in fact feel at the news that the 'old God is dead' as if illuminated by a new dawn...", *The Gay Science*, section 343 (1887) reproduced in *A Nietzsche Reader*, trans. & ed. by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1977) 208-209

¹¹⁹Compare: "We differ from the old parties in our demand for a complete revision of Parliament", 'Statement by Sir Oswald Mosley Announcing the Formation of "The New Party."' in *New Party Broadcasts no.2 'Why we Left the Old Parties'*, 3, with: "In fact Fascism is the greatest constructive and revolutionary creed in the world...*in objective it is revolutionary or it is nothing*", Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (London: BUF, 1932) 15

¹²⁰Oswald Mosley, *A National Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1931) 5 & 6; writing in the same year an admirer of Mussolini's Italy, Major J.S. Barnes, describes this phenomena in relation to the General Will which "is dormant in the absence of any acute crisis" but under such stress rises up in a nation, *Fascism* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931) 94

renaissance which demands, "a movement of youth, which willingly and gladly accepts discipline, effort and sacrifice....by which the modern State alone can be built."¹²¹

The New Party was created and ideologically structured by its founding leader Mosley. It moved, ideologically, from a nationalist to an ultra-nationalist position; from a 'nationalism' as a political guiding light compatible with liberal pluralism to a 'nationalism' possessing a blinding glare diminishing and overriding the local colour of individualism in the interest of a national hue while casting the darkest shadows. Crucially, Mosley moved the operative expression of his ideological matrix from one within parliamentary democracy to one outside liberal democracy as a response to changes in the environment of its reception. The fundamental ideological matrix remained consistently pursuing a strong and futuristic Britain. And it is into these dark fascist shadows Mosley ventured elevating himself to the position of Leader with unquestionable executive power, and these overt fascist policies will be explored in the next chapter.¹²²

¹²¹*Action*, vol.1, no.12, 24 December 1931, 1.

¹²²see the rule book of the BUF where the decisions of the Leader (at that time Mosley) are held to be the final word on policy and the final port-of-call for any internal complaints: The document details the structure of Leadership at all levels of the BUF organisation, *British Union Constitution and Rules (General)* (1938) passim.

Seven

A Party of the [corporate] Spirit

Mosley remained faithful to electoral politics until the day the New Party failed. He believed the nation would vote him into power and then he could set about reorganising the administration of state power. Mosley never fully lost faith with the democratic system and throughout his career put himself, or other associates, forward at elections.¹ It would appear that he was fundamentally inspired by a belief that the nation would call him because he alone could provide the means to turn the nations demands into reality and he expressed this belief in himself in 1947 when he wrote, "I must do this thing because no other can"². The strength of this belief focused Mosley's politics the task of awakening the nation to a truth which was so self-evident to him; a truth which required nothing more than the nation to `be itself'. The political actions which resulted from this belief necessitated an attack on state institutions which had prevented the `true' nation to be expressed: the very nation Mosley believed would call him into power. Convinced of his purpose, Mosley interpreted any denial of electoral success as a perversion of the

¹for example The British Union [of Fascists] planned to fight two parliamentary by-elections in 1940 at Silvertown and N.E. Leeds which was within two months of the closure of the British Union and the arrest of members under Defence Regulation 18B(1a). The description of the two candidates highlight aspects of their lives which can be found in Mosley's career: Thomas Moran was an ex-R.A.F. serviceman and ex-official of the Labour Party, and Sidney Allen an ex-serviceman, *Action*, no.206, 14 February 1940. On release Mosley formed the Union Movement and campaigned for the North Kensington seat at the 1959 general election and claimed the UM did not stand for election for fear of taking away the conservative vote and letting in a Labour Party committed to removing nuclear weapons, *The National European*, September 1964, 3.

²Mosley, *The Alternative* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1947) 9

course of national destiny. Mosley targeted for attack the democratic route towards power which had failed him and, in the light of defeat, he saw the democratic ideal of a nation-state as a compromise too far. Both component ideas, 'state' and 'nation', appeared diluted and compromised as the demand for an effective liberal-democratic national unit evolved. These compromises had hindered and undermined all Mosley believed to be vital in a nation.

Mosley's sense of nation

It is important to define Mosley's sense of nation because it is an element of his fundamental ideological matrix and also a dominant theme of fascism.³ From October 1932 until July 1940, when the BUF was brought to an end by the Government, Mosley was the founding leader and chief ideologue of Britain's major fascist party. His politics before and after these dates were also dominated by issues of nationalism and having accepted fascism as an ideology driven by a myth of national rebirth it follows that it is the nature of the nation to be reborn which determines fascist characteristics.⁴

³Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 26 and passim; similarly Roger Eatwell, describes fascist ideology as "a form of thought which preaches the need for social rebirth in order to forge a *holistic-national radical Third Way*", *Fascism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 11, and Stanley G. Payne has indicated general acceptance of the consensus view on fascist ideology in his 'Review article: Historical Fascism and the Radical Right', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 35 (1), 109-118; Zeev Sternhell writes of a 'tribal nationalism' as one of two components of fascism, contrasting it to the liberal nationalism of a community of individuals, Sternhell's second component is the 'anti-materialism revision of Marxism', Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 9-12; in his early work *The Ideology of Fascism*, Gregor refers to fascism as "the first frank totalitarian nationalism of our time", 92.

⁴"Our task", Mosley wrote, "is not to invent Fascism, but to find for it in Britain its highest expression and development." *The Greater Britain* (1932) 14; and "Fascism is modern nationalism - and something. Fascism is not a foreign importation. It is a world idea." *The Blackshirt*, no.20, 30 December 1933 - 5 January 1934, 3.

In his fascist manifesto *The Greater Britain* Mosley did not provide an overt explanation as to why the nation should hold the domineering and sovereign position above all else.⁵ His argument surrounding notions of stability and progress do indicate the nation acted as a bedrock, securing and allowing the regenerative progress to proceed. Mosley conceived 'Britain' as a cultural vessel to be isolated and protected from international 'dilution' and he appealed to national sentiment to evoke a sense of history and social memory. In 1936 he wrote, "Patriotism and Revolution. Love of country, combined with the determination to build a country worthy of that love. These are the aims of Fascism".⁶ As the title of his book demonstrates 'nation' was central to his politics. To rebuild the nation and to make real his vision involved a re-interpretation of history to disclose a hidden Britain and national identity. Mosley's references to historical 'heroic' figures suggested their actions were precursory expressions of his sense of nationality; that is, they revealed a British voice which has since become masked. Nelson, for example, "lives in spirit, and calls to us, as he called to his men over a hundred years ago to do our duty to our country. Fascists will not fail him".⁷ There was a call for, "A new St. George, a leader of the nation...he will join the spirit of the early veterans of the people's Movement, Robert Owen, William Morris, Kier Hardie, with the will to action and achievement of great English patriots - Drake, Clive and Nelson".⁸ These names can be grouped as British socialists and British Empire builders, as a combined category they

⁵Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 18.

⁶*The Blackshirt*, no.152, 21 March 1936, 5.

⁷*The Blackshirt*, no.79, 26 October 1934, 6, written to celebrate Nelson's victory and death of 21 October 1805

⁸A. Raven Thomson, 'Merrie England', *Action*, 23 April 1938, 1.

could be described as national socialists.

Mosley's fascism highlighted the nationalist element of his ideological matrix and drew on notable Britons to illustrate the potential strength of his nation. He was constructing a national myth in terms of rebirth and reconstruction. To better understand this key element of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix, the illusive theme of 'nation', a brief overview of the scholarship and debate on the nature of the resulting 'ism, nationalism, will be useful, particularly because Mosley's fascist discourse held at its centre a concern with the nation which represented an operative expression of his fundamental ideological matrix.

What is a nation?

The French scholar, and demythologising historian of Christianity, Ernest Renan approached the question of 'nation' in a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in March 1882.⁹ He remarked that "The existence of a nation ... is an everyday plebiscite; it is, like the very existence of the individual, a perpetual reaffirmation of life."¹⁰ For Renan the nation was not to be simply identified with race, economics, geography or language; a nation had a past of sacrifice and a present affirmation of commitment to a common life. Nations, Renan predicted, would eventually find themselves superseded by a European

⁹for Renan see H.W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A critical Biography* (London: The Althone Press, 1964) and David C.J. Lee, *Ernest Renan: In the Shadow of Faith* (London: Duckworth, 1996)

¹⁰Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?', trans. Ida Mae Synder (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1882) 26-9, in John Hutchinson and Antony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 17-18

confederation which Renan held to be essential to the maintenance of liberty. Renan conveyed a similar understanding of what constituted a nation as did Mosley: it is a combination of history and daily action in opposition to statism. From this position a nation is conceived as a synchronic entity, at once the product, maker, and receptacle of memories intertwined with the present moment. 'Nation' does not readily, or neatly, avail from a Marxian derived discourse attempting to gain definition bereft of affective or romantic illusions as Joseph Stalin's attempt illustrates.¹¹ 'Nation', for Mosley fired by the socialism of the trenches, carried the seed of an affective entity existing in realms described only in linguistic terms such as 'spirit', *volk*, and social memory, rather than bound to calculable, limited, territorial dimensions. As a fundamental ideological component Mosley could not, with any great ease in the operative mode, distinguish or isolate the idea of 'nation' which was so integral to his reality construction or worldview.

Recent scholarship, reminiscent of Stalin's attempt, has defined a nation in broad terms as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members."¹² This provides a useful description of a 'nation' but each of the defining terms, in-turn, require defining themselves, and the 'catch-all' nature of this

¹¹Joseph Stalin creates a list of characteristics associated with the idea of a nation: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture...It is only when all these characteristics are present together that we have a nation", 'The Nation', *Marxism and the National Question*, from *The Essential Stalin*, ed. Bruce Franklin (London: Croom Helm, 1973) 57-61, in *ibid*.

¹²Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991) 14.

model, while holding many elements intrinsic to a nation also contains many which may not coincide. Elements which may constitute historical memory may not align themselves with an idea of historical territory as in the example of Jews or Gypsies.¹³ A geographic demarkation can evolve and be determine by external historical and ideological forces but are not necessarily the same as those coincident with a nation's memory: German history and political geography over the last century and a half provide a prime case, and the Versailles Treaty territorial division providing a particularly relevant example. Furthermore, none of these national elements may correspond with a functioning economy.

From definition to discourse

The theoretical discourse surrounding the evolution of the idea of 'nation' can be divided into two main camps: modernist and ethicists. Modernists, notably Ernest Gellner,¹⁴ claim that the nation is a relatively recent construction; one connected to an intensification in the division of labour and the transformation in Western society, from an agrarian and static based society to a society with an industrial base and mass social movement. This interpretation argues that the idea of nation acts to hold together a common culture and to repel and guard against individual anomie. Modernists argue this perception of the 'nation' was a result of the new mobile, and industrial, society, "where the important, identity-conferring part of one's education or formation is not the special

¹³both were targeted by the German Nazism in part because of their non-territorial sense of nationhood

¹⁴Ernest Gellner, 'The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class', in *Mapping the Nation*, Gopal Balakrishnan ed. (London: Verso, 1996) 98-145.

skill, but the shared generic skills, dependent on a shared high culture which defines a 'nation'. Such a nation/culture *then*, and then only, becomes the natural social unit one which cannot normally survive without its own political shell, the state."¹⁵ And this echoes Mosley's insistence that the nature of Britain has fundamentally changed with the onset of modernisation.¹⁶

The ethnicist argument describes the history of the nation extending deep into the past and based in cultural and ethnic communities with shared myths of origin and history. The ethnicist thesis rejects the political bias of modernists and their focus on citizenship.¹⁷ Antony Smith has argued the modern state was built on a pre-modern *ethnie* of two types; lateral and vertical. The former finds aristocratic *ethnies* needing to incorporate other ethnic and cultural elements, particularly significant for those groups incorporating outlying and lower strata groupings into the state over which they ruled. The vertical or demotic were subject to rule by others and sustained by religion. The idea of 'nation' as an ideological dictate over political action taps a social yearning for identity based on common ancestry and homeland which is reflected in the discourse of nationalism.

In an attempt to resolve the modernist/ethnicist argument Hutchinson postulates two nationalisms, political **and** cultural. Cultural nationalism looks back in time to evoke

¹⁵Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 142-143

¹⁶Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 11-13.

¹⁷This debate is clearly described by John Hutchinson, *Modern Nationalism* (London: Fontana Press, 1994) 3-38

memories as a method of criticism of the present and "indeed" Hutchinson suggests, "at times of crisis generated by the modernization process, cultural nationalists play the role of moral innovators proposing alternative indigenous models of progress"¹⁸, a role Mosley would have gladly accepted. Cultural nationalists though, give way to the superior number of state-oriented movements, or political nationalists, because it is only through political nationalism that cultural nationalists can get their plans implemented. Culturalists respect natural divisions of society "because the impulse to diversity is the dynamo of national creativity,"¹⁹ and these are expressed in the nation.

The debate surrounding the idea of 'nation' and 'nationalism' can be reduced to two interpretations: political nationalism, aiming to produce an autonomous state based on common citizenship and allowing equal participation in modern world for a community, in-short a social response to the anomie of modernisation; and cultural nationalism, planning the preservation and expression of the natural creative spirit which determines identity in a community. Mosley sought cultural nationalism which could be expressed and implemented through a political state corporatism which itself reflected Mosley's philosophical understanding of the relationship between man and the world. In attempting to understand Mosley's idea of 'nation' it would be useful to understand the generative site of national formation in order to grasp how Mosley strove to regenerate his nation.

The site of national generation in an ideal type model of Mosley's 'nation'

¹⁸ibid., 41.

¹⁹ibid, 44.

Mosley believed in the importance of dynamic action and this affected his understanding of the nationality.²⁰ Mosley can be described as conceiving the nation as a synchronic entity, created in the moment; but a moment influenced by a diachronically forged social memory emerging from a conglomerate of synchronic moments. Mosley cited historical moments in support of his argument and these represented both parliament and politics as a chimeric representation of Britain. He sought to tease out discontinuities with the orthodox presentation of history to expose the hidden nation; one he believed to be still evident and linked to a more dynamic and, debatably, greater past such as Elizabethan England.²¹

The generative site of the nation derived from his remarks; the place where Mosley's perceived nation came into being at any moment, can be conceived of as the point of intra-personal exchange. Here the nation becomes a product formed from the effect of a complete process of exchange and not attributed to any section of the process, either the act itself or its agency. Therefore, in his ambition to regenerate Britain, Mosley focused on this site of national founding. This is echoed by the Italian fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile who wrote of the difference between nationalism of 'individualistic liberalism' and nationalism of fascism; with both holding the nation as the source of individual rights and values, but where in the liberal tradition the individual antecedes the State but to the fascist the individual and the State are indivisibly one or "inseparable

²⁰see Chapter two above: the 'myth of the airman' which holds dynamism as an axiomatic ideological factor

²¹"The days before the victory of Puritan repression coincided with the highest achievements of British virility and constructive adventure", Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, (1932) 39

terms if a necessary synthesis."²² And this was reflected in Mosley's fascism, which would need to be:

"grasping and permeating every aspect of national life. In every town and village, in every institution of daily life, the will of the organised and determined minority must be struggling for sustained effort. The Modern Movement, in struggle and in victory, must be ineradicably interwoven with the life of the nation".²³

The struggle for higher forms, which had been described by G.B. Shaw,²⁴ was integral to Mosley's fascism which sought, not a simple national chauvinism but, the reformulation of the relationship between its constituent people and their nation; to enlighten individuals to their role, in their daily activities, in their part of the creation of a national character and, hence, the 'nation'. To facilitate this realisation a vanguard of activists would be required to facilitate the arousal of the nation to this truth.²⁵ A corporate system could be used to:²⁶

"lay down the limits within which individuals and interests may operate. Those limits are the welfare of the nation... Within these limits all activity is

²²Giovanni Gentile, 'The Philosophy of Fascism', *Foreign Affairs* (Council of Foreign Relations) vi, 1927-8, 301-2.

²³Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 25; see also *The Blackshirt*, no.1, February 1933, 1.

²⁴see quotation in Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, volume 2, 1898-1918 The Pursuit of Power* (London: Chatto & Windus 1989) 13

²⁵Mosley's demand for a vanguard elite is evident in the planning 'Economic Council' of *Revolution by Reason*, the NUPA squads of the New Party, the use of fascist uniforms and proposed powerful executive of BUF policy.

²⁶the aim of BUF policy is often described as bringing about a Corporate State and Mosley follows this trend; for example he categorises BUF policy under these headings: 1. The Corporate State, 2. Parliament, 3. The Jews, *The Blackshirt*, no.65, 20 July 1934.

encouraged; individual enterprise, and the making of profit, are not only permitted, but encouraged so long as that enterprise enriches rather than damages by its activity the nation as a whole."²⁷

Ideally Mosley's fascist government would simply represent those inter-personal relationships and focus these social relations at a national level so that Mosley's corporatism can be seen as essentially a form of national socialism. The importance of the nation in Mosley's politics stems from his ideological matrix where a fundamental component is the nation struck a chord when expressed in the operative dimension of fascist ideology. An ideal type model of Mosley's nation derived from the preceding observations can be constructed as:

a collective expression of inter-personal relationships existing within the boundaries of an inherent cultural homogeneity and believed to be generally misrepresented by the hegemony of liberal ideologies. These oppositional elements are reflexively portrayed as serving inter- [or anti-] national masters such as high finance and detrimental to national character. The corporate state would provide the mechanism to release 'genuine' national character.

Mosley's politics were an attempt to create the circumstances whereby his conception of nation could be fully expressed: where Britain could be fully 'itself' and upon this realisation become greater.

²⁷Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 27.

Politics of nation

The New Party set the trajectory of Mosley's politics with one foot in the democratic parliamentary system and the other kicking in the dirt of fascism. Mosley slipped easily into the fascist mould as he pursued the goal of a British renaissance founded on the economic arguments he formulated during the Twenties. Mosley's fascism adopted, and evolved, a symbolism and political method believed to be most suitable for its revolt against the perceived national emasculation. The existing democratic system was taken to be part of the emasculation process and therefore the target of Mosley's attacks: no longer were issues of party to dominate Mosley's ideology, as the New Party was replaced by the **British** Union of Fascists, and Mosley moved from writing *A National Policy* (1931) to *The Greater Britain* (1932): changes which represented more than a semantic shift of emphasis and more of a real political change. Mosley's politics had become axiomatically dominated by nationalism not electoral success: fascism and corporatism would provide the means to an end concurrent with the long term ideological instinct to bring about national renaissance to Britain. "To us", Mosley concluded in *The Greater Britain*, "Parliament will never be an end in itself, but only a means to an end; our object is, not political place-holding, but the achievement of national reconstruction."²⁸ Mosley's national plans set out in *The Greater Britain* were revised within two years under the impact of Hitler's successful 1933 bid for power and can be seen to demonstrate a shift from exoteric expressions of the nation in the language of economics, to the esoteric idiom of sentiment, spirit, and ethnicity.²⁹

²⁸Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 157

²⁹cf. the two theoretical types of nation described in current scholarship and surveyed above.

Influence of Fascist Italy

Mosley visited fascist Italy in December 1931 where he met Mussolini and it would be difficult not to assume he was influenced by the impressive Mussolini and Italian fascism. Mosley's British fascism adopted the symbolism of uniforms, salutes and political style from Italy while Mosley refused to admit this influence and rather weakly argued uniforms were a practical innovation of the BUF membership and their style derived from a fencing jacket in respect of Mosley's passion of the sport.³⁰ Ideologically though Mosley was less influenced by Mussolini, having determined his ambition to rebuild Britain, which shaped his political outlook, long before he met Mussolini. Mussolini, though, suggested the use of the 'fascist' label but advised Mosley "not to try the military stunt."³¹

By 1932 Mosley's political sensitivity to the opinions generally held in society was finely honed and he sought to take advantage of the sentiment emanating from a society under threat. Harboured the communal experiences engendered by the Great War, Mosley understood how those social energies could provide a source of political strength for the rebuilding of the nation, and especially when these pre-linguistic emotions were perceived to be the heart of the nation.

Even among his companions, Mosley has been described as solitary figure in his belief

³⁰Mosley, *My Life*, 290 & 302

³¹*ibid.*, 358-362; and Skidelsky, *Mosley*, 284.

of imminent crisis,³² and certainly he was arguing against the economic trend,³³ indicating either a personal delusion or a genuine belief in the obscuration of the crisis by those with hegemonic power over all but a few. The first case would make any serious study one of a medical history of mental illness, which this is not;³⁴ while the latter would suggest an example of political conviction and faith of a magnitude so great the bearer believes they have touched a well-spring of truth and whose challenge is the communication of this experience. Mosley believed the creative potential of the nation could be released,³⁵ and his fundamental ideology held to ideas of strengthening nationhood. Both economics during the twenties and his appeal to the national 'spirit' in the Thirties were operative modes of this fundamental core. Using illustrations from history, for example: "Nelson yet lives in spirit, and calls to us, as he called to his men over a hundred year ago, to do our duty to our country. Fascists will not fail him."³⁶ Mosley felt impelled to enlighten the masses with his insight and would write in 1947, "No alternative can come from the architects of chaos: all others have been silenced. So, I must give myself to this task."³⁷

³²Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 283.

³³one of the major flaws in Mosley's fascism was its economic argument of crisis when, in fact, the crisis had bottomed out and was beginning to recover at the time the BUF was formed, see Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967* second edition (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1969) 229

³⁴the groundwork for a Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of Mosley is fairly evident: he was raised by an adoring mother who treated him as the man of the house after his father's departure and he also replaced his wayward father in his grandfathers eyes, Mosley, *My Life*, 1-23

³⁵see note 4 above

³⁶anonymous article commemorating Nelsons victory, *The Blackshirt*, no.79, 19 October 1934, 6.

³⁷Mosley, *The Alternative*, 9.

In 1932 Mosley's task was the rejuvenation of Britain; a task detailed in his first overtly fascist book *The Greater Britain*.

The idea of a Greater Britain

The title *The Greater Britain* gives some indication of Mosley's ambitions. The phrase 'Greater Britain' reflects a conception of Britain and Empire which John Wolffe described as "a state of mind rather than a geographical description",³⁸ in other words it is an imagined community.³⁹ Greater Britain had been to some a geographic concept with a diversity demanding the control of 'stepping stone' areas such as peninsulas and islands in order to service ships and airplanes.⁴⁰ Others saw Greater Britain as an extension of the English State and 'strikingly' an extension of English nationality.⁴¹ Further suggestions interpreted Greater Britain as determined through history and by geography; with history understood as the material account of man and his ability to control energy.⁴² Here the world was described as evolving into an unit with interdependent and dynamically

³⁸John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994) x.

³⁹see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991) 1st ed. 1983; one historian doubted the acceptance of Greater Britain in the psyche of individuals suggesting: "It is true that we in England never accustomed our imaginations to the thought of Greater Britain. Our politicians, our historians still think of England not of Greater Britain as their country.", J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883) 306.

⁴⁰J. Fairgrieve and E. Young, *The Growth of Greater Britain* (London: George Philip & Son, 1924) 180

⁴¹J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883) 45

⁴²James Fairgrieve, *Geography and World Power*, 8th Edition (London: University of London Press, 1941) 1st edition 1915, 4.

interactive constituent parts: air power was a new feature to this world further able to consolidate the process of unity and perceptively shrink the world into "a single system. When all people depend on the efforts of all the rest."⁴³

Earlier conceptions of a 'Greater Britain' can be found in the writings of Charles Wentworth Dilke whose *Greater Britain: A record of travel in English speaking countries during 1866 and 1867* was inspired by "a conception, however imperfect, [of] the grandeur of our race, already girdling the earth, which it is destined, perhaps, eventually to overspread." A 'Greater Britain' stemmed from the logic that, "If two small islands are by courtesy styled 'Great', America, Australia, India, must form a Greater Britain."⁴⁴ This perception of an empire structured through a belief in a progress and marked by racial domination is punctuated with remarks such as: "Everywhere we have found that the difficulties which impede the progress to universal domination of the English people lie in a conflict with cheaper races...the dearer are, on the whole, likely to destroy the cheaper peoples"⁴⁵ This sensibility was not a simple intolerance of the other but an observation on 'progress' forging a world of English domination: "No possible series of events can prevent the English race itself in 1970 numbering 300 million of beings - one national character and one tongue. Italy, Spain, France, Russia become pygmies by the side of such people", and the "power of English laws and English principles of Government is not merely an English question - its the continuance is

⁴³ibid., 345-6.

⁴⁴Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A record of travel in English speaking countries during 1866 and 1867* vol. one (London: Macmillan, 1868) vii & viii.

⁴⁵ibid., vol. two, 405.

essential to the freedom of mankind."⁴⁶

To maintain such a historic imperialist mission Britain required a strong defense system. The Cambridge Regius professor of modern history lectured, about the 'greatness' itself carrying its own dangers "because it is evident that the great colonial extension of our state exposes it to new dangers from which in its ancient insular insignificance it was free."⁴⁷ Hobson, likewise, saw the imperialist process as diluting, if not opposing, national good: "Every alignment of Great Britain in the tropics is a distinct enfeeblement of true British nationalism". He saw imperialism as hostile to the natural evolution of internationalism, and it acted to suppress nations or cause their forceful absorption which would hinder the movement toward internationalism. Hobson continues: "As individualism is essential to any sane form of national socialism, so nationalism is essential to internationalism: no organic conception of world-politics can be formed on any other supposition."⁴⁸ While Hobson saw imperialism as deflecting the historical imperative of Britain toward internationalism, Seeley and Dilke saw imperial adventures threatening the nation through over-extension. Particularly vulnerable was the passage of imports into the United Kingdom to a sudden attack from France aided by a second power which could follow the extension of the U.K. trading base. "Our enormous forces", Dilke wrote, "would be almost useless in the case of such a sudden attack, because we should not have time to call them forth". These 'enormous forces' emanated from racial

⁴⁶ibid, 406 & 407.

⁴⁷Seeley, op cit, 2.

⁴⁸J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Revised edition (London: Archibald Constable, 1905) 1st ed. 1902.

heterogeneity of the Greater Britain including, "within its territories the Oriental despotism of British India and States as democratic as Queensland: but that which is our weakness is also our strength, as making Greater Britain, if she learns her task, the most intelligent as well as the most cosmopolitan of States."⁴⁹

A 'Greater Britain' was, then, perceived as a vulnerable entity: one able to upset a path towards internationalism and one whose very nature could represent both vulnerability and strength: Greater Britain is also the title of Mosley's premier fascist document and draws upon all these resonances from the height of Britain's imperial history and yet also implies the once **Great** Britain could be **Greater**, and it is to this book we shall now turn.⁵⁰

The Greater Britain by Oswald Mosley

Nicholas Mosley wrote of the paradoxes to be found in his father's book *The Greater Britain* which were not resolved but overcome through the use of 'greatness', a "device held aloft like a sword that questions of individual freedom, of state authority fall away." Nicholas argues his father used language to cut through paradoxes and this led to a helplessness, a lack of a control, and all that Mosley's fascism offered was "a longing of the psyche".⁵¹ Certainly Mosley presented his readers with a myth of Sorelian character,

⁴⁹Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of the Greater Britain*, 4th edition (London: Macmillan, 1890) 4 & 698.

⁵⁰After the war Mosley would speak of a Greater Europe i.e. incorporating the British dominions and Africa, in his Europe a Nation campaigns, for example: Mosley speech 'Make Europe a Nation Now', *Chaos and Crisis: Mosley's Way Out*, tape recording, 1962/3 (London: Action Society, 1983)

⁵¹Nicholas Mosley, *Rules*, 220 & 223.

a possible utopia toward which they could strive and designed to stimulate massed political activity,⁵² but this should not be interpreted to imply he would simply leave the rest to follow in a haphazard manner. Throughout, Mosley was following principles which would found a corporate society; he was fulfilling his role as Leader, that is offering leadership and political vision, while others drew on their particular expertise to deal with the finer points and the detail. Mosley could claim sovereignty over the principles and objectives of the BUF while, "method must ever be adapted and developed to the progress of our organisation".⁵³ This feature, seeking to match action with actor by regulating the boundaries of the former through an assessment of the talents of the latter, and allowing one to enhance the other, was a common thread in Mosley's thought, from his criticism of the organisation of the Air Ministry in his 1919 parliamentary maiden speech, to the organisation of a fascist corporate state and his ideas on personal freedom and democracy.⁵⁴ Mosley used the term 'Greater Britain' to secure the nationalist message in the title of his book, yet it was not a 'policy of fascism' or even 'British fascism' which it denoted; 'Greater Britain' indicated the direction, and provided a goal, which Mosley believed fascism alone could secure.

The Greater Britain is a document representing faith, a conviction held by Mosley that

⁵²A.R. Thomson explicitly espouses this political technique in an article 'Merrie England' where he demands "A new St. George...to inspire British manhood for a new struggle..for the attainment of British socialism", *Action*, no.114, 23 April 1938, 1.

⁵³*The Blackshirt*, no.91, 18 January 1935, 1.

⁵⁴see Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 33, where he incorporates occupational franchise as the basis of a fascist electoral system because: "The first essential is a well informed electorate; and a man is better informed in his own job than he is in the complicated issues of politics."

the true character of Britain was 'Great' but also that this nature, or essence, was obscured and disguised resulting chimeric Britain, was a monstrous imposter 'nation' parading itself in the place of the once great Britain. Fascism would replace the mechanisms of the state to represent, and replicate, the inter-personal relationships which constitute the nation at a super-individual and national level. In this way *The Greater Britain* described a form of national socialism.⁵⁵

Mosley's fascist mission was to release the seed of national character from the shell of obscurity allowing the voice of the people to be heard. Fascism was a political phenomenon which offered an operative dimension to Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix. Fascism was divorced from democratic political institutions, but Mosley did allow some structures of democracy to remain in his scheme. Parliament though, he wrote, "should be, the mouthpiece of the will of the people" and not concerning itself "with matters of which the nation neither knows or cares".⁵⁶ For Mosley the 'will of the people' was synonymous with 'nation' and the concept of a 'bottom up' process of political expression he strongly defended: "Of all the lies told about Fascism the most absurd is that we desire to govern against the will of the people. That is the very opposite of the truth."⁵⁷ The fascist plan of reorganisation was arguably not a "negation of the

⁵⁵The BUF became the **British Union of Fascists and National Socialists** [emphasis mine] in 1936, arguably demonstrating the influence of Nazi Germany but also, as implied here, a recognition of the axiomatic national socialism inherent in Mosley's thought.

⁵⁶Mosley, *Greater Britain*, 20.

⁵⁷Mosley speech in Liverpool, *Action*, no.134, 15 November 1935, 2; Mosley echoes the Italian fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile who wrote the Fascist State "is created by the consciousness and will of the citizen, and is not a force descending on the citizen from above or without", 'The Philosophy of Fascism', *Foreign Affairs*, vi,

people's will", but designed to give Government the "absolute power to act". This was not a dictatorship, Mosley insisted, because parliament would be maintained with power to dismiss the Government; an idea evoking the Lockean style of social contract.⁵⁸ In this light, Mosley was concerned with the relationship of individuals to the government of their society to a similar degree as other political theorists attempt to create a model of power relationships.

Echoing Rousseau's General Will, Mosley's 'will of the people' sought, in addition to merely reflecting national opinion, to recover a particular national will from obscurity and harness this vision of a peopled nation as a social enticement to action. Mosley's will of the people would provide the route to national rehabilitation and not provide a purely theoretical possibility of its existence. He sought nothing less than the recovery of a national soul buried in the psyche of individuals. One near contemporary of Mosley, Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933), writing as the First World War was nearing its end, followed Rousseau arguing democracy was more than the sum of participating individuals it was "a genuine union of true individuals".⁵⁹ The role of 'genuine' politics would be to "make the vote of every man express the All of his special coign of outlook.

1927-8, 302.

⁵⁸Locke argued that governmental power is not given by divine right but entrusted by the people. This limited power was to provide protection of private property and would be taken away from a government which misused its power; Mosley differentiated between a dictatorship which implies doing something against ones will and leadership principle which gives the running of government to those equipped to do it best, *Mosley - Right or Wrong?* (London, Lion Books, 1961) Question 165, 159-160

⁵⁹M.P. Follett, *The New State: Group Organisation the solution of popular government* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1918) 5.

In every man is the potentiality of such expression".⁶⁰ Follett continued to write of the relation between individual action and social being: "The activity which produces the true individual is at the same time interweaving him and others into a real whole"⁶¹ The problem Follet recognised in the society of her day was the diminution of individuality:

"the individual is submerged, smothered, choked by the crowd fallacy, the herd theory. Free him from these, release his energies, and he with other Freemen will work out quick, flexible, constantly changing forms which shall respond sensitively to every need."⁶²

Arguing to remove boundaries between the individual and the State, Follet suggested "everyman *is* the state at every moment, whether in daily toil or social intercourse, and thus the state itself ...is expressing itself truly in its humble citizen as in its supreme assembly"⁶³ Follet's argument is extended in her comments on the apparent increase in spirituality brought forth by the catalyst of the Great War. She wrote: "A new faith is born in our hearts. The Great War is the herald of another world for men. The coming of democracy is the spiritual rebirth".⁶⁴

Follet saw party politics corrupted by personal ambition while: "the vitality of our community life is frittered away or unused",⁶⁵ and she countered this with a call for

⁶⁰ibid., 6.

⁶¹ibid., 7.

⁶²ibid., 11.

⁶³ibid., 12; a comment similar to that of Renan, see above.

⁶⁴ibid., 161.

⁶⁵ibid., 216.

America to organise neighbourhood groups; any calls to patriotism should not imitate herd-instinct but represent the conscious building of the country by individuals at "every moment",⁶⁶ but in reaction to any implied myopia Follet argued America should look to Europe whose future is held within a paradigm of federalism much like that which bound the American States.⁶⁷ Follet sums up her book as:

"a plea for the more abundant life: for the fullness of life and the growing life. It is a plea against everything static, against the idea that there need be any passive material within the social bond."⁶⁸

These ideas show striking similarities in their political ambition with Mosley's understanding of place of national existence. Follett and Mosley shared a distrust of Party politics which they argued masked genuine national expression of its people. Both thinkers maintained a passionate faith in the possibility of an alternative reality of national identity branded onto the flesh of a living nation whose life blood is the exercise of individual and daily choice. Mosley believed America could have a successful 'fascist' policy without fascism because, unlike Europe, America did not have such deeply entrenched problems and did not need the iron fist of fully fledged fascism.⁶⁹ Follet articulated the generative source of a nation which Mosley did not fully expound but implied in his utterances. It would appear that Mosley's politics were not exceptional and,

⁶⁶ibid., 346.

⁶⁷ibid., 349.

⁶⁸ibid., 360.

⁶⁹Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programme of reforms during the early thirties has broad similarities to Mosley's economic plans. Mosley had met with Roosevelt and discussed politics on a trip made to America during 1926, *My Life*, 194-6.

rather, were a part of the discourse emerging in the wake of the First World War and building on the 'irrational' arguments voiced during the final decades of the previous century, questioning the party system along with the established democratic ideals. There was a concern with the rediscovery of alternative realities rather than simple bellicose flag waving. In fascism the latter was evoked to stimulate the former.

Mosley and Plato

In his particular permutation of generic fascism Mosley saw the nation as a site where the 'essential' British spirit could be contained and expressed only when free from outside 'influence'.⁷⁰ This reformulation of the idea of freedom, expunged of liberal ideas of freedom, was replaced with one corresponding to Plato's *Republic* and emphasising place and role in relation to the national good: promoting the allocation individual tasks in accord with natural ability and producing freedom from choice and freedom from outside distraction.⁷¹ Mosley argued fascism would liberate the individual from the pretence of freedom: "Surely nobody", he wrote, "can imagine that the British, as a race, are free,"

⁷⁰The inability of democratic liberalism, the scientific/rational embodiment of a nation, to represent the essence of the nation is mirrored in Henri Bergson's philosophic work *Creative Evolution* (first published in 1911). Here, "intellect", Bergson writes, "is characterised by a natural inability to comprehend life. Instinct, on the contrary, is moulded on the very form of life." Science draws *from* life rather than entering into it, while 'intuition' leads into life. *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan & Co, 1960) 174, 186.

⁷¹Socrates to Adeimantus "productivity is increased, the quality of the product is improved, and the process is simplified when an individual set aside other pursuits, does the one thing for which he is naturally suited, and does it at the opportune moment." Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) book II 370c, 60; Mosley's ideas on the state and individuals echo those of Plato whose ideas of Philosopher-Rulers heading the government of the state bear a striking similarity to Mosley's Thought-Deed men described in his post-1945 writing especially *The Alternative* (1947)

true 'freedom', he believed, lay in the ability of an ordinary man "to enjoy some of the fruits of life,"⁷² and, hence, unemployment restricted freedom: "*The beginning of liberty is the end of economic chaos*. Yet how can economic chaos be overcome without the power to act?"⁷³ Remaining consistent with both his Resignation speech and *Revolution by Reason*, Mosley was looking to form a controlled economic environment in which a planned economy would be able to provide employment, and where economic freedom would be created for the worker and, as with Plato, the re-establishment of the connection between economic need and the state. These policies existed in the ideological operative dimension to facilitate the fundamental ambition of realizing the dynamics of a futurist national greatness.

A 'true' nation

In writing *The Greater Britain* Mosley sought to establish the existence of another Britain; one other than the 'Britain' portrayed by parliamentarians. Mosley sought to identify the chimerical falsities presented as Britain and to maintain a continuum between Imperial Rome and Britain.⁷⁴ This became integral to his fascist ideology: Ancient Greece and Rome represented the pure spirit of civilisation unbounded by the shackles of

⁷²Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 22.

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴of course the renaissance was by definition a period of rebirth not only in the study of man but a rebirth of the citizen through the renewed study of Aristotle, see Walter Ullmann, 'The Rebirth of the Citizen on the Eve of the Renaissance Period', *Aspects of the Renaissance: A Symposium* Archibald R. Lewis (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1967) 5-25; Mosley's persistent, return to these ancient ideas may indicate an ideological predilection for 'renewal' represented pragmatically by his persistent concern for national reconstruction.

academic tradition.⁷⁵ This intellectual alliance brought Mosley into a theoretical and conceptual association with Mussolini's Italian fascism: to the assumed home of civilisation a relationship became enhanced by adopting the fasces symbol and presenting it in the frontispiece of *The Greater Britain* and the 'Fascist Shilling Library' publications. Mosley, attempting to rid any association of foreign influence, denied the implication that he sought to imitate Mussolini. Mosley wrote:

"The Fasces is the emblem which founded Imperial Rome, the Mother of European civilisation, culture and progress during the last 2,000 years. That fact is recognised on many British monuments which are often to be seen displaying, in the heart of London, the Fascist emblem which is a symbol of our greatness".⁷⁶

To demonstrate this claim the BUF press reported sightings of fasces symbols on old British buildings and even on Royal carriages.⁷⁷ This fasces symbol, representing strength through unity, Mosley described as "civilisation and progress", now in the hands of the British Empire their "chief custodian". This is in accord with Mosley's ideas about the universal nature of fascism: "Our task", he wrote, "is not to invent Fascism, but to find for it in Britain its highest expression and development."⁷⁸ The fasces symbol, both hidden and yet interwoven into the fabric of British society, could be detected by the

⁷⁵a feature which would, by extension to incorporate ancient Greece, facilitate his European position after 1945, see *The Alternative* (1947) 26, see also Mosley, 'European Faith Higher Forms', *National European*, Jan 1965, 5.

⁷⁶Mosley, *Fascism in Britain* (London: B.U.F., 1933) 10.

⁷⁷A photograph depicting the King and Queen passing the BUF National Headquarters is described as Blackshirts giving the 'Roman Salute' conceding the influence of Italy, *The Blackshirt*, no.112, 14 June 1935, 1.

⁷⁸Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 14; *The Blackshirt*, no.36, 30 December 1933-5 January 1934, 3.

initiate and signed the mark of another reality which could be revealed and revived by fascist avant-gardist politics. These were symbolic references reflecting the operative dimension of Mosley's fundamental ideology.

National decline and revolution

The shrouding Britain's true nature brought forth symptoms such as unemployment: the number of people unemployed represented a non-productive and inactive element in the British national body and a brake on the dynamic essential to national reconstruction. An increase in the non-productive sector of the workforce was, Mosley wrote, "tragic proof that economic life has outgrown our political institutions. Britain has failed to recover from the War period". This failure to recover was, "largely due to a system of Government designed by, and for, the nineteenth century."⁷⁹ Modernisation was required and in order to remove the historical baggage Mosley's called for a fascist revolution.

The quintessentially modern phenomenon of 'revolution' was notably directed to an international end with the paradigm provided by the Bolshevik Revolution.⁸⁰ Only fifteen years before the founding of the BUF Russian communism was seeking to evaporate national borders in the heat of class conflict. Fascism offered an alternative revolution

⁷⁹Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 11.

⁸⁰the French Revolution set the precedent for modern revolutions involving the masses, in the introduction of her *States and Social Revolutions: a comparative analysis of France Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 5, Theda Skocpol describes the unique feature of social revolutions, in contrast to rebellions or political revolutions, is the creation of "basic changes in social structure and in political structure [which] occur together in a mutually reinforcing fashion." This is a useful definition of the type of revolution Mosley wanted to produce: one beyond simple political change extending through the social fabric of the nation.

which maintained, and brought into prominence, the nation: "In objective it [fascism] is revolutionary or it is nothing," Mosley wrote,⁸¹ and he cited other revolutions in transport, electric power, modern mass production, banking, social opinion which encouraged improved working conditions, increased leisure time, and the formulation of popular opinion through newspapers. To Mosley fascism was the political equivalent of these revolutions. All these micro-revolutions were but small steps which could be a giant leap for the nation when unified by fascism. Mosley wrote:

"science, invention, technique have recently increased the power to produce out of the range of all previous experience. In the meantime, our machinery of distribution and of government has remained practically unchanged, with the result that the production of industry greatly outstrips effective demand. In the second place, foreign markets of countries not yet industrialised are daily ceasing to be available. Our previous markets themselves being industrialised"⁸²

Mosley's conclusion was that: "Nothing but the rationalised State can hope to overcome the problem created by rationalised industry."⁸³ Economics and state management systems could partially represent the nation but the reality lay in the actions and flesh of

⁸¹Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 15; Mosley's fascism was revolutionary as he proclaimed in the first number of the BUF *The Blackshirt* newspaper with the Headline 'On to Fascist Revolution!: Drastic Action or Disaster. Parliament Blethers While Industry Dies'. Mosley also wrote an article titled 'Revolution' which he claimed would come from the homes of people growing "under the leadership of selfless thousands, who dedicate themselves to a cause beyond self", *Action*, no.113, 16 April 1938, 1.

⁸²Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 47.

⁸³*ibid.*, 53.

its people.⁸⁴ Revolutions in the productive sector of the nation were interpreted by Mosley as signs of renewal; portents of a new age of plenty and invigoratingly positive.⁸⁵ This was an expression of his ideological matrix, not a greater race but a greater Britain.

Mosley's fascism sought to extend revolution into the sphere of Government; to "harmonise individual initiative with the wider interests of the nation" so that "there is no room for interests which are not the States interest."⁸⁶ Any threat of complacency with the parliamentary system would be superseded by nation building: "Parliament will never be an end in itself, but only a means to an end; our object is, not political place-holding, but the achievement of national reconstruction".⁸⁷ Innovations in production were perceived to be outstripping changes in the system of government: politics and the productive, the represented and the motive centre of the nation, did not correspond. Mosley's criticisms of the political system indirectly evoked memories from the First World War where governments were seen as treacherous; causing the war and manoeuvring behind the backs the common soldier. Mosley represented the contemporary government as inert and outdated resulting in a declining nation usurped by outside influenced and the inverse of its true character: Mosley's utopian dream of a

⁸⁴In the 1934 revised edition of *The Greater Britain* page 148, Mosley comments on the transfer of national energies "from the political sphere of talk to the economic sphere of action", demonstrating the affinity between his axiomatic political belief in 'action' and the economy.

⁸⁵In his Olympia speech Mosley argued people adopted fascism "because they desire a new creed and a new order in our land - a creed which comes to abolish poverty in an age of plenty", *The Blackshirt*, no.60, 15 June 1934, 4.

⁸⁶Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 13.

⁸⁷ibid, 157.

reborn and greater Britain would emerge through, what he would later describe as, "the reversal of values in the age of hypocrisy."⁸⁸ "We live on public anarchy and private repression: we should have public organisation and private liberty....The fascist principle is Liberty in private, Obligation in public, life."⁸⁹ In 1932 he saw the revitalising impulses of modern science, which offered a revolutionary power able to redress any imbalances, as a route to overthrow the historical drift toward national decline. He saw these impulses nullified by a simple lack of planning and will.⁹⁰

Fascism would facilitate Mosley's recreation of a greater Britain because, he argued, fascism was a national movement and would therefore develop a distinctly British character.⁹¹ While fascism also held the potential to become a world wide faith, being "modern nationalism - and something. Fascism is not a foreign importation. It is a world idea."⁹² And while the expression of fascism came in the symbolism of ultra-nationalism its historical propensity was believed to be pointing to a world-wide movement suggesting a turning-point in political history had been reached.⁹³ By correlating and

⁸⁸'Analysis', *The National European*, January 1954, 6.

⁸⁹Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 33 & 34.

⁹⁰The revolutionary description remained axiomatic to Mosley's thought after the war, for example "It is vital to realise that we are living in the greatest revolution of all times, not only in military but also in political thought. The future will belong to those who understand the new facts." *The European Situation* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1950) 16

⁹¹Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 14.

⁹²*The Blackshirt*, no.20, 30 December 1933 - 5 January 1934, 3.

⁹³The ambition of his ideology appears in the title of his 1936 article 'The World Alternative', *Fascist Quarterly*, vol.2, no.1 January 1936, 377.

connecting British fascism with an overarching universal fascist movement Mosley sought recognition that fascism had a future as a political force. In this, fascism was not unlike 'liberalism' in its potency; a world wide belief system able to draw together peculiarly nationalist movements into a larger, world-wide rebellion against the existing order.⁹⁴

A phenomenon of the twentieth century

Mosley argued that for each historical period one political movement was most readily adapted to the realities of the day and fascism was the most suitable political creed for Britain then, and for the world later; fascism would come "to all the great countries in turn as their hour of crisis approaches".⁹⁵ Fascism alone recognised, "the necessity for an authoritative state, above party and sectional interests",⁹⁶ because fascism knew, "the great heart and soul of the British people", laying beyond the influence of alien finance, communists and established political parties. This nucleus which was the true Britain was, "that heart and that soul [to which] we [the BUF] are appealing today".⁹⁷

Crisis

⁹⁴Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 13-14; Mosley's understanding of a universal fascism echoes the British Major James Strachey Barnes whose admiration of Italian Fascism led him to write *The Universal Aspects of Fascism* (London: William and Norgate, 1928) and for whom fascism "insists that there is a universal moral law", *Fascism* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1931) 107; Mosley never acknowledged Barnes.

⁹⁵Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 13.

⁹⁶ibid.

⁹⁷*The Blackshirt*, no.74, 21 September 1934, 10.

The belief in an impending crisis is important to Mosley's political formulations.⁹⁸ While Mosley can be seen to interpret unemployment as a trigger to evoke revolutionary forces, 'crisis' could spontaneously wipe away the refractive gloss of existing democracy and expose the true heart of the nation. Mosley, after meeting with Mussolini in 1931, reiterated his belief in the role of 'crisis' and in particular the significance of its depth in determining the future of party politics.⁹⁹ A deep crisis could break the existing political system and "evoke new forces" while avoiding a drift back to the old party system.¹⁰⁰ The emergence of a crisis could create a revolutionary environment: a realisation of the J-curve hypothesis which describes how a society revolts after being deprived of high expectations. Crisis could weaken existing political structures and expose the nation's people to an alternative reality.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Robert Benewick describes crisis as the *raison d'être* of the British Fascist movement, the instrument for gaining power, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 1972) 134 & 137; Nugent suggests Mosley's economic system was the root of his fascism and designed to 'face the "crisis"', 'The Ideas of the British Union of Fascists' in N. Nugent and R. King eds. *The British Right: Conservative and Right Wing Politics in Britain* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1977) 137; Mosley was still writing about 'Britain's Crisis We were Right' in *The National European*, January 1965, 3.

⁹⁹see chapter one above for parallel with Shaw.

¹⁰⁰Mosley, 'Old Parties or New', *Political Quarterly*, January-March 1932.

¹⁰¹Mosley's New Party had made a film called *Crisis*, which included film of sleeping M.P.s, was banned for bringing Parliamentary institutions into disrepute, Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 278; in the 1960's Mosley was still waiting for the crisis which would bring "the return of reality" demonstrating his belief in the cyclic nature of history bringing an inevitable future, "All this will one day pass abruptly, with a new rhythm of history", *European* [Mosley], 'Commonwealth or White Ruin', *The National European*, August 1964, 3; in a report of a 1975 Mosley speech at Munich's Festaal of the Kuenstlerhaus, Mosley again holds 'crisis' as a contingent factor for action, *Action*, no. 188, 1 February 1975.

Mosley's reliance on a circumstantial `crisis' acting as the contingent antecedent heralding his fascist revolution served to decenter his otherwise charismatic leadership role and place him in the position of enlightened observer and commentator on events. In this way `crisis and revolution' emphasised the social message of fascism: it claimed to be `bottom-up', or grass roots,¹⁰² movement and not one pandering to an oligarchy of one. Mosley's used `crisis' to transform his presence into one of seer and analyst compelled to enlighten the masses by pointing to historical trends, rather than simply empowered through dynamics of being revolutionary leader. Mosley believed Britain could only emerge re-born from the chaos of crisis through the use of fascist discipline and planning, and without the decisive flaw in liberal democracy and the party system which divided the nation and engendered the crisis which weakened Britain.¹⁰³ Fascism offered Mosley the best operative means to satisfy the demand of his ideological matrix for a strong, futuristic, Britain in this environment.

A contradiction arises in Mosley's ideology: he maintained that Man could, through the use of science and heroic action, force a change in the direction of history; but this change was running against the determinism described by Spengler and countering the `natural' cyclic decline of civilisation.¹⁰⁴ At the same time Mosley believed a fascist

¹⁰²Mosley literally uses the term `grass roots' regularly in his post-1947 politics, for example, `The National Party of Europe' *The National European*, November 1964, 5.

¹⁰³Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 18.

¹⁰⁴"I believe it is our German philosopher's [Spengler's] misunderstanding of this immense new [science] factor which leads him to his pessimistic conclusion", Mosley, `The Philosophy of Fascism', *Fascist Quarterly*, vol.1, no.1, January 1935, 37; Mosley maintained this view at the time of writing his autobiography: "The union of Caesarian movement with science seemed to me at once the prime requirement of the modern age and the answer to the ultimate fatality predicted by Spengler", *My*

revolution was contingent upon *given* circumstances, such as the existence of a 'crisis'. This apparent incongruity can be resolved if it is accepted that Mosley's ideology was a variant of socialism, that is, fully expressing itself through social or a trans-individual medium, and axiomatic to his idea of knowledge was his belief in accessing truth through direct experience.¹⁰⁵ In this light, to establish an oppositional platform to the dominant ideological hegemony, which Mosley saw as prevailing over the nation's decline, the whole social (national) body would need to be brought into rebellion. The stimulus for a revolt would occur only if the nation's decline was demonstrated as being integral to each individual, and to each individual's experience of their social interactions: in short decline had to be demonstrated as a part of each individuals daily activities. Mosley's trans-individual socialism demanded a bottom up revolution, a flowering of nationality under the guiding light of his thought.

Imperial idea

If, as has been proposed here, Mosley visualised Britain as comprising of the totality of a group of (micro-national) interpersonal relationships, then the national boundaries were to be defined by cultural homogeneity.¹⁰⁶ Outside of this common ground of communication between individuals (culture), 'others' existed and their role in the

Life, 232; so also 'Fascism and Philosophy: A Rational Basis' (anon.) which argues Fascism rejected the predetermination of Spengler, fights decadent tendencies, and seeks reinvigoration of the nation with ideals of state service and self sacrifice, *The Blackshirt*, no.7, 16 May 1933.

¹⁰⁵for fascism as 'a new "socialism"' see Zeev Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology' in *Fascism: A Readers Guide*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) 371-9; Empiricism, founded by John Locke, argues all knowledge is only derived from experience.

¹⁰⁶see ideal type of Mosley's nation described above.

defining of national boundaries were inevitably to be addressed by an ultranationalist ideology such as fascism. Imperialism was charged to bring civilisation, in the form of Western industrial capitalism, to the world.¹⁰⁷ From the perspective of fascism imperialism represented a natural order in a Social Darwinian world of struggling nations, and so fascism would seek control over geographic resources in order to assert national power and become 'great'.¹⁰⁸ The use of the word 'Greater' by Mosley conspicuously implied a notion of grandeur; being bigger is better and a 'Greater Britain' denoted a nation of imperial intent charged with a sense of duty to 'civilisation' rooted in ideas of race and evolution. Mosley viewed the world in terms of contrasts; with colonised 'backward people' needing protection from the economic ravishment of predatory and alien capitalism. The corporative principle extended to races with each possessing a role determined by their own special skills: "The earth", Mosley wrote, "can and will be developed by the races fitted for that task, and chief among such races we are not afraid to number our own",¹⁰⁹ again reflecting the Platonic organisation of society into ability groups and roles. And this operative expression of ideology fed into an understanding of race.

Mosley could look for paradigms to express his fundamental ideology in a particular,

¹⁰⁷this is a recent use of the term 'imperialism' which had already been used to label the Napoleonic form of empire government, and those who simply favoured the empire. Later the expansionist empire became 'imperialist' and Lenin regarded it as the last stage of capitalism. Philip D. Curtin, ed. *Imperialism* (New York: Walker & Company, 1971) ix

¹⁰⁸for example this desire was expressed by Fascist Italy's impetuous imperial assault on Abyssinia 1935-36 and in the German Nazi claim for *Lebensraum* (living space).

¹⁰⁹Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 138.

evolutionary, understanding of race; one which had a currency in scientific discourse and lent some authority to Mosley's prejudicial, if not supremacist, belief. For example, the psychologist Charles Conant Josey wrote of a divorce between idealism and practice leading to the competition between ethical idealism, democratic and international aspirations, and values of race, nationalism, and imperialism. It is worth quoting the words of this representative of human science at length in the light of Mosley's respect of 'science': "Races differ greatly", Josey wrote:

"in their ability to impose their will on nature and on men. The complexity of their mental processes, their initiative and ingenuity, their contributions to the welfare of mankind are by no means equal. In all these the white race excels....The white race dominates mankind. They are the rulers *par excellence*. In the white man the evolutionary process seems to have reached its highest point. He is its culminating achievement."¹¹⁰

Internationalism would undermine the 'natural' destiny of the white race to "exercise rational control over the future of the world."¹¹¹ The white race must, it is proclaimed, realise again its "high and noble mission" and then another era of race expansion and creative fruitfulness" can begin.¹¹² From Josey can be inferred a political stance antagonistic to socialist principles and opposing all internationalism which would have

¹¹⁰Charles Conant Josey, *Race and National Solidarity* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923) 235.

¹¹¹To fascists 'internationalism' could refer to any transnational community such as Jews, Gypsies, or Communists. Gypsies continue to confound the imposition of a national identity as Angus Fraser concludes the 'people of Europe' is an appropriate appellation, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 1-9.

¹¹²Josey, *Race*, 226-7.

a diminishing effect on the efficacy of race. In the emerging science of anthropology theorists of language claimed they could connect the evolution of language from an animal cry to the "intellectual and moral needs of man" with French and English nations vying for pre-eminence.¹¹³ Other saw prejudice as a subtle artifice; a construction of white people and their belief in white superiority.¹¹⁴ Scientific reasoning sought to place hypothetical limits to race and these ideas were allowed to slip from the discourse of the intellect and become vulgarised in a concrete reality.¹¹⁵

Writing twenty two years later, in 1928, Hertz highlighted the chance correlation of race and nation. Nations often believed in an illusion of purity in their national blood, and the dominance of a race in nationality.¹¹⁶ Yet national strength gained through racial purity is discounted in a reference to Jews who are described as, "the product of manifold crossings", and whose worldwide influence provides "strong proof against the alleged noxiousness of racial crossings".¹¹⁷ This theme echoes Finot who wrote that any genuinely advanced people, infused with great vitality, would be intermixed with others, "purity of blood is thus only a myth, and its talismatic virtue is found to be irredeemably

¹¹³Andre Lefevre, *Race and Language* (London: Kegan Paul, 1894) 424; incidentally Lefevre finds no link between the Semitic family and Indo-Europeans in this analysis of language and world histories, 224.

¹¹⁴Jean Finot, *Race Prejudice*, trans. Florence Wade-Evans (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906) 310-311.

¹¹⁵ibid., 317.

¹¹⁶Friedrich Hertz, *Race and Civilization*, trans. A.S. Levetus and W. Entz (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1928) 2.

¹¹⁷Hertz, *Race*, 135.

compromised."¹¹⁸ These arguments can be found repeated in the ideas of Hertz who describes the hopelessness of attempts to distinguish between the separate contributions of each of the several races made in the make-up of European culture.

In the discourse of race and nationality two contradictory trends emerge and both used pseudo-science to advance their case either to bolster the claim of racial difference or uniformity but were united on their attempt to strengthen the nation. From this spectrum of ideas Mosley could find, at a conscious or sub-conscious level, whatever intellectual support he required to bolster the operative dimension of his fundamental ideological matrix. Even on the issue of European peace Mosley could find affinities with John Oakesmith who saw value in using the "principle and machinery of nationality which can be... instruments of war, must now be directed and organised towards the accomplishment of peace".¹¹⁹ But, although Oakesmith's liberal temperament looked in a different direction to Mosley; toward educating people away from belief in racial superiority and correlating advancing national character with superior national achievement,¹²⁰ these writings contain a significant racial categorisation of human life in their approach and there is evidence enough in these writings to support a race orientated understanding of human motives for those, like Mosley, seeking to gain a populist appeal and fundamental; understanding of nationality.

¹¹⁸Finot, *Race Prejudice*, 319.

¹¹⁹John Oakesmith, *Race and Nationality: An Inquiry into the Origin and Growth of Patriotism* (London: William Heinemann, 1919) 275

¹²⁰*ibid*, 275 & 299.

From the evidence found in this sample of opinion it can be seen that Mosley's ideology did not simply reflect an extremism stemming from the social zeitgeist, but rather, Mosley's ideology was represented, in parts, by the variety of discourses already available and able to complement, and bolster his worldview.

The territory of Greater Britain

Fascism in Britain did not need to gain territory to be great, it did not need a living space or to demonstrate strength on the world stage through imperial adventure, Britain had an Empire. In this light, Mosley's policy of a 'Greater Britain' was not a new imperial mission of external expansion to regenerate the nation, it sought, rather, a regeneration from within. This feature distinguished Mosley's fascism from Nazi or Italian fascism, and was clearly voiced in 1935 as a part of the fascist palingenetic project:

"We say to the Government, 'keep Britain out and mind Britain's business' lest even worst befall us in the situation to which you have reduced us. Britain shall return to the world scene a giant and a leader among nations. But first she must pass through the rebirth of a mighty awaking."¹²¹

While the days of imperial adventure capture the spirit of Mosley's enterprise they did not dictate his policy. These images were conjured to indicate, for example, an admired vision of manhood: "The men who carried the British flag to the furthest seas were far from hag-ridden in their private lives."¹²² The mythic power of the First World War was

¹²¹Mosley, *The Blackshirt*, no.129, 11 October 1935, 5.

¹²²Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 38-39.

likewise used by the BUF propaganda to demonstrate how national spirit and heroic mission could emerge from crisis but, as with reflections on past imperialist adventure, these myths were used because of their ability to stimulate particular memories and reinforce specific aspects of the process of remembering.¹²³ One example is provided by Raven Thomson who called for the revival of the spirit of the trenches in creating Greater Britain so that she "shall never fall to decadence and decay, but will stand as an example to the world for ages to come."¹²⁴

The fascist world-view saw Britain suffering from a collective amnesia: in Mosley's opinion it was his role to awaken the nation and remind it of how to be great again, because the Government, it seemed, had not only lost the capacity to remember but it could not even report the facts correctly.¹²⁵

¹²³Memory is usefully seen as in a state of constant flux: not the simple recollection of actual events but the recollection of the last time the 'event' was remembered. A 'failure of reality monitoring' is the demonstrable inability of people to distinguish between what they have actually perceived and what they have heard about or imagined and this can be quite common. Gillian Cohen, *Memory in the Real World* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989) 31-32. An utopian visionary with an shrewd political mind, such as Mosley, seeks to play on the fallibility of memory and to replace missing sections of a memory's script with corresponding themes from the utopia. Traditions are drawn into a fascist world view for example May Day is claimed to be National Socialist Day, *The Blackshirt*, no.211, 8 May 1937, 8; "May throughout history has been a month associated with the Common People of Britain...The British Union's cause is of the people and comes from the people. The peoples celebration, therefore, is our day of celebration", *Action*, no.113, 16 April 1938; May Day is interpreted as sign of the "vital spirit of Britain" breaking from the "encumbrance of decadence and vested interest", an act of renewal, Mosley, 'May Day Peoples Day', *Action*, no.115, 30 April 1938, 1.

¹²⁴*The Blackshirt*, no.29, November 11-17th, 1933.

¹²⁵From the outset of the BUF Mosley wrote: "Primarily we are a political movement carrying propaganda for revolutionary changes by peaceful means", *The Blackshirt*, no.1, February 1933, 1.

"Fascism", he argued, "was born from a surging discontent with a regime where nothing can be achieved. The Old Gang hold the stage and, to them, misrepresentation is the path of their own salvation."¹²⁶

Internal regeneration would tap the energy expended by the discontented and channel this energy into a new system of Government, one which could balance stability and progress. These two factors considered essential to a fascist government also express two elements of Mosley's ideological matrix, 'stability' reflecting his concern with the nation and 'progress' with futurism.

"Stability cannot exist without progress, for it implies the recognition of changes in the world which no political system can alter. Nor can progress exist without stability, for it implies a balanced and orderly view of the changes which have taken place."¹²⁷

Mosley flew his kite of social progress in a wind of modernism while its string was firmly tied to the stability of the nation.

Conclusion

A Greater Britain was one operative expression of Mosley's ideological matrix and his utopian dream.¹²⁸ This dream was only realisable when the people of Britain experienced

¹²⁶Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 15.

¹²⁷ibid 18.

¹²⁸Krishna Kuamr describes how utopia acts in society building "upon existing reality but is not imprisoned by it [...] by not showing certain things from our own world, that it negates their persistence into the future [...utopia...] refuses to accept current definitions of the possible because it knows these to be part of the reality that it seeks to change." *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991) 107.

the same perceptual experience of `reality' that Mosley did. In other words this utopia would be realised when fascism became naturalised and it withered away as a political necessity. Mosley concluded his book: "The case advanced in these pages covers, not only a new political policy, but a new conception of life."¹²⁹ It was a huge, fundamental, and cultural revolution which spawned unpleasant offspring. In the next chapter two notorious expressions of fascism, violence and anti-semitism, will be analyzed in relation to Mosley's core ideology.

This was very much Mosley's approach, to present through the pages of its journals, a complete image of comradeship, kinship and unity among members, a happy fascist world in contrast to the dismal days under democracy.

¹²⁹ibid 147.

Eight

Blemish on the dominion: violence and anti-semitism

The operative expression of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix during the 1932-1940 period was expressed in terms of fascism. Mosley's particular permutation of generic fascism's rebirth ultranationalism strove to rebuild Britain in the cast of the sum of individual experiences and it held out utopian visions of a magnitude so self-evident to the prepossessed it produced a response of reflexive denial among BUF supporters who interpreted the harbingers of downfall as messengers indicating success. The enemies of the BUF ideology came clad in the ideological clothing of anti-semitism and violence. Mosley's fascism was dedicated to the revival of Britain and sought support from wherever it came. The powerful impact of Hitler's National Socialist regime resonated with Mosley Fascism which initially expressed itself in more closely to Mussolini's Italian Fascism. This shift can be detected in the revised second edition of Mosley's *The Greater Britain*, published in 1934, and indicates a greater movement than simply increasing the role of the leader in the organisation of the BUF.¹

Operative expressions of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix can be found reflected in the pages of *The Blackshirt* and *Action* as they promoted the rise of fascism on both

¹this particular aspect was highlighted by Benewick, and concurs with the popular assumption that Mosley was simply seeking power, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Allen Lane 1972) 138; see Appendix One for a detailed comparison and analysis of the 1932 and 1934 editions of *The Greater Britain*.

the world stage and in Britain. In the first issue of *The Blackshirt* Mosley declared 'On to Fascist Revolution! Drastic Action or Disaster. Parliament Blethers While Industry Dies' and he described the BUF as "a political movement carrying propaganda for revolutionary change by peaceful means. To this end we seek to penetrate every element and institution in national life."² This was no wistful use of the term 'revolution', it represented an axiom at the heart of Mosley's operative ideology, that being, a desire to overturn the status quo and replace its perceived imbalances with a new order, operating through "regulation and planning of the Corporate system, to build up a home market which rests on the firm basis of a higher standards of life for the mass of the people."³ This was Mosley's operative route to the realization of national greatness demanded by his fundamental ideology.

Changes in Mosley's operative ideology can be detected as he adapted the economic program he had expounded during his parliamentary career, and especially in his resignation speech, to a paradigm defined by the Italian Fascist example.⁴ His inflection of this model produced his particular permutation of generic fascism. The initial audience for the BUF literature corresponded to the founding supporters of Italian Fascism, the *ex-combattenti* and *Arditi*, veterans of the First World War, and a cartoon by John H. Gilmour illustrated a group of ex-servicemen with happy faces leaping through barbed wire toward the hand of fascism which is reaching toward them. The barbed wire is labelled, 'Humbug', 'Old Gang Politicians', 'Old Gang Press', 'Depression', 'Despair',

²Mosley, *The Blackshirt*, no.1 February 1933, 1

³ibid., no.10, 1-7 July 1933.

⁴for example, Mosley, 'Prices Up Wages Down: All parties unite in fatal policy', ibid.

`Broken Promises' and the drawing is captioned `Over the top, for the last time boys!'⁵ This similarity to Italian Fascism was not disguised by Mosley (to call the newspaper `Blackshirt' invites parallels) and in the first issue of *Blackshirt* he compared the necessity of Mussolini's dictatorship of Mussolini to save Italy with the BUF resistance to `organised bands of Reds' and `anti-British forces'. To Mosley fascism was more than an anti-marxist movement, it was a universal futurist ideology of the day: "Fascism alone stands out as the real Technocracy of Government, as the spirit of the modern age and the science of modern age translated into a movement of action."⁶ Dynamism was the determining quality.

The rise of Hitler at this time was,⁷ likewise, viewed by Mosley as an example of the new ideology gaining impetus across Europe but not necessarily providing a paradigm for his movement.⁸ Articles titled "Fascist Progress in Holland",⁹ "France is Going Fascist",¹⁰ Fascism in Switzerland, and "Fascist Progress in Sweden,"¹¹ were regular features in *The Blackshirt* of the latter half of 1933 and were used to demonstrate the `irresistible' surge of fascism across Europe. Furthermore, an anti-communist stance emerged in the pages of *The Blackshirt* and was used to gauge fascist success and, "marks a new phase in the

⁵*The Blackshirt*, no.20, 9-15 September 1933, 3.

⁶Mosley, *ibid.*, no.1, February 1933, 4.

⁷Hitler appointed Chancellor 30 January 1933.

⁸Mosley, `Hitler - The new man of Germany', *The Blackshirt*, no.2, March 1933, 2.

⁹*ibid.*, no.18, 26 August - 1 September and no.19, 2 - 8 September 1933.

¹⁰*ibid.*, no.20, 9 - 15 September 1933.

¹¹*ibid.*, no.22, 23 - 29 September 1933

Fascist struggle", while police activities at BUF meetings were interpreted as an attempt to protect the communist agitators; it is a sign of the Old Gang Government's alarm at "the extraordinary advance of Fascism in Great Britain during the last few months."¹² The strength of opposition was interpreted by the BUF as a gauge to the strength of the fascist message, supporting and hardening fascism as an operative ideology which best represented Mosley's fundamental ideology.

But Mosley's fascism was not hermetically sealed and impregnable, and inevitably open to the cross fertilisation from other ideologies which emerged out from the same concerns, with "origin[s] in the same turmoil of the human mind and spirit."¹³ In this manner Hitler's nazism was drawn into the expression of Mosley's fascism and BUF organised tours to Germany, with itineraries including items such as "visiting concentration Camps for political prisoners and other Reds", the doors were opened and the invitation presented for the entrance of German nazi ideas into British Fascism.¹⁴ The most notable of these was anti-semitism.

Anti-Semitism

Ten months after Hitler gained power in Germany *The Blackshirt* opened with the headline 'Shall Jews Drag Britain to War?'. In this article the BUF denied political hatred of Jews, its policy "has not been anti-Semitic. We have never attacked any man merely

¹²Mosley, *ibid.*, no.3 March 1933, 1.

¹³Mosley, 'The Future of the Political Parties: A Symposium', *Political Quarterly*, vol.III, no.1, January-March 1932, 31.

¹⁴Leaflet, 'Itinerary for German Tour' in *The Blackshirt*, 16 June 1933.

because he was a Jew."¹⁵ The BUF defense against the charge of anti-semitism was rehearsed before December 1933 under the headline 'The "Jewish World" Challenge' where the BUF stated it was not anti-semitic: "We did not say 'the Jews are striving to involve Britain in War,' but that 'Jews' were doing so."¹⁶ The reflexive denial of the possession of a real prejudice coming as a prelude to the expression of that prejudice is a feature common to racial or ethnic intolerance,¹⁷ and in this way the BUF and Mosley's fascism defined prejudice through their denial of it. In addition to this observation the genesis of the term anti-Semitism sheds light on claim that Mosley was anti-semitic.

A brief history of anti-semitism

The term 'anti-semitism' has been attributed to the Wilhelm Marr a journalist among a group of German Jew haters at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Writing in 1878 Marr's *The Victory of Judaism over Germany* described the general history of Jewish socio-cultural hegemony in the world. The book was such a success it became a best-seller,¹⁹ not least because of its despairing tone, "readers found in the book what Marr had not

¹⁵*The Blackshirt*, no.28, 4 - 10 November 1933.

¹⁶*The Blackshirt*, no.30, 18-24 November 1933; Mosley persisted with the argument that he did not attack Jews on account of their race throughout his career, see for example question 129, *Mosley Right or Wrong* (London: Lion Books, 1961) 131.

¹⁷reflexive denial follows a similar procedure as that described by Teun A. van Dijk, of the attempt by a speaker to control the recipient's opinion using strategic denials such as "I am not a racist, but...", 'Discourse, Opinions and Ideologies' first draft, paper for a colloquium at Aston University, 16 May 1995, 21

¹⁸Lionel B. Steiman, *Paths to Genocide: Antisemitism in Western History* (London: Macmillan 1998) 151-152

¹⁹Marr's book was published March 1879

written: the incentive for a war against the Jews."²⁰ And one reason anti-Semitism in general gained popularity was its combination of pseudo-scientific facade and an overall obscure and inconsistent content which could satisfy many, otherwise, diverse individuals.²¹

Marr demonstrates an anti-semitic example of reflexive denial and one comparable to the claim Mosley's made later, that it was the Jews who created the anti-semitism of the BUF by attacking them. One example of this is demonstrated by a speech given at the Albert Hall where Mosley stated "we do not attack Jews on racial or religious grounds. We take up the challenge that they have thrown down, because they fight against Fascism, and against Britain...."²² And two years later in the same hall Mosley declared: "The Jew himself has created anti-semitism - created it as has always done, by letting people see him and his methods. Even Hitler was not anti-Semitic before he saw a Jew."²³ Such logic is indicative of reflexive denial.²⁴

Marr's anti-semitism, unlike Mosley's can be explained in terms of personal tragedy. He

²⁰Moshe Zimmerman, *Wilhelm Marr: the Patriarch of Antisemitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 78

²¹*ibid.*, 113

²²'Blackshirts Take up the Challenge Thrown down by Jewry. The Leader's Great Clarion Call at the Albert Hall', *The Blackshirt*, no.80, 2 November 1934, 1 & 2.

²³'Fascism has the Power to demand peace: the Jew alone stands between Britain and Germany', report of a BUF Albert Hall Rally, *The Blackshirt*, no.153, 28 March 1936, 5.

²⁴see Colin Cook, 'Oswald Mosley's European Alternative: Reflexive Denial and Resistance to Collective Memory', workshop 29:1 'Post-Fascist Memory in Europe', *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of ISSEI 1996* [CDROM]

had a number of wives but claimed he only found true happiness and contentment with his second wife who was a Jew. She became pregnant but the baby was still-born and Marr's wife soon followed it to the grave. Marr interpreted these events in biological terms: "My wife was a pure Jewess; since pure blood is always preferable to mixed blood, my life with was happy.....I at least came to know the Semitic race in a thorough manner, in its most intimate details, and I warn against the mingling of Aryan and Semitic blood."²⁵ This was a very biological racism.

Marr, like Mosley, was an atheist and by using the term anti-semitism he could overcome the dilemma of attacking Jews on religious criteria but, conversely, anti-semitism denoted an opposition to all people using the semitic language, presumably including those who were not Jews. This subtlety was not lost on German Nazis whose authority on race, Hans Günther, believed anti-semitism to be a bad expression ideally to be replaced by 'anti-Jewishness'. The term 'anti-semitism' was banned in Nazi press by Goebels to narrow its range: the war was to be fought against the Jews and nothing less, echoing the contrasts made in Nuremberg laws between 'Jew' and 'German' rather than 'semite' and 'Aryan'.²⁶ Marr's reliance on the dichotomy of Semite and Aryan developed from the ideas of

²⁵Marr quoted in Moshe Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr*, 71 & 72.

²⁶Moshe Zimmerman, *Wilhelm Marr: the Patriarch of Antisemitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 114; Klaus P. Fischer has recoiled from using the term 'anti-semitism', because of its inherent ambiguity and connection with the purveyors of the anti-Jew onslaught, in his history of the Holocaust favouring the 'clinical' term 'Judeophobia' or 'Jew hatred', *The History of an Obsession: German Judeophobia and the Holocaust* (London: Constable, 1998) 3 & 24. Richard S. Levy has highlighted these fine distinctions with a definition of antisemitism including a commitment to act against Jews, *Antisemitism in the Modern World. An Anthology of Texts* (Lexington & Toronto: Heath & Co., 1991) 5 & 38 cited in Lionel B. Steiman, *Paths to Genocide: Antisemitism in Western History* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 253

French scholar Renan who understood linguistic divides in terms of semitic and aryan varieties. The aryan myth, though, goes further than a linguistic division in its description of an Aryan race descending from an Asian plateau and travelling into Europe to become the supreme race, in opposition to the Semites. This myth was established in Europe during the middle of the last century.²⁷ It attracted believers slowly in England and only really gained support after Darwin's scientific challenge to the doctrine of Christianity had become accepted,²⁸ but it was not a major feature of Mosley's politics.

Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix did not possess a biological, racist, factor. It was concerned with a strong nation and had no intrinsic requirement to oppose any particular group on the basis of race or religion. Furthermore, Mosley's perception of the nation emanating from the trans-individual, cultural zone, was not determined to connect with a biological base of race. In this respect, Mosley was in stark contrast to the Imperial Fascist League of Arnold Leese, whose fanatical anti-semitic doctrine fully believed in the conspiracy described in the infamous forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and saw race as a biological battle for superiority.²⁹ In this interpretation of history Aryans represented the pinnacle of achievement in a struggle demoting the Jew to the role of an agent of racial inferiority. Mosley's conception of nationality led to an indistinct racial,

²⁷Leon Poliakov suggests by 1860 the division between Aryans and Semites, "was already a part of the intellectual baggage of all cultivated Europeans." *The Aryan Myth* (London: Chatto Heinmann for Sussex University Press, 1974) 255

²⁸Charles Darwin published the results of his research into natural selection and evolution in *The Origin of Species*, in 1859

²⁹The Imperial Fascist League, founded 1928, saw Mosley's BUF as part of the Jewish conspiracy plan to soften their anti-semitic message. Under the leadership of Arnold Leese, the IFL refused Mosley's attempts to draw them into his organisation.

or anti-semitic, policy because his sense of nationality was not rooted in pseudo-biology. Mosley did, though, move close as he demonstrated in 1936 "We are fully aware of the racial differences between Jews and ourselves, and when entrusted with government, we are fully entitled to take any measures necessary for the preservation of the British race."³⁰ But it was the fundamental demand for national strength which dictated operative policy and Mosley contended that he never attacked Jews for what they were but for what they did, that is, "that they have constituted themselves a state within the nation."³¹ The fine gauge in this line of distinction demands that the association between the BUF and antisemitism is addressed.

The BUF and Anti-semitism

The association of anti-Semitism with BUF policy is a vexed question. The emergence at the end of the Second World War of the extent of nazi German attempt to eliminate European Jewry, the Holocaust, brought retrospective justification to the illiberal pre-war actions to against British fascists, such as internment under Defence Regulation 18(1a),³² and highlighted the anti-semitic rhetoric of the BUF in a society sensitised by witnessing films of horrors committed in the name of national socialism. But why did Mosley adopt anti-semitism at all, or was he intrinsically an anti-semite? Scholarship to date brings no

³⁰Mosley, 'British Rights and Jewish interests: We must govern our own country', *The Blackshirt*, no.180, 3 October 1936, 1.

³¹Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 59.

³²the trigger to intern fascists but not communists in Britain indicates the threat to the secret alliance between Churchill and Roosevelt brought about by the Tyler Kent affair, see Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985*, 194-196; see also A.W.B. Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention Without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

clear answer to this conundrum.

In an attempt to explain Mosley's antisemitism Gisela Lebzelter has pointed to his anti-Jewish expressions in addition to the overt antisemitic campaigns of the BUF, over which he claimed autocratic control as its 'leader'. The BUF movement was an expression of Mosley's predispositions, and hence his ideological matrix.³³ But Lebzelter has also accepted anti-semitism was used "as a propaganda asset without the devotion of a frenzied fanatic," and Mosley, "succumbed to the dynamics of that ideology",³⁴ which developed a political dimension as the economic crisis diminished.³⁵ Anti-semitism in the BUF was both an expression of Mosley's predisposition and a propaganda ploy. While the focus of Lebzelter's account rests on British anti-semitism and, as a result, does not extend to Mosley's political economic background and connect this with his anti-semitism, Mosley's antisemitism is left to be understood as both essentially anti-semitic and, simultaneously, contingently anti-semitic without distinction. In the broad sweep of Lebzelter's topic Mosley's antisemitism is not connected to his interpretation of economic transactions and their nature as a token of national vitality, its life blood, which led to a need to protect and strengthen economic transactions. From this position Mosley could interpret international finance as synonymous with an anti-nationalism and an alien menace; big business was brought alongside international Jewry. It was these factors, combined with the futuristic demand to act and do, which led Mosley to attack Jews

³³Gisela C. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918-1919* (New York: Holmes Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978) 99

³⁴ibid., 104.

³⁵ibid., 101

because of the perception that they threatened his mythical 'greater Britain', rather than being mesmerised by Nazi style, racial, or religious hatred.

Colin Holmes' account of British anti-semitism looked beyond individual prejudice to the social setting and argued that while some BUF members possessed an obsessive hatred of Jews which gave purpose to their lives, the broader context cannot be ignored. Holmes goes on to describe the existence of an anti-semitic tradition before the BUF, demonstrated in the extreme by the example of Arnold Leese's Imperial Fascist League, founded in 1929 three years before the BUF was formed. Furthermore, the gap between fascism and anti-semitism had been demonstrated by Mussolini's fascism which had not been politically anti-semitic until after the Rome-Berlin 'Axis' of 1936. Holmes argues there was a predisposition towards anti-Semitism in the BUF ideology as it responded to the 1929-31 crisis, and after 1934, when the BUF was released from the constraints brought about by their connection with the 'respectable' press baron Rothermere, the anti-semitic theorists openly constructed their exotic conspiracy 'superstructure'. Holmes recognises Mosley's claim that he did not attack Jews on account of their 'race' or biological determinants, but adds, Mosley's "attitudes revealed a hostility towards Jews which was expressed within an ethnocentric and conspiratorial framework".³⁶ This, though, does not imply Mosley's ideological matrix was fundamentally anti-semitic at all. His anti-semitism was an operative ideological route to the expression of his fundamental ideological matrix. Using this ideal type paradigm there is no requirement to delve into

³⁶Colin Holmes, *Anti-semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979) 179-180

the dubious psychological explanations for a loathing of Jews.³⁷ The tone of Mosley's writing on Jews are of a different order than those of fundamentally driven anti-semites such as, for example, A.K. Chesterton or Hitler.

Holmes' interpretation of anti-semitism is in a similar framework to Renan and Marr, that is anti-semitism is the hatred of Jews and not the semitic peoples as a whole. More precisely Holmes regards anti-semitism as the hatred of Jew *as Jews*, because of their ethnic heritage, and not attacks on Jews who simply happen to be Jews.³⁸ Holmes suggests Mosley possessed an ability to hide his anti-semitism, which was a skill drawn from his family which had given him a knowledge of the system of influence in Britain. The result of this upbringing created a calculating political figure who could display greater self restraint than others and, "allowed only an occasional raw emotional streak of anti-semitism to appear."³⁹ Holmes assumes Mosley was primarily an anti-semite rather than a political anti-semite seeking, primarily, the regeneration of his country. This later interpretation is adopted in Thurlow's description of the BUF's 'turn to anti-semitism' in terms of a populist attempt at a restart following the loss of Rothermere support.⁴⁰ Mosley had ordered the notoriously anti-semite A.K Chesterton to compile a report into attacks against BUF by Jews and his less than surprising results confirmed

³⁷for an imaginative psychoanalytical account of Hitler's Jew hatred in terms of his thirst for revenge over the Versailles Treaty, and his necrophile fear of dirt and poisoning which saw the Jews as foreigners and foreigners as poison, see Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 525 & 531

³⁸Holmes, *ibid.*, 1; Holmes, 'Anti-Semitism and the BUF' in *British Fascism*, Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow eds. (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 114

³⁹Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in Britain*, 196.

⁴⁰Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 104

Mosley's suspicions. As a result Mosley voiced his explanation for BUF hostility toward Jews in terms of retaliation for their attacks on BUF attacks on the BUF.

Mandle's analysis, like Thurlow's, connects a decline in BUF membership to growing exoteric anti-semitism flowering out of an esoteric anti-semitic propensity from amongst its membership.⁴¹ Mandle argues Mosley's anti-semitism was of a particular type obsessed with conspiracy and the concept of challenge.⁴² Benewick's approach to BUF anti-semitism describes it as, "the Jews were a tangible object for projection and an outlet for frustration."⁴³ The Jewish community were an identifiable group to the Blackshirts and hence, easily available for attacks, unlike the communists whose locale was more 'under the bed' than Mile End. Greater credence can be lent to these contextual and existential rationales though, than to Eatwell's cavalier description that, "Mosley was essentially the amoral opportunist, driven by his quest for an issue which could rally the foolish masses."⁴⁴ Together these analyses suggest anti-semitism was the result of poor, or misjudged, policy management rather than emerging from a fundamental abhorrence of Jews at the core of Mosley's fascist ideology, and the BUF anti-semitism was a case of political expediency rather than fundamental ideology.

⁴¹W.F. Mandle, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* (London: Longmans 1968) 63

⁴²ibid. 69

⁴³Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1972) 151

⁴⁴Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in Britain*, 9; Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 186

Two broad categories of interpretation emerge which relate to Mosley's political biography. Anti-semitism was used as a tactical (if not cynical) political ploy, or anti-semitism was used as a genuine expression of an inner ideological compulsion. In the light of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix, his anti-semitism reflected a persistent and common anti-Jewish sentiment of the British people as it found an operative dimension Jews were perceived in Britain as failing to assimilate themselves into British culture and were believed to have brought about their own harassment, if not persecution.⁴⁵ Tony Kushner has written that, "the contemporary literature and social surveys of the 1930s and 40s do suggest that most people in Britain saw the Jews as somehow foreign....many (on the left as well as the right) believed that Jews exercised inordinate power in society."⁴⁶ This attitude was reflected in Mosley's writing when he described 'the Jew' who, "comes from the Orient and physically, mentally and spiritually, is more alien to us than any Western nation."⁴⁷ From a background culture of anti-semitic feeling which pervaded British society Mosley drew a language to shape his operative ideology. Britain could tolerate only those Jews who shed their distinctive Jewishness. In fascism, and in the company of passionate and extreme anti-semites such as William Joyce, Mick Clark and A.K. Chesterton, and building upon isolationist economic theories such as social credit, themselves primary expressed by anti-semites such as Kitson, Mosley's expressed hatred of Jew's was considerably restrained and without the anticipated degree of vindictive force expected of genuine hatred and intolerance. As a

⁴⁵see Tony Kushner, 'British reactions to Nazi Anti-Semitism' in Kushner and Kenneth Lunn eds., *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1990) 143-161

⁴⁶ibid., 145.

⁴⁷Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 59

fascist, Mosley's Jew hatred was muted if at all genuine, and a political tactic, if not a cynical political manoeuvre.

Mosley's Jew hatred

One approach to understanding Mosley's anti-semitism is to employ the ideal type definition of his nation discussed in the previous chapter. Here Mosley's nation was described as a cultural entity which could be mirrored in economic transactions, but otherwise created and existing between individuals and perpetually created in the moment of their interaction. The total expression of this nation would use a corporative structure within which individuals could effectively act on an understanding of action based on concrete experience the source of real knowledge. For Mosley, corporative association would enable the social interactions of individuals, made within areas of competence, to come together to express the spirit of the nation while the historical nature would remain unfettered.⁴⁸ In this light the Jewish population in Britain acted as a daily and tangible reminder of the perceived decline in Britain, and they became a worthwhile tactical target for the BUF because they could be recognised by the least trained and prejudiced eye. Mosley provided the nationalist gloss stating that for fascism to succeed in Britain it, "must be indigenous and peculiar to the British mind and nature," while its origin lay "in the same turmoil of the human mind and spirit" as existed in other nations.⁴⁹ It was to allow Mosley's vision of a true British nation to be revealed that any non-national elements, such as the Jews, were to be removed from Britain so it could be 'great' again.

⁴⁸see A.R. Raven, *The Coming Corporate State* (Westminster: Action, 1937)

⁴⁹Mosley, 'The Future of the Political Parties: A Symposium', *Political Quarterly*, vol.III, no.1, January-March 1932, 30-31.

Jews were tangibly occupying the same conceptual space as that sought by Mosley's nation in its ideological operative mode.

At a BUF Hyde Park rally Mosley announced: "We know that beyond the alien financier, beyond the Red mob, beyond the Tory Party, is the great heart and soul of the British people. It is that heart and to that soul that we are appealing to-day."⁵⁰ Anti-semitism was not a necessary political goal for Mosley, it was a pragmatic step which could allow for the realisation of his utopia of a strong Britain, "a brotherhood which is the greatest thing that we shall ever know in our lives."⁵¹ And in a telling passage of admiration for Mosley, A.K. Chesterton demonstrated the difference between him and his leader by adding to the dream of a free Britain: "freed from oriental smells of decadence and ruin,"⁵² a crudity of language Mosley avoided.⁵³

One exception to Mosley's rule not to attack Jews on purely `racial' grounds occurred at the Manchester Belle Vue Park. Here Mosley made anti-semitic pronouncements indicating a biological racism which were unusual comments from his lips. Angered by hecklers he said, "Just take one look at their alien faces and you know who are financing a crowd like that...This evening's entertainment, provided by this little crowd brought

⁵⁰*The Blackshirt*, no.73, 14 September 1934, 2.

⁵¹Mosley, *The Blackshirt*, no.74, 21 September 1934, 10.

⁵²A.K. Chesterton, introduction to *British Union Pictorial Record* (London [?]: BUF, 1938)

⁵³for Chesterton see David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A.K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (Tauris Academic Studies, 1996)

here by Jewish money,"⁵⁴ a declaration proudly published and headlined in the BUF newspaper. In this speech Mosley demonstrated an evolution of his anti-semitism from what was previously 'international finance' to become "alien Yiddish finance, more than any other single factor, which is undermining the prosperity of Britain to-day".⁵⁵ But it is the 'undermining of Britain' which Mosley opposed and not, fundamentally, those who do not interfere with the process of genuine nation production.

A month after his Manchester speech Mosley sought to rationalise his remarks. Using examples, most probably gleaned from Chesterton's research findings, to argue that of those people convicted for attacking fascists in June, thirty two names had Jewish origins suggesting the attackers did not represent a genuine uprising of British people against fascism because 50% of those arrested were Jews in a land where the Jewish population is only 0.6%. Fascists, he said fight Jews because they fight fascism.⁵⁶ Mosley clearly expressed his ideological matrix when he said he had set out, "with the national objective of saving our country by cutting free from internationalism and awakening the soul of our nation for national reconstruction. This did not suit the big Jewish interests, and they attacked us."⁵⁷ And this led him to his seeing even the party political system he attacked as a front for Jewish interests seeking to dominate the nation.⁵⁸

⁵⁴report of Mosley speech, *The Blackshirt*, no.76, 5 October 1934, 2.

⁵⁵ibid.

⁵⁶report of Mosley speech, *The Blackshirt*, 2 November 1934, 2

⁵⁷Mosley, 'British Rights and Jewish Interests: We must govern our own country', *The Blackshirt*, n.180, 3 October 1936, 1

⁵⁸ibid., and report of Mosley speech at Belle Vue Park Manchester, *The Blackshirt* no.76, 5 October 1934, 2.

Reflexive denial turns anti-semitism on its head.⁵⁹ Jews, not fascists, created anti-semitism for fascism.⁶⁰ "The Jews", Mosley said, "more than any other single force in this country are carrying on a most violent propaganda against us."⁶¹ Jews were perceived as opposing Mosley's "Movement of national revival", the BUF, because of an allegiance they held beyond Britain's borders. Jews were allied to "their own race and kin in nations beyond our frontiers",⁶² and they were competing ideologically for the same conceptual territory Mosley had held to be denoted by 'Britain', that being the space defined by the interaction of two, culturally conversant, people. The inherent strength of the Jewish community appeared to corrupt the simple lines drawn by fascism and provide a non-German scapegoat to evoke the sense of community found in war. Compelled by his fundamental ideology, seeking a strong Britain, Mosley operatively expressed this by declaring fascist's willingness to incorporate Jews into Britain only if they put the interest of Britain before those of Jewry. Under these conditions Jew's would have nothing to fear from fascism, and it would be them who would create anti-semitism if they failed to match these demands by maintaining national interests outside of Britain.⁶³ This policy was echoed by the obsessive anti-semite A.K. Chesterton, in reply to criticism of the

⁵⁹reflexive denial can be described as the involuntary redeployment of meaning by an ideological adherent to bolster an ideology, despite overriding demands made by an antithetic consensual countenance within the adherents community, I outlined this idea in my paper 'Oswald Mosley's European Alternative: Reflexive Denial and Resistance to Collective Memory', workshop 29:1 'Post-Fascist Memory in Europe', *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of ISSEI 1996* [CDROM]

⁶⁰the same argument would be employed to explain the violence at BUF meetings

⁶¹report of Mosley speech at Albert Hall, *The Blackshirt*, no.80, 2 November 1934, 2, this issues led with a front page headline 'Fascism accepted the challenge of Jewry'

⁶²ibid.

⁶³*The Blackshirt*, no.84, 30 November 1934, 4.

BUF, who wrote that only those identified with social or economic malpractice needed to fear fascism.⁶⁴

One source of Mosley's opposition to the Jews was their infringement, and contradiction, of the generative site of the nation. His fundamental ideology sought to strengthen Britain and he expressed this in *Tomorrow We Live*, "We propose ... to make those who understand finance do what the people want done, and to let them know in plain facts what will happen if they do not do the job the nation commands...the process will be greatly assisted by the preliminary deportation of alien financiers."⁶⁵ At the ideologically operative level Mosley was tapping an undercurrent of opinions, a body of ideas which appeared in Europe in the nineteenth century and which described history in terms of race. This 'idea' came to Britain only after neo-Darwinian accounts of evolution became accepted and these racial ideas were reflected in Disraeli's word which saw history as, "All is race; there is no other truth".⁶⁶ This idea echoes the 'real founder of British racism', the surgeon Robert Knox who wrote, "race is everything civilisation depends on it".⁶⁷ The importance of race to Mosley's fundamental ideology was only as a carrier of the cultural values of the nation. The British race was an effect, a function of the nation, and one which both created and perpetuated Mosley's Britain. In this light, a fascist could accept

⁶⁴*Everyman*, no.19, 15 February 1935, 445.

⁶⁵Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 48

⁶⁶Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A history of racist and nationalist ideas in Europe* (London: Sussex University Press, 1971) 232; according to Diana Mosley her husband was an admirer of Disraeli and he had discussed the idea of writing a book about him with the publisher Hamish Hamilton, letter to *The Times*, 10 March 1998, 19.

⁶⁷Poliakov, *Aryan Myth*, 232.

the British race as a biologically eclectic mix rather than a genetically 'pure' strain of European and this mix could include biological Jews.

Political anti-semitism

Richard Thurlow has argued anti-semitism was a political weapon in Mosley's armoury as Thurlow indicates which Mosley demonstrated in his 1936 speech where he state that, "in any in audience in Britain the strongest passion that can be aroused is the passion against the corruption of the Jewish power."⁶⁸ Mosley believed the Jews were attempting to drag Britain into war with Germany and by doing so they were coming, "out into the open, when they marched to Hyde Park,....when fear made them less cunning, when they revealed themselves to the British people. That was when anti-Semitism was born."⁶⁹ A distinction was drawn between the British people and the Jew who were described simply 'not British'. The BUF, in this light was not destroying Jewry but draw out those 'corrupting' elements in the ailing body of the British nation, among them Jews. Anti-semitism became a consequence, an effect, of BUF activity, and of Mosley's fundamental ideology, not a motivating factor. Mosley linked his attacks on Jews with his general attack on the old political gangs. He argued that if BUF free speech was restricted to allow Jews freedom from all forms of attack, this would justify the, "Fascist complaint against Jewry and its relationship to the older Parties of the State".⁷⁰ This remark displays Mosley's tactical use of anti-semitism in connection to the creation of the National

⁶⁸Mosley speech, 'The Sinister Force of Jewry', *Action*, no.6, 26 March 1936, 9.

⁶⁹ibid.; 50 000 East End Jews demonstrated against Nazism at Hyde Park during July 1933, Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 384.

⁷⁰Mosley, letter to Sir John Simon Secretary of State for Home Affairs reproduced in *Action*, no.4, 12 March 1936, 5.

Government on 24 August 1931 with its limited purpose,⁷¹ "To deal with the national emergency that now exists."⁷² Mosley was losing operative routes such as the economic reasons underpinning his argument for fascism, and the sheen of nationalism, and so the political use of anti-semitism acted as a useful populist recruitment ground for Mosley.⁷³

BUF re-organisation

Early in 1935 Mosley wrote of 'The Next Stage in Fascism', announcing a reorganisation of the BUF, dividing the movement into two. First were the dedicated Blackshirt core of, "those who prove, by real Blackshirt service, that they are inspired by the true Blackshirt spirit," and second were those 'sincere' to the cause but unable to enter Blackshirt ranks, "or who have the purely political mind as distinct from the dedicated Blackshirt spirit."⁷⁴ Mosley's reorganisation of the BUF was both symbolic and pragmatic. Symbolically it represented the BUF as a movement led by dedicated enlightened elite core, and it was a pragmatic political act because it formed a discrete and immeasurable quantity of BUF members, in addition to the evident uniformed members, which could allow for claims of far greater support than may have actually existed.

⁷¹Maurice Cowling described Mosley as, "unlucky in the timing of his major acts as a politician", rather than an ill-judged politician, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 16

⁷²part of an official statement from the newly formed National Government August 1931, quoted by A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) 293

⁷³according to Mandle this could account for the failure of the BUF anti-semitic campaign: Mosley had turned to anti-semitism as a scapegoat in times of trouble, yet the times of trouble did not exist, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* (Plymouth: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1975) 65

⁷⁴Mosley, 'The Next Stage in Fascism', *The Blackshirt* no.91, 18 January 1935, 1.

Reorganising the BUF drove the corporate principle deeper into the organisation with small five man units who would "live and think in terms of the unit...It must be a miniature of the whole Movement and contain within it the whole spirit of the Movement." The Leadership principle was, likewise, replicated throughout the BUF at its macro-organisational level and the ability to lead would determine promotion prospects.⁷⁵ But while Mosley was tidying up his domestic organisation his political eye moved to affairs of Europe and World.

Mosley's rhetorical vitriol turned on communist Russia for threatening the peace of Europe, but this attack also contained an anti-semitic sentiment when he referred to the interests of international finance in Russia. Of more significance, in the light of Mosley's ideological matrix, was the connection Mosley made between fascism and the maintenance of European peace bonded to the idea of European rebirth. He wrote:

"Throughout all nations the new force of Fascism arises in form and character suited to the individual people. But throughout every Fascist Movement vibrates the vital inspiration of Europe reborn. That inspiration will provide unity and a Peace of which the democrat cannot even dream"⁷⁶

Mosley polarised the themes of European peace and rebirth with their counterparts of Jewish interests and the Bolshevik Revolution demonstrating a shift in operative ideology yet maintaining coherent fundamental ideology.⁷⁷ To connect Jewry to bolshevism was a feature of anti-semitic reaction from the outset and was not a feature created by Mosley.

⁷⁵ibid., 1-2.

⁷⁶Mosley, *The Blackshirt*, no.99, 15 March 1935, 2.

⁷⁷Mosley, *ibid.*, no.101, 29 March 1935, 2

The title of a 1921 publication of The Britons, *Jews in Russia: with a list of the names of the 447 Jews in the Soviet Government in Russia* acts to demonstrate this theme.⁷⁸ The intellectual enemy of the nation, communism, was simply bound to the biological enemy of the nation, the Jewry: Jews were biologically identifiable to the anti-semitic eye, while a communist was differentiated only by the invisible possession of a political idea, yet both were believed to undermine national identity through overt or covert financial schemes.

Mosley found considerable scope to express his combination of financial and national decline in this reactionary discourse. Anti-semitism was reflected in his description of 'Financiers of democracy' who were prepared to trade with Russia, or as he saw it, use Russia as a dumping ground for the surplus produce and the exportation of economic capital endangering to nationalism by "interlocking the Economics of Civilisation with the Politics of Barbarism." But, Mosley rhetorically asked, why do these people put Russia first and not Britain first? to which he replied,

"(1) that International Finance has established great interests in Russia, and (2) that Jews hate Germany and seek to use Russia against her. So the ugly twins of corruption in the West and Communism in the East march hand in hand to challenge the Renaissance of the European. This is the answer which challenges the manhood of Britain."⁷⁹

⁷⁸Victor Emile Marsden, *Jews in Russia: with a list of the names of the 447 Jews in the Soviet Government in Russia* (The Britons', 1921)

⁷⁹Mosley, 'Peace Sacrificed to Soviet?', *The Blackshirt* no.96, 22 February 1935, 6.

Presented as a third force on the world political stage, fascism was portrayed as a force seeking to avoid war with the Jews who were described as driving Europe into war with international finance draining national assets. Mosley's motif became one of attacking the amorphous international finance and transnational Judaism because they were perceived to be antagonistic to national strength and intent on bringing European nations into conflict, undermining their financial base, while socialists are accused of "destroying White civilisation in the interest of International Usury."⁸⁰

At the Albert Hall Mosley spoke of "socialism and Jewry marching hand in hand ...insulting Germany," but the fear of impending war caused him to remind his audience not only of his belief in a conspiracy of international socialism and international Jewry but how to avoid it, "in World Fascism you have a guarantee of peace such as Democracy can never hope to present."⁸¹ And so Mosley Fascism painted a picture of polarized world politics whose antagonism could force future war with peace only to be found in fascism: "Why", Mosley argues, "should Britain pursue a policy so insensate as the criminal employment of Oriental Communism against Western Fascism?"⁸² There was an operative shift in Mosley's expression of his fundamental ideology when anti-Semitism appears. Mosley extended the range of his fascism from a chauvinistic British phenomenon to one of a world wide ideology and creed. Underpinning much of Mosley's apparent fear of Jewry was a greater fear of another war which would weaken Britain.

⁸⁰Mosley, 'Bankers and Socialists. the "All-In" International', *ibid.*, no.98, 8 March 1935, 1

⁸¹Mosley speech reported in *ibid.*, no.101, 29 March 1935, 5.

⁸²Mosley, 'The Vile Conspiracy. Weakness and Aggression', *The Blackshirt*, no.108, 17 May 1935, 1.

Although the Olympia meeting of July 1934 acted to repel individuals who sought peace,⁸³ others were attracted toward Mosley's movement for precisely the same reason, to prevent war.⁸⁴ Jews, Mosley argued, were the cause of war and his anti-semitism portrayed the Jew as pariah of civilisation, slipping into the interstitial zone of national generation, breaching national boundaries and fostering antagonisms between nations. Furthermore, Jews were seen to be supporting the internationalism of both socialism and capitalism, while the pseudo-scientific theories of anti-semitism provided intellectual support in the BUF search for more populist methods.⁸⁵ In his arguments Mosley allowed the precise meaning of utterances to slip in order to bring the enemies of fascism closer together and indicate conspiracy. For example, in the following passage Mosley slips from using 'Socialist's' to end with 'International Usury':

"[Socialist's] became the last hope and instrument of the system which they denounce. Forever mouthing revolutionary formulae, they are, in fact, the performing mice of the Bankers whose antics distract the people while our real rulers get on with the job of destroying White civilisation in the interest of International Usury."⁸⁶

Mosley's political anti-semitic remarks were encouraged by nazi Germany's approach to

⁸³Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914 - 1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 153

⁸⁴ibid., 195.

⁸⁵Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 104-5

⁸⁶Mosley, 'Bankers and Socialists. The "All-In" International', *The Blackshirt*, no.98, 8 March 1935, 1.

Jews and sought to polarise the political spectrum in Britain around notions of identity.⁸⁷ The question was indirectly one of British or Jew?. It was the relationship between the idea of Britain and constituent individuals which was the deciding factor. When Mosley was asked by a Jew if he would be sent to a concentration camp if fascism came to power Mosley replied that the Jew would be required to put the interests of Britain before Jewry. Jewish identity subsumed in Britishness to an extent that it would create a Jew loyal to Britain who would not be hurt by fascism.⁸⁸ It was this basic argument which was carried in Mosley's *Tomorrow We Live* when he stated that the British Union would not attack Jews on account of religion or race but only on the grounds that they, "have constituted themselves a state within a nation, and have set the interests of their co-racialists at home and abroad above the interest of the British State."⁸⁹ The impact of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix in the concrete fact of the material world is expressed here in a raw form. Only the Jews holding non-British interests would be required to leave Britain and Mosley proposed the creation of a Jewish National State in one of "many waste places of the earth possessing great potential fertility... where Jews may escape the curse of nationality and may again acquire the status and opportunity of nationhood."⁹⁰ In these words Mosley exposed an operative ideological stance resolution to the problem posed

⁸⁷Mosley described Hitler as a flawed character and understates any admiration for him in his autobiography, *My Life*, 364-372; Nicholas Mosley did not believe his father liked Hitler, *Rules of the Game/Beyond the Pale* rev.ed. (1994) 334-5; The Nazi Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 removed German citizenship from Jews and forbade 'Aryan' Germans from marrying Jews.

⁸⁸Mosley, speech at Manchester Free Trade Hall, *The Blackshirt*, no. 84, 30 November 1934, 4.

⁸⁹Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 58-59

⁹⁰ibid., 59

to his fundamental ideology by the existence of Jews in Britain. Deportation became Mosley's Final Solution. A neo-Darwinian struggle for survival in his approach to the Jews emerges with racial issues dominating, and so violent acts, either promoting one race or demonstrating the superiority of another, would almost inevitably follow.

BUF Violence

Mosley's anti-semitism, ascribed to the dominance of nationalism, was one operative element of his fundamental ideological matrix, and this nationalism became expressed as ultra-national in the operative mode of fascism. Violence often the political bedfellow of revolutionary extremism, can be seen originating in the desire to bring into the conscious realm of others nationalist sentiments. Violence offered one method to pursue an argument and release and even release "utopian energy".⁹¹ Furthermore, violence was a basic reality of Darwinian evolutionary theory producing the survival of the fittest.

Violent behaviour is explicable in a variety of ways. Freud went as far as describing it as basic to life, though often repressed instinct, alongside libido. It may be possible to argue an array of reasons for individual violent behaviour. Malthusian ideas argue against possibility of sustaining an expanding population with limited quantities of foodstuffs and this can account for violent activity. Violence has also been described as a response to stress in a community and attributed to the process of population reduction in the face of reducing resources, in short, violence is part of natural selection and not a natural or

⁹¹Robert Darnton, 'What was Revolutionary about the French Revolution' in *The French revolution in Social and Political Perspective*, ed. Peter Jones (London: Arnold, 1996) 27

innate facet of Mans behaviour.⁹²

'Violence' is not a refined term. Hobsbawn has pointed to the imprecise use of the term and the extent to which it is contingent upon the society to which it is applied. Acceptable violence in one society may be considered unacceptably extreme in another. Furthermore, Hobsbawn argues, it is the removal of the socially held distinctions between the different types of violent activities which lead to the rise of indiscriminate violent behaviour. For example, traditional violence was the technique of last resort to achieve specific ends, over time there has been a drift to a new, "non-operational", indiscriminate form of violence. In short, the rules of violence have been forgotten and in contemporary society, where all violence is deemed unacceptable, "they are merely likely to produce, by reaction, men and women who consider all violence good."⁹³ 'Violence', then, is a problematic and imprecise term and the context of its emergence and that of interpretation deny authoritative definitions.

The common association of fascism with violent activity demands an explanation in relation to the ideological core of British fascism and particularly Mosley's ideological matrix, not least because it can be considered partly responsible for the 1936 Public Order Act after the infamous Battle of Cable Street.⁹⁴ Violent acts resulting from

⁹²C. Russell and W.M.S. Russell, *Violence, Monkey's and Man* (London: MacMillan, 1968) 3

⁹³E.J. Hobsbawn, *Revolutionaries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973) 209-214

⁹⁴see the recent collection of essays Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman (eds.) *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000); also Colin Cook, 'Concept: British Fascism' *Modern History Review* vol.10, no.3 February 1999, 2-4

personality defects, Freudian catharsis, or personal gratification, may be useful to understand a generally violent personality, but Mosley was not essentially violent and he became associated with political violence only as the New Party transformed into a fascist party. More fruitful is the argument that violence may act to sustain individual self-identity. In a situation of protest or collective action individuals may behave in an apparently irrational manner not solely attributable to a psychological debility or the substitution of class interests for individual ones. This may be interpreted as a self-sacrificing act or as rational and self-saving act.⁹⁵ While it may be accepted that individuals may be driven to take part in an act of collective action by class and material concerns, the risks actually undertaken often exceed these parameters. What could be occurring in the midst of a collective action is an increase in the risk to personal identity proving greater than not taking risks. It is a choice, and "failing to accept the danger would have meant a collapse of personal identity or at least a bitter wound".⁹⁶ This 'choice' may be rational but will also be reflexive, and in order to incorporate this reflexive choice into the fascist nation; to re-enforce its effect, rituals were produced by fascist governments to dramatize a merging of the public and private selves in a non-liberal environment.⁹⁷ In this light, the participation of an individual fascist in violence at, for example, the Olympia or Earls Court meetings, can be seen as not only succumbing to the effect of the ritual of the meeting with the drama of crescendo building

⁹⁵Craig Calhoun's study based on the 1989 spring rebellion in Beijing, China, 'The Problem of Identity in Collective Action', in *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology* ed. Joan Huber (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991) 51-75

⁹⁶ibid.

⁹⁷Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The political culture of interwar Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) 246

speeches, but also as an act of preserving self-identity in the midst of a collective action. The individual is both struggling to maintain the integrity of 'self' while simultaneously being seduced by the choreography and ritual of the group.

'Selfhood', then, is the product of a scene or environment, in which it appears. It is given an identity by the structure of social encounters which emerge "whenever persons enter one another's presence."⁹⁸ In the fascist elevation of nationalism to extreme and overarching heights, individuals find a sense of satisfaction because in this environment they are free of local, family, regional, or class forms of self-identification, and are further free to use the mirror of an arbitrary claim to identity represented by the nation itself, and through the nation the world.⁹⁹ In this light, violence can act as an existential reinforcement of fundamental fascist beliefs, and act in transcending individualism, yet not as an essential component of those beliefs.¹⁰⁰ To Mosley violence, while not openly encouraged, served operative functions: bonding the organisation in the heat of battle, creating an atmosphere of an event and drama while drawing publicity. Mosley though, did not accept any violent acts were initiated by his organisation, or were allowed by his members beyond self-defence. In his opinion BUF violence resulted from outside forces trying to suppress his right and demand for free speech.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press) 223 & 225

⁹⁹Craig Calhoun, 'Nationalism and Civil Society', *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994) 314-328

¹⁰⁰see Alex Ostmann, 'The Existentialist Dimension of Fascism' *History of European Ideas*, v.15, no. 1-3, 233-238.

¹⁰¹*Mosley Right or Wrong* (London: Lion Books, 1961) questions 206-218

The violence associated with the BUF lay, ideologically at least, in the category described by Hobsbawm as traditional, that is a technique of last resort to achieve specific ends. BUF violence can be viewed as having a specific purpose when other democratic methods were perceived as failing. Moreover, in its ideological state fascism was revolutionary and revolutions are, almost by definition, violent as they attempt to overthrow the status quo.¹⁰²

The tendency towards violence was a feature of Mosley's fascism and informal association of philosophical thought known as anti-positivism provides a useful resource of theories and a paradigms to explore the correlation of this violent tendency and Mosley's ideological matrix.¹⁰³ In particular the French philosopher Henri Bergson argued that reality is in a state of constant flux and becoming.¹⁰⁴ This persistent state of movement is simply unknowable to the scientific method that divides reality into discrete parcels for the purposes of examination and then reunites these parcels into an approximation of reality.¹⁰⁵ Bergson held the scientifically measured reality to be a self-referential replica of reality: reality was not static or even measurable because it is in a

¹⁰²Hobsbawm, 'Revolution' in Roy Porter and Mikuš (eds) *Revolutions in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); the revolutionary aspect of fascism was an important attraction to those from the political left as one communist convert to the BUF described "the revolution and the patriotism, that's what won me over." quoted in Thomas P. Linehan, *East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40* (London: Frank Cass, 1996) 270

¹⁰³see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959) 33-66

¹⁰⁴there are similarities here to Hegelian thought, see Chapter nine.

¹⁰⁵Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan & Co, 1960) 10-11

persistent state of evolution and this can be related to the dynamics of Mosley's ideological matrix. Only intuition could perceive reality. Bergson's description of consciousness provides a one key to unlock the propensity for fascist violence.

Bergson described consciousness as denied by regular, and repetitive actions because in the repetition of an act it becomes a mechanical act. With this mechanisation of the act comes the bonding of the act's representation with the self and with the idea: the act and the idea become one leaving only pure action without consciousness.¹⁰⁶ In this light, Mosley can be perceived as wanting to reinstall the component of consciousness and awaken the people to the decline he saw around them. In this light it is possible to conceive of the shock of real physical violence as able to achieve this end and, as a result, emerge as a propensity in Mosley's fascism, if not as policy but as a working out of Mosley's ideological matrix while his supporters were 'working towards' him and perpetrating violent acts.

Violence though was not a component of ideology, as Mosley articulated: "We march forward to a victory which is inevitable, not by small illegalities or petty violence unworthy of a great Movement, but with a great appeal to the whole of the British peoples by disciplined methods characteristic of a mighty nation to give Fascism power by verdict of the electorate."¹⁰⁷ Mosley perceived violence as the path followed by opponents against which he could gauge BUF success and he reflexively denied violence

¹⁰⁶Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy. Lectures and Essays* translated by H. Wildon Carr (Westport Connecticut & London: Greenwood, 1975) 1st published 1920, 15

¹⁰⁷Mosley, *Action*, no.7, 2 April 1936, 9.

as an axiomatic component of his movement even if this flew in the face of the popular opinion: "The measure of their fury is the measure of our advance" and violence simply marked the third and final phase of the attack from the 'Financial Democrats' on fascism: "Red violence and blue lies; they have so far thought of no better methods than the last but they lose the game."¹⁰⁸

Mosley's words evoked themes of battles and fighting, and any innate resistance to violence was weakened by his 'fighting talk' and a form of nationalism couched in terms of the nation's life or death. Against this the representational democratic parties were described acting to allow the control of Britain to be usurped by Jewish finance.¹⁰⁹ The 'true' Britain was smothered yet there is, "no material force on earth [which] can stop our [fascist] march to power with the workers behind us.....there is a force and a power in the British people stronger than any trick these democrats can devise."¹¹⁰ Here Mosley displayed a gap between a sense of social justice and democratic representation. The dynamics of social interaction was the reality of Britain unlike the artificial simulacrum of democracy undermined by foreign finances. Violence at BUF meetings came from others outside of his the organisation.¹¹¹

Mosley sought the construction of a fascist self, existentially related to the nation by

¹⁰⁸Mosley, 'The Truth Emerges. Boycott and Violence Defeated Oswald Mosley sums up an historic four years', *ibid.*, no.35, 17 October 1936, 9.

¹⁰⁹'The Speech they tried to ban. What Mosley Said in East London', *ibid.*, no.36, 24 October 1936, 7.

¹¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹¹Mosley, 'Parliament on Trial', *Action*, no.37, 31 October 1936, 9.

merging with it, as Mosley evocatively wrote in 1937,¹¹² "The future is with the strong, the brave, the resolute, who have found themselves by the oblivion of self in a greater cause and destiny."¹¹³ But this could suggest an annulment of Bergsonian consciousness which Mosley addressed and corrected in a later article:

"If we have to chose between those who can feel and those who can only think let us always chose the former, because this divine spark still lives within them. But the full man can both feel and think, because his vitality of mind and strength of spirit can carry learning as a gift and an adornment and not as a burden."¹¹⁴

The Olympia meeting on 7 June 1934 ungloved the fascist fist evoking indignation across the respectable Britain evoking the disdain of those sympathetic with BUF authoritarian policy. Significantly for the future of the BUF, was the withdrawal of support from Rothermere's *Daily Mail*. Mosley would later challenge and, ignoring the obvious resemblance of his movement to the fascism in Italy and Germany or the recent Night of Long Knives Germany on 30 June, claim that it was the threat from Jewish business to remove their advertisements from the newspaper rather than the fascist violence which led to Rothermere's withdrawal of support.¹¹⁵ Actions like these were interpreted by

¹¹²Heidegger, the eminent philosopher in nazi Germany, commented that everything essential and grand has arisen from the fact that men had a 'heimat' (homeland) and that he was rooted in tradition. Alex Ostmann, 'The Existential Dimension of Fascism', *History of European Ideas*, vol.15, (1992), no.1-3, 233-238.

¹¹³Mosley, 'The Lion Stirs: The time when Britain will again dare to be great is at hand', *Action*, no.46, 2 January 1937, 9.

¹¹⁴Mosley, 'Crown and The People: We Feel a Joyous Loyalty to the Great Symbol The Flags are out in the Poor Streets', *ibid.*, no.65, 15 May 1937, 11.

¹¹⁵Mosley, *My Life*, 346.

Mosley to reinforce his claim of a conspiracy hiding the `true' Britain. He declared:

"We know that beyond the alien financier, beyond the Red mob, beyond Baldwin and the Tory Party, is the great heart and soul of the British people. It is to this heart and to that soul that we are appealing to-day."¹¹⁶

The nation was the dominant authority over self-identity. Mosley's saw the `conspiracy ... of the old political world' in reports of a Hyde Park meeting in London. The popular press now "turned out lies" and the "intellectual Press of democratic decadence twitters that the Blackshirt Movement is dead...to all the ravings of decadence and corruption, Hyde Park gave the answer."¹¹⁷

Without doubt Mosley's BUF meetings resulted in violent episodes. Opponents were either victims or aggressors, but violence was not a fundamental component of Mosley's ideological matrix. Belligerence was not essential and Mosley remained dedicated to the prevention of war, interpreting interwar peace as a consequence of, "The restraint and discipline of Fascism alone [which] had prevented war and had proved that a Fascist Europe alone could maintain peace."¹¹⁸ Despite this, and as a fascist, Mosley expressed his ideas in terms closely associated with the Sorelian concept of violence, and while he may have been intellectually equipped to distinguish between Sorelian concepts of `force' and `violence' their impact upon disaffected BUF members was less pronounced. Sorel had conceived of `Force' as a tool to create absolute and automatic obedience; force was the imposition of authority whereas `violence', without hate or spirit of revenge, would

¹¹⁶Mosley Hyde Park rally Speech, *The Blackshirt*, no.73, 14 September 1934, 2.

¹¹⁷ibid., no.73, 14 September 1934.

¹¹⁸report of Mosley speech at Newcastle Town Moor, ibid., no.67, 3 August 1934, 7.

be able to break authority. Coordinated by the myth of a regenerated Britain, violence would be able to smash the perceived degenerate national authority if it was applied at a local level of true national generation, and that was the point of social contact between two individuals. The intransigent nature of violence dismissed any compromise between word and deed and a space would emerge for the 'true' nation to materialise.¹¹⁹ Violence could erase marks of weakness. Backed by an intellectual background of Nietzschean re-evaluations of moral values, Spencer's neo-Darwinist ideas promoting competition between nations, and the pessimistic analysis of Spengler announcing the imminent decline of civilisation, the impulse was primed for a violent response toward opposition, even to the extent of pre-empting opposing action.

Conclusion

Psychology, social theory and philosophy can offer imaginative insights into the prejudice and violence commonly associated with fascism. The insights provided by these disciplines, though, do not supplant the ideal type of an ideological matrix which underpinned Mosley's political biography and is proposed in this study, rather, they offer alternative accounts. The argument of this thesis sheds light on the abhorrent manifestations of the political genus of fascism, anti-semitism and violence, by describing them as emerging from a fundamental ideological matrix which is utopian in its ambition to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. Philosophical theory

¹¹⁹Jack J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, 51. Sorel wrote "*It is the myth in its entirety which alone is important*: its parts are only of interest in so far as they bring out the main idea" and Mosley's main idea was the regeneration of Britain, George Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hulme (London: George Allen, 1915) 136-7

can shed light on the tenets of fascist ideology which generously supported political violence, and this does not necessarily bind these philosophies to violent actions. Neither anti-semitism or violence were fundamental ideological elements in Mosley's ideological matrix but what they offered were operative, and very direct, expressions of Mosley's ideological matrix in the world in addition to their value as tools of propaganda. Together these elements of violence and anti-semitism could act as non-verbal articulation of many philosophical, political and sociological positions which, like fascism, questioned the strength of liberal democratic realities while also bonding the BUF movement. All these questions Mosley was given time to consider when imprisoned under British Defence Regulations as the war against fascism began.

Nine

Becoming a fortunate man¹: internment and philosophy

Internment under DR18B(1A)

The British Union of Fascism was closed down by a government at war with fascism. Mosley was locked up and spent this time rationalizing his politics of action into a philosophical expression of his fundamental ideological matrix. The strength of the British state apparatus was bolstered by the outbreak of the Second World War, yet within Britain the theatre of liberal principles continued to be played out and individuals who had been interned under the Defence Regulations were entitled to an appeal. The Defence Regulations primarily allowed the imprisonment of suspects in the interest of national security and left questions about the circumstances of the arrested to be asked later. Mosley took the opportunity of appeal to plead his case against detention even though it may have been little more than a formality.²

The legal representation of the Advisory Committee was headed by Norman Birkett who had encountered Mosley before in a legal battle which Birkett had lost.³ In his written

¹Mosley wrote in 1957, "Fortunate in the modern world is the man who understands what he is doing", 'European Socialism', *The European*, v.15, May 1954, 14.

²A.W.B. Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention Without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 274

³Birkett represented *The Star* newspaper in their defence of the libel action taken against them by Mosley. *The Star* used a speech on 24 February 1933 by Mosley as evidence to suggest Fascists were ready to take over the government with the aid of machine-guns Mosley argued Fascism would only come, "by the will of the people at a General Election" and "Fascists were ready to meet force used against the State by

defence Mosley argued that there was not a single shred of evidence to suggest that he or his colleagues were prepared to assist the enemy despite raids on his and his family's homes in search for such evidence,⁴ and Birkett admitted that there was scanty evidence to prove the BUF were under foreign control. He believed BUF leaders were not in association with enemy leaders, furthermore Birkett was reluctant to accept MI5 attempts to substantiate these claims.⁵ At the hearing Birkett witnessed Mosley performing cleverly, answering each question in a manner so as to not fall foul of the charges. On the charge of receiving Italian funding Mosley claimed he never inquired deeply into these matters; over those who were pro-Nazi and anti-Britain Mosley argued that every political party had its lunatic fringe.⁶ In Birkett's opinion Mosley appeared not to be made from the material of a traitor,⁷ and yet, moving with the inertia of the wartime political legal process, rather than an impartial search for factual truth in the face of the law, he recommended detention of Mosley.⁸ Mosley was to spend the war against fascism interned and unavailable to extol the virtues of his ultra-nationalist doctrine. This

force, but not force to obtain the reins of Government.", H. Montgomery Hyde, *Norman Birkett: The Definitive Biography of the Legendary Barrister* (London: Penguin, 1989) 389-391

⁴Simpson op cit, 275.

⁵ibid., 276; David Irving has established that the BUF did receive funding of £40 000 from Italy during 1933-1934, Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 137-138

⁶Simpson, op cit, 277-8; a sentiment repeated in his post-war *My Answer* "that 'lunatic fringe' of Fascism, which found expression in various small independent societies of infinitesimal membership and inflated egoisms." 32.

⁷Simpson, 280-281

⁸Of course, Mosley had visited Mussolini in Fascist Italy and Hitler attended his secret wedding to Diana in Nazi Germany. Mosley's BUF also received funding from Mussolini's regime. Furthermore, Mosley's founding of the BUF demonstrated his sympathy with the political style of the two regimes.

period of enforced exclusion allowed Mosley time to reflect and underpin the ideological premises of his politics with a philosophical system. It is this system of thought and philosophy which is the focus of this chapter.

Zeev Sternhell has traced the evolutionary root of fascist ideology to a revolt against the materialism and individualism extolled by liberalism at the close of the nineteenth century. Founded in opposition to ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, a 'revolt against positivism' developed primarily in intellectual French thought during the 1890's but these ideas were not the inevitable precursors of fascism and, for example, George Sorel was a common figure in the twin manifestations of totalitarian rule, fascism and Leninism.⁹ Mosley exemplifies Sternhell's argument in his 1947 post-war tract *The Alternative* where he declares: "Here we come to the root of the matter: our values are those of the spirit, and their values are those of materialism"¹⁰ and Mosley sub-titles the chapters to include 'Soviet "Creed": Limits of Materialism'.¹¹

Mosley saw the value of constructing a philosophical edifice for his fascist ideology from the outset. In 1935 Mosley wrote 'The Philosophy of Fascism' based on a speech

⁹Zeev Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', *Fascism: A Readers Guide: Analysis, Interpretations, Bibliography*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1979) 1st Pub. 1976, 325-406; and 'The "Anti-Materialist" Revision of Marxism as an aspect of the rise of Fascist Ideology', *Journal of Contemporary History*, v.22.no.3, (1987) 379-400; for revolt against positivism see H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959); Georges Sorel (1842-1922) theorist of anarcho-syndicalism.

¹⁰Mosley, *The Alternative*, 84

¹¹ibid., 302.

delivered to the English Speaking Union during 1933.¹² Mosley initially distinguished the philosophical from the political suggesting the former deals in the abstraction of ideals and he did not wish for any overarching assumptions about fascism to be made from the content of one speech, but this text does represent a bold attempt to provide philosophical depth to his politics.

Mosley declared fascism to have a novel and original philosophical background derived, as with other political philosophies, from the synthesis of conflicting cultural formations. Mosley's thought is reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectical method: thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis, and an emphasis on the notion of a 'spirit' driven history.¹³ But there is an association between Hegel and Mosley Philosophy far stronger than a mere bond of similarity and a brief look at Hegelian thought will indicate. The heuristic value of comparing Mosley with established philosophers lay in the assumption that they possess a greater ability as philosophers to express similar philosophical ideas to those which underpinned Mosley's political texts and utterances. Hegel has been connected with fascism by both supporters and opponents of fascism, for example Gentile and Popper, while more recent attempts have sought to uncouple Hegel from fascism.¹⁴ Hegel also

¹²Mosley, 'The Philosophy of Fascism', *Fascist Quarterly*, vol.1, no.1, 35-46; this is the central text used by Mosley in *My Life* in his discussion of the ideology of fascism, 316-335; an unattributed article 'Fascism and Philosophy: A rational basis', *The Blackshirt*, no.7 16 March 1933, repeats Mosley's theme which accepts Spengler's critique but replaces his pessimistic determinism with the fight against decadence and the reinvigoration of state service and self sacrifice.

¹³Mosley acknowledges this association between his method and Hegel although in 1933 he attributed to Spengler in fear of "alarming the English-Speaking Union" he was addressing, *My life*, 321.

¹⁴Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1945); Jay Drydyk, 'Hegel's Politics: Liberal or Democratic?', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, v.16, n.1, Mar. 1986, 99-122; Roger Eatwell cautions against attributing fascism to

serves a particular purpose of expressing philosophical ideas akin to Mosley's but without the dependency upon a particular type of nationalism associated with Fichte.¹⁵ Fichte's nationalism emerged, arguably, from conditions of national subjugation at the hands of Napoleon and was thus suitable to re-emerge for the National Socialists after the defeat and sense of national humiliation following the First World War. In contrast Mosley's Britain was victorious in war and already possessed an established Empire and so his ultra-nationalism was inevitably distinctive.

Hegel and Mosley

The association of fascism with Hegel should be approached with caution but it does shed light on Mosley's philosophy. Hegel's dialectical method can be viewed as a dynamic system of thought set against the preconditions exerted, necessarily, by formal logic which enable deductions to take place. For Hegel 'real' logic needed to be free of the rules imposed *a priori* by formal logic which is able to demonstrate the possibility that a 'truth' can be deduced from a set of propositions even when it is intuitively or commonsensically untrue. Removal of the constraints of formal logic would leave experience as the deciding factor in the truth of a given premise.¹⁶ Through his lengthy arguments Hegel placed thought in an indeterminate state of 'pure being'. Here thoughts

Hegel by pointing to his influence on both the right and the left political spheres, *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) 5

¹⁵Fichte was of greater value to the German nazis because his ideas of nationalism were produced when Prussia was loosing to Napoleon a situation compared to German losses in the First World War: a comparison between the battle of Jena with the humiliation of the Versailles treaty, Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1993), 30-1

¹⁶Kant had argued that there was a necessity for accepting a priori assumptions to enable investigations to begin, for example the idea of causation as the basis of science.

were nothing, but 'nothing' itself is 'something', it is both 'being' and 'nothing' and the oscillating between them is 'becoming'. From a different position, Hegel was observing that nothing can exist without reference to some other thing and so it follows that only the totality, or absolute, is real. Mosley reflected this idea of argument in a letter written to his son Nicholas while interned. The letter concerned the evolution of man, he wrote: "the dominant phenomenon of life as we see it is the organic process of nature - beginning with such small and crude material and working under the impulse of struggle and suffering to ever higher form and beauty."¹⁷ In 1965 Mosley wrote "All life is a movement from lower to higher forms. All life, if it is to endure, must so move. To stand still, or decline, is to die."¹⁸ Mosley's idea of 'Life' can be seen corresponding to the Hegelian dynamic of 'becoming'; it is the site of persistent national birth. The urge to ever higher forms was described by the, so-called, philosopher of the BUF, Alexander Raven Thomson: "The whole scheme of nature seems to be devoted to the attainment of higher and higher degrees of organisation".¹⁹ And in this light Mosley used of the term 'action' to indicate the site of his reality while and it also became the title of both New Party and BUF regular publications and an emblem for the movements.

Hegel, had established a bare and rudimentary philosophical position and he elaborated this system describing three moments, 'Understanding', where determinants are fixed and distinct; the 'Dialectic', which recognised the movement between the determinants with particular regard to their opposites; and 'Speculative', where 'real truth' was found. In the

¹⁷*Rules of the Game, Beyond the pale* 485-486

¹⁸Oswald Mosley, *The National European*, January, 1965, 5.

¹⁹Alexander Raven [Thomson], *Civilisation as Divine Superman: A Superorganic Philosophy of History* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1932) 15

'Speculative' stage opposites were to be regarded as contradictions within a unity, and again this philosophical system coincides with Mosley's philosophical programme, for example in his belief that a union of disparate political forms, such as the Left and the Right, could create a new dynamic third political force, represented by fascism.²⁰ After the war Mosley would speak of the 'Idea' emerging from the synthesis of democracy and fascism. This is an example of a shift in his operative ideology, from one dialectic position to another, in face of changing circumstances which his fundamental ideology maintains the elements of dynamism philosophically expounded in Hegel's ideas.²¹

Hegel and his philosophical ally Schelling evolved their ideas from Spinoza in viewing 'the absolute' as an infinite substance existing without the need of a referent or dependency, "This unity is consequently the absolute truth, the idea which thinks itself."²² This was not a separate entity, "but simply the whole of which all things are only parts."²³ The universe was not perceived as mechanistic but in vitalistic and teleological terms. In his *Naturphilosophie* (1797-9) Schelling described all nature as a hierarchic manifestation of the 'force of all forces', or 'primal force'. On the bottom rung of this hierarchical ladder are minerals, and above plants are followed by animals and

²⁰Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 17-18

²¹Mosley, *The Alternative*, 11; Hegel's thoughts appears somewhat obscure, "*The Absolute Idea*. The idea, as unity of the Subjective and Objective Idea, is the notion of the Idea - a notion whose object (*Gegenstand*) is the Idea as such, and for which the objective (*Objekt*) is Idea - an Object which embraces all characteristics in its unity." quoted in Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* 2nd edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961) 705

²²ibid.

²³Frederick C. Beiser, (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 5

further upwards human self-consciousness on the top rung. Schelling's vitalism attempted to resolve the Cartesian dilemma which separated mind from matter by conceiving of them as different degrees of organisation of the same living force. This force could be rationalised in teleological terms "and since force embodies itself only in the activities of matter, it is not a ghostly kind of substance."²⁴ In a similar manner, Hegel sidestepped Kant's belief in the impossibility of knowing the supernatural directly, by arguing the absolute was not a specific thing but conceived in naturalistic terms and thus metaphysics does not require the transient knowledge condemned by Kant:²⁵ "All that we then need to know is nature herself, which is given to our experience"²⁶ And here is a further correlation with the philosophy of Mosley who held fast to the belief that knowledge stemmed from direct experience in the world: "In discerning the evidence of this world we are obliged to rely upon our sense of perception, because we have no other instrument."²⁷ And what could Mosley observe other than hierarchy and a natural intrinsic order.

The failure of democracy to represent the nation

The reality of Mosley's First World War experiences, combined and reinforced by his immersion in politics and democratic government, imbued him with the belief that there had been movement away from the heart, or core reality, of the British people. The visceral pulse of national reality had become smothered by democracy, yet "there is a

²⁴ibid., 6.

²⁵Kant argued that a number of universal truths should be accepted without question to enable a rational discourse to proceed.

²⁶Beiser, op cit 8.

²⁷Mosley, *The Alternative*, 306.

force and a power in the British people stronger than any trick these democrats can devise."²⁸ A veil had been cast over the eyes of the British peoples which fascism would lift exposing the 'true' nature of the nation: "We therefore claim that in our new system we shall exchange the 'false liberty' of the few for the 'real liberty of the many',"²⁹ and Mosley proclaimed, "the message of the Blackshirt Movement is *Arise and enter your own*, and be great, happy and wealthy again!"³⁰ The British Lion could be found through material means without the need of a leap of faith, because, when conceived organically, the British nation was either 'awake' or 'asleep'.³¹ Mosley perceived a return to the primal forces of Schelling and which became evident in the post-Nietzschean era of mass society.³² The construction of a proletarian class through the process of industrialisation and modernisation could be interpreted as a return to a natural or true condition of modern society and fascism could offer a return to an organic reality beyond the restrictions of class: "The Barriers of Class shall be destroyed and the energies of every citizen devoted to the service of the British nation which by the effort and sacrifice of our fathers has existed gloriously for centuries before this transient generation and by our own exertions, shall be raised to its highest destiny."³³

²⁸Mosley, *Action*, no.36, 24 October 1936, 7.

²⁹Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London: BUF Publications, 1933) 11

³⁰Mosley, *Action*, no.36, 24 October 1936, 6.

³¹Mosley, 'The Lion Stirs: The time when Britain will again dare be great is at hand', *Action*, no.46 2 January 1937, 9.

³²G. Mosse, *Man and the Masses: nationalist and fascist perceptions of reality* (New York: H.Fertig, 1980); M. Biddiss *The Age of the Masses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959)

³³'Aims of the British Union' quoted by Mosley in *The British Peace - How to Get It* (London: Greater Britain Publications, 1940) 7

The nation unified the people in a transcendent and self serving manner and Mosley used the idea of nation in contrast to "flabby internationalism" [...] "we invite Great Britain to act, and to advance into new civilisation with her eyes open to reality, as becomes a great nation."³⁴ The nation was a key element of his ideological matrix brought to the fore in the operative mode of fascism. If the nation was the heart of his politics, fascism became its name.³⁵

Hegel had described the organic nature of nations coming into being, living as they expressed an enigmatic spirit force, and dying when this spirit moved to other cultures. Herbert Spencer translated these ideas into pseudo-sociology.³⁶ Mosley expressed similar notions with particular rhetorical force, for example, "Let the New World stand firm and steady in the justice of its cause and in the rising will of the peoples. The Old World begins to dissolve before the force of destiny and the will of man."³⁷ Hegel's argument described the detail of a nation's demise as the result of mere habitual existence, or through a self-reflecting rationalisation which could be both its pinnacle of achievement and its downfall. Close scrutiny and analysis act to undermine the object studied bringing the belief that the perceived nation is in decline. As the population reflects on the nature of the political constitution in order to understand the principles underlying the

³⁴Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1933) 8

³⁵Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 14

³⁶Herbert Spencer, 'The Social Organism', 1st published in *The Westminster Review*, January 1860, reproduced in *The Man Verses the State, with four essays on politics and society*, ed. Donald Marae (Harmondsworth; Penguin Books, 1969) 195-233

³⁷Mosley, 'No Blood Bath British People Demand Peace' *Action*, no.133, 3 September 1938, 1

spontaneous formation of the nation the nation is exposed as valid conditionally, not universally.³⁸ Mosley introduced this idea into the history of the British people arguing the heroic mood of Elizabethan times, formed under the threat from Spain, declined only to be replaced by the interests of money.³⁹ Hegel, in contrast to Carlyle, saw history unshaped by Great men but the Great men were acting as the unconscious conduit for the advancement of the spirit. The Elizabethan age provided Mosley with an historic illustration of this spirit which, when threatened by Spain "surged up, in response to the life challenge, a great outburst not only in life action, but also, of triumphant music, drama and poetry".⁴⁰ The high cultural expressions were paralleled the dynamism which drove Mosley's ideological matrix. And Mosley's highest category of Will, the 'Will to Achievement', could be *expressed* in a man "moved by the fire within, which left him to great striving from a bed of roses as surly as from a couch of thorns."⁴¹ Mosley clearly chose such a route but this further represents an expression of his ideological matrix.

In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel described a similar passage of the 'will', from manifestation in property, through morality, and into ethical life. Family, the state, and civil institutions may manifest themselves as one will, brought into contact with, and mediating with other wills. Here individuals are only 'free' when devoted to universal collective welfare encapsulated in the rational state rather than to a means beyond themselves and

³⁸Allen W. Wood, 'Hegel and Marxism', *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F.C. Beiser (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 430

³⁹Mosley, *The Alternative*, 25.

⁴⁰ibid., 25.

⁴¹ibid., 292.

individual welfare.⁴² In his early writing Hegel drew on examples of Arab clans to illustrate his argument: "there is the implication the individual is not simply part of the whole; the whole does not lie outside him; he himself is just the whole which the entire clan is", and further, "For *genuinely* free people, "the individual is a part and at the same time the whole."⁴³ Hegel's idea of an interaction of 'wills' bears a similarity found in Mosley conception of 'nation'; a dynamic effect of the interaction culturally conversant individuals. Claims that Mosley was espousing socialism were greeted with responses such as:

"Correct, my friend, *but* Socialism as you will hear with a difference. Socialism it is - if Socialism be the expression of the peoples will and the instrument of the peoples welfare - but *British* Socialism, divorced from the old cramping international doctrine."⁴⁴

Mosley was, at least formally if not consciously, replicating and translating many aspects of Hegel's thought in the political domain. Hegel's idea of 'spirit' was being expressed by the nation: "The British Union's cause is of the people and comes from the people."⁴⁵ And other British fascists emphasised the mystical aspect of the movement:

"Now the mysticism of National Socialism is based upon a similar force to that of Sufi and Christian mystics, and that is love ... With the National Socialist, it

⁴²Allen Wood, 'Hegel's ethics', *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. F.C. Beiser, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 230

⁴³*Early Theological Writings: G.W.F Hegel*, trans. T.M.Knox and R.Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) quoted in Elie Kedourie, *Hegel and Marx: Introductory Lectures* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 70

⁴⁴E.D. Randall, report on Mosley speech at Lewisham, *Action*, no.105, 19 February 1938, 11.

⁴⁵Mosley, 'Revolution', *ibid.*, no.113, 16 April 1938, 1.

is the love of for the people (action) and the aim of an ultimate union of the nation which is a mystical urge."⁴⁶

Although parallels have been drawn between Hegel's ideas and those of Mosley, he was hesitant to call on Hegelian thought as an expression of his ideological matrix. Rather, Mosley chose Oswald Spengler.

Oswald Spengler

Despite his reluctance to directly express Hegel Mosley's writings do polarise politics and propose a synthetic union of poles to achieve and provide resolution.⁴⁷ In Spengler Mosley found an intellectual background for his fascism yet he criticised Spenglerianism as limited by its pessimism and ignorance of modern science and production methods. Mosley wrote:

"It was Spengler's profound understanding of Caesarism which first attracted me to him, but his appreciation of modern science was shallow indeed scanty. The union of a Caesarian movement with science seemed to me at once the prime requirement of the modern age and the answer to the ultimate fatality predicted by Spengler."⁴⁸

Spengler described Caesarism as "a kind of government which, irrespective of any

⁴⁶R. Gordon-Canning, 'The Inward Strength of National Socialism', *ibid.*, no.98, 30 December 1937, 11.

⁴⁷In a review of Mosley's *Tomorrow We Live* A.R. Thomson describes Mosley as a synthesis of Hitler and Mussolini: "Indeed, Mosley combines in large measure the intellectual brilliance and instinctive fervour of the two Continental leaders, [Hitler and Mussolini] which find in him a characteristic synthesis." *British Union Quarterly*, v.2, no.1, January-March 1938, 85-86; Mosley claimed "Synthesis, eternal synthesis, is the solution to many of the false dilemmas of our time", in his autobiography, *My Life*, 91.

⁴⁸Mosley, *My Life*, 323.

constitutional formulation that it may have, is in its inward self a return to thorough formlessness."⁴⁹ Institutional forms were unimportant to Spengler because real importance was centred on "the wholly personal power exercised by the Caesar".⁵⁰ 'Nation' to Spengler meant, "A people in the style of a culture,"⁵¹ which, "as a living and battling thing, possesses a State not merely as a condition of movement, but also (above all) *as an idea*...Culture is the being of nations in State-form."⁵² Spengler's idea of national identity, though, possessed a perverse Darwinian and existential quality: "*A people is only really such in relation to other people*, and the substance of this actuality comes out in natural and ineradicable oppositions, in attack and defence, hostility and war. War is the creator of all great things."⁵³ And, superficially at least, Spengler and Mosley parted intellectual company over their acceptance, or rejection, of war. Mosley's fundamental opposition to all war became translated into a struggle against democracy and the perceived betrayal of the nation by politicians, and he wrote:

"The British people want peace. On the other hand some of the politicians want a blood bath. These men are to be found in all the Old Parties of Financial Democracy"⁵⁴

Mosley sought to alert the nation to these insights:

⁴⁹Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, translated by Charles. F. Atkinson (London; George Allen & Unwin, 1932) 431

⁵⁰Spengler, *ibid*, 431.

⁵¹*ibid.*, vol.II, 362

⁵²*ibid.*

⁵³*ibid*, 363

⁵⁴Mosley, 'No Blood Bath. British People Demand Peace', *Action*, no. 133, 3 September 1938, 1.

"Let the people know the facts and waken them to the danger. Then no war will come; for no system can take a people to war against their will...If the people are awake we shall win; and it is our job to wake them."⁵⁵

Struggle acted as an indication of fascist success in their exegesis of democracy while struggle also tested and strengthened their mettle:

"Fascism comes to power through the fiery ordeal of sacrifice and struggle, in challenge to all existing things....Fascism is first tested in the fires of reality, and nothing but the purest and strongest metal can survive those flames. From them emerges `the steel creed of an iron age.'"⁵⁶

Philosophers like Hegel and Spengler offer insights into the operative expression of Mosley's ideological matrix. Interpretations and adaption of their complex theoretical positions were also available to Mosley in forms which influenced the formulation of his ideas as he sought to express his ideological matrix. For example Alexander Raven Thomson and George Bernard Shaw both had personal contact and the opportunity to influence the politically struggling Mosley.

Mosley admired Shaw's position that mankind had not yet achieved an adult mind. In Shaw's *Methuselah* man extended his life to achieve this but, in the meantime, Shaw had advised the study of the highest types `so far available' to allow the production of more new types. Shaw advised Mosley to call his new party The Activists before he changed his mind and advised him to remain in the Labour party as the natural successor to

⁵⁵*Action*, no.122, 18 June 1938, 1.

⁵⁶Mosley *Blackshirt Policy* (B.U.F. Publications Ltd. 1933) 13

MacDonold.⁵⁷ Shaw saw Mosley as a leader "more able than either Napoleon III or Hitler at his age",⁵⁸ but Shaw later shied away from the Blackshirt movement when it displayed its unpleasant side. Mosley, though, had already drawn upon Shavian wisdom, and his reading of *The Perfect Wagnerite* in 1924 has been portrayed as an event simply determined by fate.⁵⁹ Although Shaw's extensive philosophy included, and influenced, Mosley's thought another political philosopher who would join Mosley as a leading Blackshirt was closer to hand in the person of Alexander Raven Thomson.

A.R. Thomson

Politically it was Thomson and his 'superorganic philosophy of history' which provides significant insights into Mosley's conception of nation.⁶⁰ Thomson had set out to describe the cyclic repetition of cultural forms which indicate the superorganic nature of civilization.⁶¹ Beginning with monism, a state where all matter and bodies are composed of a single, primitive, substance, he then employed a concept of space-time derived from relativity theory to argue that a similar nature to the primary substance which is 'energy-time'. These primary units of energy-time proceed to form new units through a process of 'integration' and each integration, in its turn, creates a more complicated unit, an evolutionary procedure reminiscent of that described by Schelling. Thomson also

⁵⁷Mosley, *My Life*, 224 and 227.

⁵⁸Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: volume 3 1918-1950 The Lure of Fantasy* (London, Penguin Books, 1993) 109

⁵⁹Mosley, *My Life*, 121; a rendition repeated by Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley*, 133

⁶⁰Alexander Raven [Thomson], *Civilization as Divine Superman: A Superorganic Philosophy of History* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1932)

⁶¹*ibid.*, 225

described planes of existence, arranged according to a hierarchy with the higher plane more complicated than the units on lower planes so the "whole system of nature seems devoted to the attainment of higher and higher degrees of organisation."⁶² He wrote of an impulse towards improvement and the achievement of a higher level. Several 'integrations' are described: Monism, Dualism, Monads, Pluralism, Order with each of these integrations connected to the various 'planes'.⁶³ In Thomson's fanciful organic worldview he conjured the idea of 'superman' and while this may evoke the tradition of Nietzschean philosophy Thomson thought the idea of an individual superman too grand an idea, and he argued that the real superman had already appeared in the form of civilisation. Civilisation as a whole had already achieved superhuman feats like the building of skyscrapers and this was the evidence of the superorganism in action.⁶⁴ In theistic terms, the superorganic personality which civilisation embodied was a necessary safeguard because, without this "higher being on an exalted plane",⁶⁵ there would only be hedonism as a basis for rationality and which democracy had gone some way towards putting into practice.⁶⁶ The individualism, lauded by liberal democracy was considered a false ideal because most people are tied to a specific task of work and were not actually 'free' to make decisions and exercise free choice. The political implications of these restrictions were expounded by Mosley when he wrote: "Every part fulfils its function as a member of the whole, performing its separate task, and yet, by performing it,

⁶²ibid., 15

⁶³ibid., 32-33

⁶⁴ibid., 35

⁶⁵ibid., 226.

⁶⁶ibid., 226-7.

contributing to the welfare of the whole."⁶⁷ Mosley used Thomson's ideas which laid the foundation of his fascist corporate policy and which Thomson himself expounded as author of *The Coming Corporate State*.⁶⁸

Thomson, following Spengler, regarded civilisation as an organic entity able to wax and wane; grow and decline; suffer life and death. Civilised society had emerged from an agricultural source and autocratic and military rule had become undermined by the rebellion against the centralization of government: "This is the origin of what can only be termed 'Nationalism'. Where several subject-nations exist, local resistance will naturally be organised to follow national and racial lines."⁶⁹ Thomson assumed a natural order would generate the necessary hierarchy and striving to sustain it; for example in his emphasis and use of the terms 'natural', 'racial', and 'national lines' in social construction. An autocratic phase would be followed by an oligaric phase where 'culture' is contained by the upper classes and determined by the chances made available at birth. Thomson saw the last stage of civilisation as 'democratic', and this:

"encourages the self-indulgence of the people as individuals [and] brings an inevitable degeneration in its train. The democratic individual is no longer willing to sacrifice himself or his interests to civilization as a superorganic entity greater than himself."⁷⁰

And this expresses the concern of Mosley who described fascism in terms of the

⁶⁷Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932) 26-27

⁶⁸A.R. Thomson, *The Coming Corporate State* (Westminster: Action, 1937)

⁶⁹Raven [Thomson], *Civilisation as Divine Superman* 83

⁷⁰ibid., 113.

synthesis of Nietzsche and Christian doctrines, taking from Christianity "immense vision of service, of self-abnegation, of self-sacrifice in the cause of others; not the elimination of the individual, so much as the fusion of the individual in something far greater than himself."⁷¹ Democracy was perceived as severing ties between individuals and the 'other', the mythic greater cause which had become replaced by wealth as the new cause and measure of value.⁷² The self-serving individual was the outward expression of a Self focused and turned inward without affection. This zone of intra-personal relationships was becoming, increasingly, through replaced by the contract of monetary exchange. This was believed, by Mosley, to be to the detriment of society and the country. Thomson saw plutocratic rule, the power connected with money, as the harbinger of decline because it called upon the wealth of "surrounding barbarian hordes" who, when their demands cannot be repaid, invade bringing a return to primitive society, which were represented by anarchists and communists. From this position, democracy supplied a 'false' idea of equality of opportunity which gave rise to the contradictory inequality of plutocracy:

"When the democratic phase of foregoing civilization dissolves in complete disintegration into an intercultural barbarism, art, like religion, gains the veneration of the invading barbarians, and survives with an even greater intensity of inspiration to the time of cultural regeneration... Thus when dawning autocracy restores civilization as a superorganic reality, and cultural co-operation once more becomes a vital process, art surviving from earlier democracy is given an

⁷¹Mosley, 'The Philosophy of Fascism', 39

⁷²see Alex Ostmann, 'The Existentialist Dimension of Fascism', *History of European Ideas*, v.15, no.1-3, 233-238.

immense impetus of superorganic inspiration [...]"⁷³

The cultural aspect is pre-eminent to a purified society and fascists frequently recalled past times of perceived 'greatness' to revive the spirit which was forgotten in their day. Thomson continued: "The success of each renaissance era will depend very largely upon whether the classical period chosen for imitation is similar in superorganic phase to that of the later civilization."⁷⁴ Mosley did this by seeking out phases of British history which reflected its ascendance and contrasted these with signs he saw that represented British decline.⁷⁵

Alexander Raven Thomson supplied Mosley with a philosophers language which he could use to express his ideological matrix. The political plan to realise this argument was expressed in Thomson's *The Coming Corporate State*, a plan to merge the individual with the state. In fascism Mosley saw a political opportunity to alter the relationship between the Self and the world. This was demonstrated by Mosley's demands for "new Britons" and an "epic generation".⁷⁶ It was the nature of people, their collective Self, which demanded recognition for the re-emergence of a Greater Britain: "Outside the difference of function and of service the fascist State recognises no difference between its citizens... We believe in the Leadership principle and the differentiation which allows

⁷³Raven [Thomson], *Civilization as Divine Superman*, 214

⁷⁴ibid., 220.

⁷⁵for example Mosley recalled the May Day festivals of Tudor England and connects them with ancient Rome, 'May Day Peoples Day', *Action*, no.115, 30 April 1938, 1; Mosley responded to the Abyssinian crisis by contrasting Italy's future with Britain's past "we feel our nation, whose standards have been the glory of mankind reduced to humiliation, while Italy has risen in a brief thirteen years from the dust..", Mosley, 'The Fools who Govern Us.' *Action* , no.11, 30 April 1936, 9.

⁷⁶Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 72

definite responsibility to the individual... Men and women are born with varying gifts and capacities."⁷⁷ A dedication to the nation was even vital to the process of curing bodies as BUF medical policy was designed to stress: "It is the fascist conception of the ideal citizen that every man and woman should be prepared to the maximum extent to be of service to their fellow citizens."⁷⁸ Personal health was a national concern and to be undertaken as a national responsibility.

With an urgency conditioned by his ideological matrix, Mosley sought the concrete evidence of British greatness which would represent the organic flux and spirit described by Hegel and, less convincingly, by Thomson. Mosley believed signs of this past existed before its history was corrupted by over zealous disciples of Descartes, with "doctrines of modern disintegration",⁷⁹ sought out matter as evidence of this once glorious period. Cultural archaeology one might say.⁸⁰

The 'Idea': apology and Europe

At the end of the Second World War Mosley took the opportunity of his regained

⁷⁷Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London: BUF, 1936) Q.8

⁷⁸BUF, *BUF Medical Policy* (London: BUF Publications, 1936) 2

⁷⁹Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 71

⁸⁰Henri Bergson argued that "the present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause." And, "Evolution implies a real persistence of the past in the present, a duration which is, as it were, a hyphen, a connecting link...to know a living being or *natural system* is to get at the very interval of duration, while the knowledge of an *artificial* or *mathematical system* applies only to the extremity." Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan & Co, 1960) 15 & 23-24. For Mosley democracy equated with the artificial system while his ideological matrix sought the dynamism of 'the interval of duration' and was expressed in his understanding of the site of national genesis.

freedom to attempt political rehabilitation.⁸¹ Initially Mosley published *My Answer*, essentially a reprint of *Tomorrow We Live* with an explanatory if not apologetic introduction. *My Answer*, published by Mosley Publications in 1946, contained a reprint of his last major publication before the war, *Tomorrow We Live*, itself published in 1938 when war and peace treaties (Munich Agreement and Anglo-German declaration) opened the possibility of accommodating fascist nations alongside democratic nations. Mosley's fascist tract *Tomorrow We Live* returned to themes set out in Mosley's earlier major fascist writing *The Greater Britain* of 1932, and a continuity was established.

In *My Answer* Mosley built upon his philosophical system to present a clear recital of reflexive denial and an unflinching vision. For example, he wrote about how the political left, in the guise of the Labour party feared 'the Idea' of his fascism and attempted to suppress it and it was not the un-Englishness of the BUF which caused its dissolution under the DR 18 but the threat the BUF posed to the established system. This belief in the strength of the BUF was bolstered by attempts the government made to legislate against it. Initially the Public Order Act of 1936, and later the DR 18b(1a) which interned BUF members followed by Regulation 18AA which proscribed the British Union, worked to destroy this small political party.⁸² In *My Life* Mosley suggested, in ironic style, that the reason for his detention was little more than for the BUF campaign for a negotiated peace.⁸³ Significantly though, Mosley posited the inspiration for his politics

⁸¹Mosley was released from his detention on 20 November 1943 because of the advancing phlebitis and associated weight loss but the fact of his release caused distress to his opponents, see Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 229-231.

⁸²Mosley, *My Answer* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, 1946) 6; BU proscribed on 26 June 1940.

⁸³Mosley, *My Life*, 402.

under the appellation of the 'Idea' conjuring both an indeterminate power (what or from where stemmed this 'idea'?) while tactically avoiding any association with the recently demised and contemporaneously unsuitable term 'Fascism'. As a political manoeuvre this semantic shift had been advanced before the outbreak of war. In 1939 Mosley declared:

"This we know - THE IDEA that we have created can never die. Already it lives for ever deep in English soil and English blood. So already it has won immortality and in the end can never know defeat."⁸⁴

Yet this operative expression of Mosley's ideological matrix was evident in his 1935 statement 'The Next Stage in Fascism' which accompanied the reorganisation of the movement. Mosley wrote:

"The principle and the objective are fixed and unchanging. The method must ever be adapted and developed to the progress of our organisation."⁸⁵

Mosley perceived the governmental system which had interned him through the same glass his own world was made, in a holistic world absolute individuals, do not exist. In this light Mosley's worldview perceives individuals as a function of the whole system, of the 'Divine Superman' depicted by Raven Thomson. Individuals would be a myth created by the material world, a myth to be challenged by Mosley's 'Idea.'⁸⁶

To the reader of *My Answer* its apologetic nature is evident when Mosley describes how it was not incompatible for National Socialist or Fascist beliefs to be held without

⁸⁴Mosley message on British Union 7th Anniversary 1 October 1939, *Action*, no.188, 5 October 1939, 1.

⁸⁵Mosley 'The Next Stage in Fascism', *The Blackshirt*, no.91, 18 January 1935, 1.

⁸⁶The work of Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) bears assumptions not unlike those carried by this text connecting the construction of the fascist Self individual ego with the fascist political enterprise.

betraying ones country,⁸⁷ while emphasising the contradiction of a country supposedly fighting for liberty abroad while withholding that same liberty from its own people, as internment under the Defence Regulation had done.⁸⁸ These convoluted arguments were not lost on his internment inquisitor Norman Birkett who supported Mosley's claim that he was not a traitor and, in doing so, reinforcing Mosley's belief that the opposition to his movement was derived from their posing a real threat: their correctness was in their ideas and not necessarily in its form. Mosley wrote, "The Idea is what the Parties ever feared. Everything else has been merely the barrage of falsehood behind which they advanced to the suppression of the idea". The 'Idea', "by its whole character, innate truth, historic necessity and vital force, was stronger than all material things."⁸⁹ The 'material thing' was the path civilisation took following the Enlightenment and incorporated both liberalism and its various permutations such as socialism, Marxism, and communism. Mosley's 'new' message, or operative expression of fundamental ideology in the environment of fascism's failure, sought a spiritual and European path: "Europe which shares with us the sublime heritage of culture whose resplendent rays shone forth from early Hellas, not only to illuminate the centuries of European History, but to tinge with glory all that is fine and noble in the thought of the American Continent."⁹⁰ Europe would be the post-war expression of Mosley's 'Idea',⁹¹ internment gave time to read and

⁸⁷*My Answer*, 11

⁸⁸*ibid.*, 10

⁸⁹*ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁰*ibid.*, 31.

⁹¹'Europe' generally connotes an geographic and cultural zone rather than a precise bordered country providing the scope for a number of separate 'Europes' to, at least conceptually, exist at any one time, for example see the five Europes described in Johan Galtung's *Europe in the Making* (New York: Crane Russak, 1989) 1-6,

absorb ideas of the Hellenic source of civilisation and the motif of 'Europe' replaced what had been 'Britain'. Mosley's post-war project was to be the creation of Europe as a nation. This would involve identifying European identity by reformulating an inexact, almost casual, association of countries and geographic positions into a coherent Euro-state. Linguistic differences were not to be a barrier to Mosley's European dream because they were, to a man who had recently taught himself German while interred, mere technical differences and could be educated away.

In the preface to *The Alternative* Mosley argued that the failure of fascism and national socialism rested on their overly narrow concentration upon the interests of the nation. He wrote, "Our creed was brought to dust because the Fascist outlook in each land was too National."⁹² This stratagem was deployed, either consciously or the product of reflexive denial, to distance Europe a nation policy from the ultra-nationalism of fascism in order to present a post-war policy free from the horrors of Nazism and Fascism. Mosley described fascism as an extreme over-reaction to the perceived threat posed by internationalism and mixing races and cultures.⁹³ The intensity of the fascist response of

including a Europe for security and co-operation; a Europe of 29 countries; a Europe of 12 countries, a Europe of people equal to 10% of mankind. See also Roger Griffin, 'Europe for the Europeans: fascist myths of the European New Order 1922-1992', Humanities Research Centre Occasional Paper no.1 1993.

⁹²Mosley, 'The Extension of Patriotism' reprinted in *The Alternative*, 12-15; it has been suggested there is evidence of a different text, an alternative *Alternative*, presenting a more nationalistic argument and could account for the delay in the publication of *The Alternative* some two years after the end of the war despite Mosley's enforced retreat from the world, see Anne Poole, 'Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement', *The Failure of British Fascism*, ed. M. Cronin (London: MacMillan Press, 1996) 73

⁹³In the year before his death Mosley saw the idea of a common European market preceding a common European policy as a flaw in plan to centralise Europe. A divided Europe could lead to a each country becoming an American satellite and

extreme, and exclusive, nationalism blocked any chance of realising, "Universalism of like kind". The true path, Mosley now argued, was beyond democracy and fascism. Mosley expressed this belief using palingenetic imagery: "From the flames which end an epoch rises the Idea of the future".⁹⁴

Mosley's Europeanism predated the Second World War. As a fascist Mosley said it was "The restraint and discipline of Fascism alone [which] had prevented war and had proved that a Fascist Europe alone could maintain peace."⁹⁵ In 1938 Mosley wrote that European Union was being blocked by memories of past wars, and the memory of quarrels between Fascism and Democracy, which was a:

"quarrel [which] belongs to an age which is dead: it is gone with the facts which gave its birth. We have passed beyond Fascism and Democracy...In Union Europeans shall complete their mission among the peoples of the world. For this high purpose Europe awakes."⁹⁶

The European idea to which Mosley would return to some nine years following the military defeat of the fascist regimes,⁹⁷ involved the naming of an inner (and perversely universal) necessity rather than a semantic political shift. The 'necessity' emerged from the zone of the collective soul; the 'european' label came from the shelves of the political

American strength was derived forms a central government and economic unity, Mosley, 'Europe's Golden Egg', *The Daily Telegraph Magazine*, no.279, 20 February 1979, 7.

⁹⁴*The Alternative*, 13.

⁹⁵Mosley speech on Newcastle Town Moor reported in *The Blackshirt* no.67, 3 August 1934, 7.

⁹⁶Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 18

⁹⁷*Alternative*, 13.

convenience store. Mosley's understanding and consciousness of an European ideal, which he had held well before the outbreak of war, corresponded to his notion of civilisation and allowed Mosley to elegantly shift the operative dimension of his ideological matrix after 1945, from the intense nationalism of 1930's fascism to the broader European arena without losing any claim to continuity in his ideas. Of course the ultra-nationalism was still a vital component but now it was Europe a nation rather than a Greater Britain.⁹⁸

Europe had been an essential concern for Mosley in the second 1934 edition of *The Greater Britain*,⁹⁹ and with National Socialists in power in Germany, Mosley accommodated Europe into his text so that peace of Europe would be dependent on the co-operation of, "Fascist Governments united in the great Brotherhood of Fascism [who] could and should build the enduring peace of Europe on a stable basis."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, this 'Brotherhood' would be able to: "preserve and elevate European culture in a higher and greater world morality".¹⁰¹ And expressing the palingenetic myth indicative of fascism Mosley wrote "legacies of the unhappy past will be buried in a united effort of

⁹⁸Anne Poole has contrasted Mosley's 1936 idea of 'Four Power Bloc of Fascist Nations' with his 1947 extension of patriotism but this is not the "complete reversal of the focus on the nation in his pre-war works" as she suggests, rather it is a reorientation of the expression of Mosley's ideological matrix in a radically changed context yet still rooted in nationality, Anne Poole, 'Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement', *The Failure of British Fascism*, ed. M. Cronin (London: MacMillan Press, 1996) 68-69

⁹⁹It is interesting to note the chronology here: *The Greater Britain*, 1st published 1932, Hitler rise to power 1933, *The Greater Britain*, 2nd and revised edition 1934, see appendix one

¹⁰⁰ibid., 2nd edition (1934) 153

¹⁰¹ibid., 154.

new European culture to build a new civilisation".¹⁰² Out of the ashes of past wars Mosley sought peace: "Fascism means peace", he had declared in a 1934 speech.¹⁰³ And having observed fascism came to power after war in Europe Mosley saw fascism attracting ex-servicemen and the young bringing, "a new method, a new outlook, an outlook determined to *build a European culture* mightier and greater than the memories of the past" [italics mine], and in this manner Britain would "lead Europe and the world to the new reality of Fascist peace."¹⁰⁴ In *Tomorrow We Live* Mosley asserted the peaceful effect a fascist Europe could bring with, "the dignity and strength of a united Europe [we] could have secured the relatively bloodless suppression of slave trading barbarity in Abyssinia ... But Europe was divided, and from this division of the mind and spirit a sequence of catastrophe has arisen".¹⁰⁵ Mosley concluded *Tomorrow We Live* with a recognition that the decadence and decline predicted by Spengler signalled the end of a civilisation and was "apparent in the modern scene", although he rejected the ultimate pessimism of Spengler favouring the redemptive ability of science and the inspiration of a new spirit to answer the "historic fatality".¹⁰⁶ The rise of fascism and National Socialism across Europe represented, to Mosley, a "supreme effort of modern man to challenge and overcome the human destiny".¹⁰⁷ Europe was a central element of Mosley's politics but its expression was masked by chauvinism during the interwar

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ *The Blackshirt* no.60, 15 June 1934, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Tomorrow we Live*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 71.

period, itself the fascist operative expression of his fundamental ideological matrix.

Tomorrow We Live was a document reprinted and published by Mosley in 1946 at the beginning of the post-fascist period. *Tomorrow We Live* speaks of peace, of European unity, but it was fascist, and clearly expresses a myth of regenerative ultra-nationalism. Mosley revised this by saying it is simply as a document from the past, "and should not touch the present and the future."¹⁸ Mosley preceded the reprinted *Tomorrow We Live* with an essay explaining its post-war publication and how he would like to allow the public to judge him on what he had said before the war and before he spoke again.¹⁰⁹ He wrote that internment during the war was a political manoeuvre and argued that being a fascist did not preclude the fighting for ones country. Imprisonment of BUF members without trial was an outcome of conspiracy against 'the Idea' and it was the Idea that the 'old' Parties, the 'old gang', feared. Talk of the BUF as fifth columnists and traitors in the pay of foreign enemy powers, were, to Mosley's mind, mere falsehoods constructed to suppress the Idea. Although the BUF were indeed in the pay of Mussolini's fascism for an initial period, Mosley's interpretation can be supported by archival evidence. Government papers demonstrate a long-term political reason for internment was political, with most internees being quickly released on appeal. For example, despite exhibiting greater signs of foreign control than did British fascists, the British Communist Party was never subject to a state attack on the liberty of its members.¹¹¹ The closure of the BUF

¹⁸ Mosley, *My Answer*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 18.

¹¹¹ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 232; 87% of total internees were released by February 1940, Thurlow, *The Secret State*, 256.

by the Government was driven by political rather than defense concerns and this provided Mosley with the necessary fuel to recharge his ideological batteries and he declared that "all failed to arrest an Idea, which, by its whole character, innate truth, historic necessity and vital force, was stronger than all material things".¹¹² The basis of this idea lay in Mosley's ideological matrix and his references to 'the idea' were attempts to express his ideological matrix without resort to established political operative expressions. The Idea remained, and he began to shift the operative emphasis from British to European perspective, tracing British cultural roots to the same source as those of Europe, "to the original Hellenic inspiration of the European tradition".¹¹³ And this would be repeated by his wife Diana in 1965, who wrote in her 'Diary', "in Greece as nowhere else you are aware that you have reached the source, whence flowed everything we Europeans love and admire ...[and she experienced]...and intensely strong impression of home-coming."¹⁴

Mosley's thoughts at the end of the war began the process of modifying operative ideology by rationalising the defeat of fascism in terms of faults within the ideology rather than accepting the ideology as a whole had failed. Mosley clung to the 'idea' and worked on a new European expression of this idea. This could suggest a deep psychological bias in Mosley's cosmology, a theory discussed by Griffin,¹¹⁵ and the persistence of a palingenetic core myth integral to generic fascism, is evident in this post-

¹¹²Mosley, *My Answer*, 18.

¹¹³ibid., 32.

¹¹⁴Mosley, *The National European*, April 1965, 11.

¹¹⁵Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 186-200.

war writing, for example: "When next, together, we turn our eyes toward the future, we may discern - rising like a phoenix from these ashes - the undying soul of England and the European man."¹¹⁶ Europe a nation replaced Mosley's interwar dreams of a greater Britain as the motivating myth in his politics. This was both a renovation of the old fascism while, at the same time, maintaining the motive behind fascism of the unity of a people, the nation, above and beyond individuals:

"Our task is to preserve and to build. If the Fatherland of Europe is lost, all is lost. That home of the soul of man must be saved by sacrifice. First, the world of the spirit must unite to resist that final doom of material victory. But beyond lies the grave duty imposed by the new Science. It is not only to build a world worthy of the new genius of man's mind, and secure from present menace. It is to evoke from the womb of the future a race of men fit to live in that new age. We must deliberately accelerate evolution"¹¹⁷

Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix remained constant after the Second World War and his unfailing belief in the predominance of national interests over any other concerns led him to display all the features of reflexive denial to the social memory.¹¹⁸ As the European idea became formulated by Mosley, he underwent an archaeological journey of ideas into the philosophy of the ancients. These two concepts, reflexive denial and a

¹¹⁶Mosley, *My Answer*, 39.

¹¹⁷Mosley, *The Alternative*, 313

¹¹⁸I have described this elsewhere, see Colin Cook, 'Oswald Mosley's European Alternative: Reflexive Denial and Resistance to Collective Memory', workshop 29:1 'Post-Fascist Memory in Europe', *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference of ISSEI 1996* [CDROM]; Hannah Arendt connects this with Hegelian dialectics which "provide a wonderful instrument for always being right, because they permit the interpretation of all defeats as the beginning of victory", *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 3rd edition (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967) 349n.

renewed interest in ancient philosophy are demonstrated in Mosley's *The Alternative*:

"Few things are more paradoxical to the student of history than the almost complete reversal of values which the practices of a modern 'Democracy' have introduced to the original Greek concept of the basis of Justice.....The idea of 'Justice' meant to the Greeks something nearer to our idea of 'function' than the present concept of 'equality before the law'"¹¹⁹

Mosley read the Greeks in translation and this bolstered his belief that justice resulted from each doing what they were appropriately placed to do.¹²⁰ In short, Mosley argued the idea of democracy and justice displayed by the democratic systems of Europe was a perversion of a fundamental truth in history.¹²¹

A National European

Despite the overwhelming defeat of the fascist regimes in Europe Mosley maintained a coherent fundamental ideological matrix and, at the operative level, saw his politics tempered by the experience of war and with an established philosophical grounding which demanded success. Such intellectual vigour was lost on the popular face of post-war British fascism which shifted its focus away from the interwar visionaries, such as Mosley, toward a new generation of far more extreme nationalists.¹²² Mosley though, still believed he would be called to lead the political fray and when asked why his Union

¹¹⁹Mosley, *The Alternative*, 252

¹² Mosley quotes two popular texts, Werner Jager *Paideia. volume II*, and Lowes Dickenson's *The Greek View of Life*. In his autobiography, *My Life*, Mosley attempts to use Greek thought to assess character, 148.

¹²¹Mosley, *The Alternative*, 254-5

¹²²see Colin Cook, 'Concept: British Fascism', *Modern History Review* vol.10, February 1999; Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 260.

Movement was bound to win he replied:

"Because our analysis is true, and is now being proved true; because our policy alone meets the consequent situation; because our character has been tested in our long effort, and the nation will soon require proved character which can be trusted in a serious situation; because our movement and our companions throughout the continent alone have the spirit to bring a European revival, and the faith which can move the mountain between us and the greater future."¹²³

The future was determined by experiences of the past and Mosley's ideological matrix was the pivot point in this chronology. Included among the publications emanating from Mosley was *The National European*, he also wrote regularly in *The European*. In 1958 Mosley's Europeanism displayed its preeminent position in the title of his book *Europe: Faith and Plan: A way out from the coming crisis and an introduction to thinking as an European*.¹²⁴ In this book Mosley resisted the collective memory of the post-war, post-fascist world by arguing against the repeated recollection of recent conflict because this was a sign of decaying society.¹²⁵ Mosley wrote, "It is true that a morbid preoccupation with horror and atrocity is both a phenomenon of this epoch and a usual symptom of social decadence."¹²⁶ The world was continually in a state of imminent decay and, as Hegelian thought predicted, each moment of decay hold in it the seeds of reconstruction

¹²³Mosley, *Mosley Right or Wrong?* (London: Lion Books, 1961) Question 159, page 156

¹²⁴Mosley, *Europe: Faith and Plan: A way out form the coming crisis and an introduction to thinking as an European* (London: Euphrion Books, 1958)

¹²⁵ibid., 4

¹²⁶ibid., 8-9

and rebirth, so for Mosley the primary task following a war which tore Europe apart was that of rebuilding Europe, yet his fundamental motivation was the same as for his politics of the Thirties. He wrote in 1958:

"A Movement of history and destiny should be a guardian and companion of the vital nature spirit in a persistent dynamism toward higher forms...We shall remain in the mud until we can lift our eyes beyond it."¹²⁷

The idea of a united Europe was not new and, for example Churchill sought a European solution in the attempt to rebuild a war-torn Europe. Churchill sought a United States of Europe,¹⁻⁸ but Mosley demanded a complete root and branch restructuring of European mentality to deliver Europe complete as a nation. As with Mosley, the demand to avoid future wars at all cost motivated others to dream of a European solution. Sir Max Waechter wrote on *How to Make War Impossible: the United States of Europe* in 1924 but this was a 'united states' idea and not a European nation in itself. To Mosley the construction of a European nation, above the interests of individual countries and individual citizens, would act as a bulwark against the perceived consumerism of the West and the Communism of the East. The myth of Europe which Mosley constructed was also the last hope for Britain and British patriotism, "The last patriotism is now for an Englishman to feel, think and act as an European, because England can no longer live greatly without Europe, and probably cannot much longer live at all."¹²⁹ This gained a greater conviction over the following year: "There is now only one way out for Britain, through their door which leads into Europe; real Europe, great Europe", and the emphasis

¹²⁷ibid., 142.

¹²⁸Churchill, Speech at Zurich University 19 September 1946

¹²⁹European [Mosley], 'Analysis', *The National European*, July 1964, 3.

from great to Greater follows in the next paragraph: "There shall be no European problem of external payments because the area of Greater Europe will contain all necessary foodstuffs and raw materials. We shall consequently be independent of international finance, and Wall Street will no longer control Europe."¹³⁰ Here Mosley's evocation of a Great Europe resembles, in a remarkable way, his early fascist motif of a Greater Britain indicating a similar source for his political ideas.¹³¹ Mosley concluded the article with the declaration, "we can and will enter in the faith we have always declared, and so will the white overseas territories which will complete Great Europe."¹³²

Mosley did not shy from his past of inter-war political extremism but he cast it in a historical light which emphasised the decadence initially countered by fascism and national socialism,¹³³ "the first points of resistance....represented the will of Europeans to live in face of the forces which threatened our destruction."¹³⁴ Fascism and Nazism were an "incident rather than a renaissance", both destroyed by exaggerated nationalism. Mosley's Europe a Nation would be driven by a surging historical determinism: "in the vast events of modern politics that renaissance will come from the heart and soul of the

¹³⁰ Mosley, 'Britain's Crisis We Were Right' *The National European*, January 1965, 3.

¹³¹ this was a central theme of his European dream, for example 'Great or Little Europe', *The National European*, August 1964, 5.

¹³² Mosley, 'Britain's Crisis We Were Right' *The National European*, January 1965, 3.

¹³³ The cover of *The National European*, May 1965, is illustrated by a photograph of Blackshirts on in-line on parade behind their leader Mosley, the caption reads: 'Red Flag Over Europe? The spirit and dedication of the Blackshirts of the Thirties will be needed to meet the coming Red attack on Europe' indicating an effort to claim continuity between pre-war and post-war political themes.

¹³⁴ Mosley, 'The European Renaissance', *The National European*, October 1964, 5

peoples in a great movement of the popular will, when they see that all else fails. It will come because it must. Once again the thought of tomorrow will become the fact of today."¹³⁵ With echoes of his fascist tract *Tomorrow We Live* Mosley clung to the hope of historical forces bringing into reality his vision as he did in the thirties as he awaited a crisis to bring him to power.

During 1965 Mosley succinctly expressed the fundamental principle underlying his politics and it is from this Hegelian axiom a basic ethic emerges:

"All life is a movement from lower to higher forms. All life, if it is to endure, must so move. To stand still, or to decline, is to die. All life is a fluent, dynamic movement, which must strive for ever higher forms or perish...To advance this movement becomes therefore our purpose in life... The movement from lower to higher forms becomes the condition of the survival of man. If we serve mankind we therefore serve this movement. To serve the movement is good, to oppose it is bad." ³⁶

Mosley's ethical position was justified by reference to the evolutionary improvement of man and he looked to Aristotelian arguments for a super-human state over and above individual citizenship. An idea which circumvents the notion of a social contract because it would simply not be required.¹³⁷ Humans, then, are seen as inherently political beings living as a part of a city-state which emerged from two essential human associations, the male to the female for childcare, and that of master to slave. From these beginnings

¹³⁵Mosley, 'For Europe Reality at Last', *The National European*, August 1965, 5

¹³⁶Mosley, 'European Faith Higher Forms', *ibid.*, January 1965, 5.

¹³⁷A theme echoed in A.R. Thomson's *Civilisation as Divine Superman*.

evolved 'households' and ultimately cities.¹³⁸ Mosley's personal 'discovery' of these ancient Greek principles provided him with confirmation of the correctness of his thought and provided a central axiom for his post-war thought which postulated the idea that Greece was the source and hence the centre of Western civilisation.¹³⁹

In short Mosley concluded, "We stand for life against death."¹⁴⁰ And here we find the persistent strand in Mosley's politics which is national regeneration. In 1965 he saw debate over Europe muddled:

"How then will new life come from this confusion of thought and wreckage of systems, which is modern Europe? New life will come as its always comes - from the soil, from the root of things. This means in the vast events of modern politics that renaissance will come from the heart and soul of the peoples in a great movement of the popular will, when they see that all else fails. It will come because it must. Once again the thought of tomorrow will become the fact of today." ⁴

And in this paragraph the axioms of Mosley's fundamental ideology to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness are evident. Other operative expressions of this fundamental ideology emerge, for example the sense of crisis from which new life will

⁸Bernard Williams wrote, "The legacy of Greece to Western philosophy is Western philosophy." 'Philosophy' in *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*, ed. M.I. Finley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 202

¹³⁹Skidelsky describes Mosley's interment as the point in his life where "he had a past to understand - and justify.", *Oswald Mosley*, 466

¹⁴⁰Mosley, 'European Faith Higher Forms', *The National European*, January 1965, 5.

¹⁴¹Mosley, 'For Europe Reality at Last', *ibid.*, August 1965, 5.

emerge; a belief that renewal will come as people have false values stripped away by their self evident failings to reveal the 'truth'; an expected sense of spontaneous common purpose; the preeminence of thought over matter and the belief that matter is a by-product of previous action.¹⁴²

Formulations of 'Self'

Internment gave Mosley the time to reflect and formulate his relationship with the world, between 'self' and a vision of Europe a nation. This thinking was reflected in a detailed account of an enterprise and management structure which Mosley presented in his essay 'European Socialism'.¹⁴³ Businesses the Labour Government of the day were nationalising Mosley would syndicalise and return their ownership to the workers. He appeared to insist upon the individualistic nature of the enterprise, with individual initiates leading the way, but he was advocating a 'collective individualism': "We found our industrial structure upon the free individualism of the creative pioneer, and we crown it with the collective individualism of the workers who co-operate with each other to mutual benefit "¹⁴⁴ Again Mosley is reformulating boundary of the individual; blurring the distinction between 'self' and 'not self' because here nationality is generated, dynamically and futuristically. European Socialism was Mosley's additional offering for the 'workers' alongside monopoly capitalism and rigid socialism yet this, common to all Mosley's philosophy, was based upon the harmonic premise which unites the creative

¹⁴²a theme reminiscent of Henri Bergson's philosophy

¹⁴³Mosley, 'European Socialism', *The European*, v.15, May 1954, 8-14.

¹⁴⁴ibid., 11; Mosley uses this argument to criticize the Labour Party, 'Labour's New Programme; or how to get the worst of both worlds', *The European*, October 1953, 13.

individual and the creative mass: "their motive to create can be the same. Let those do who can, and let them enjoy the fruits of what they do."¹⁴⁵ Mosley's 'individual' was both free and limited. He wrote, "We will bring order that freedom may live within it",¹⁴⁶ and this sentiment he chillingly reiterated in a letter to *The European* he wrote: "We give freedom until it is abused; then we act; and, believe me, we not only ask for the power but will have the will to act."¹⁴⁷

The European idea which Mosley advocated represented, "a faith which can no more be repressed than any of the vital creeds of history", if it was repressed it could "turn it back upon itself - to become again the explosive and destructive force of obsolete nationalism",¹⁴⁸ a return of the inter-war Fascism and National Socialism. Mosley, though, did not divorce himself from his inter-war politics rather viewing them as a mistaken expression of a historical force: "The best minds in this movement have passed beyond their pre-war conception...They have joined with other European minds in the birth of a new European idea. The idea is not national but European; it has passed beyond the old nationalism."⁴⁹ But despite this operative evolution, Mosley's Europe was planned as a nation and European Socialism is categorically a form of national socialism.

After 1945 Mosley sought to reformulate the expression of his ideological matrix by

⁴⁵ibid., 14.

⁴⁶Mosley, *The European Situation: The Third Force* (Ramsbury: Mosley Publications, March 1950) 8

¹⁴⁷Mosley, 'European Socialism', letter to *The European*, v.18 August 1954, 58-9.

¹⁴⁸European [Mosley], 'Analysis', ibid., no.6, August 1953, 3.

¹⁴⁹ibid.

shifting the focus of the operative expression of his fundamental ideology to explain the fall of the fascist regimes and represent his solutions to the ills of civilisation. Mosley's utopian vision would demand a reformulation of the Self from the autonomy of liberal individualism to one extending into the zone of shared experience between individual actors which expressed the nation. Individuals could only be an expression of this motivating spirit rather than through the self-interested expression of an individual material self.

Ten

Conclusion

Oswald Mosley was a consistent, albeit minor, political player in Britain and to a lesser degree Europe during a large proportion of the twentieth century. He entered politics after the First World War in 1918, and was making political comment until shortly before his death. Mosley's association with fascism and his founding of Britain's largest fascist movement, the BUF, highlighted his infamous political abilities which were represented by a massive textual output of political comment and theories. To consider Mosley as an ideologue, in terms of a core ideology, has derived considerable momentum from the new consensus of scholarly opinion emerging during the late nineteen nineties that fascism *did* (and does) have an ideological content. The convergence of opinion has been noted by Roger Griffin who saw common ideological axioms of fascism being noted by a range of subject specialists.¹ Mosley never shrank from using the term fascist to describe himself or his politics of the Thirties and although he discontinued using the term fascist after the war it did not indicate a renouncement of his core beliefs, but rather a reformulation. For example, in 1961 Mosley argued:

"In each country fascism meant a love of the homeland, a national expression of a European people's will to revive and to live greatly. Fascism was in essence a national creed. That was both its strength and its ultimate weakness. We have now over come that weakness by becoming Europeans. We have extended our

¹Roger Griffin (ed) *International Fascism: Theories and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998) 14

patriotism to the whole home land of Europe."²

The revival of Europe had replaced the revival of Britain: a transposition of an ideal rather than a transformation of an essence.

This thesis has described Mosley's move to fascism in terms of an operative expression of a remarkably consistent ideal type fundamental ideological matrix. Throughout his life, Mosley expressed an ideological matrix which was altered, apparently changed or refracted, to maintain a degree of viability and plausibility in the different contextual environments of its anticipated reception. It has been these shifting operative modes of expression of the ideological matrix which have structured this study and provided a heuristic foundation from which an elucidation of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix has followed.

Mosley, born into the aristocracy and, arguably,³ this upbringing socially conditioned him for a leadership role, but a predisposition does not necessarily determine the future: being born into the ruling classes does not make all of the ruling classes rulers. For the purposes of this study the First World War has been taken as the contextual trigger which formed Mosley as a political being. The war generously supplied examples, reinforced by real experiences, of possible worlds and social structures amid a world of horror and death. The myth of the airman encapsulated one operative dimension of the ideological matrix and was the topic of the second chapter.

²*Mosley Right or Wrong?* (London: Lion Books, 1961) Question 226, 210

³see for example Jan Dally's biography *Diana Mosley: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 86, who, despite suggesting it is a too simple an explanation of personality, finds considerable importance in Mosley's background to explain his political moves.

The political concern which was the subject of the third chapter was 'Ireland'. Mosley's criticism of the British government emerged, not from a chauvinistic nationalism but, from a position that criticised the determination of national issues which were otherwise left to be decided by the reflexive response of individual soldiers. The fundamental concern was the balance between national strength and the allocation of role and task, action and ability. From Mosley's ideological matrix the need for a strong Britain emerged and through his examination of the problems in Ireland Mosley identified a lack of leadership as a cause. The policy of the government was unresolved and resulted in weakness.

Chapter four examined Mosley's economic ideas and related these to his conception of 'nation' as a representation of his ideological matrix. Economics offered a way to both embody the dynamic of the nation, and also provide a concrete arena where manipulation was possible to restore national strength. To ensure an economy which could respond quickly to the speedy changes, which had been made possible by modern production methods and distribution, required coming off the Gold standard which was an out-dated and slow economic mechanism. A flexible economy could respond dynamically to changes and the nation would be stronger as a result. Closely associated with the economy was the issue of unemployment, the subject of the fifth chapter. Mosley interpreted unemployment as evidence of a nation in decline. The unemployed were not producing and building the nation and, furthermore, they were not interacting with the real world of 'facts' and hence were a dormant, static and negative element, unable to act as a creative functioning unit of the nation at its most basic level. While Mosley's answers to the question of unemployment ultimately led to his removal from the Labour party, the

existence of a political space was also operating to draw him away from the socialism of Labour.

The New Party represented Mosley's first attempt to provide an organisational presentation of his ideological matrix with a public face attracting support from those who, likewise, saw weaknesses in democratic politics. In this sixth chapter, the New Party, by its name and propaganda machinery was shown to act as a further exoteric expression of Mosley's fundamental ideology but while displaying similarities to fascism it was argued that the New Party was not a fascist party. The BUF though was unashamedly fascist and this movement was discussed in the seventh chapter where Mosley's early, fundamental, fascist tract *The Greater Britain* is placed within a discourse of the idea of a 'nation', nationalism, and a 'greater Britain'. In the political phenomena of fascism an operative expression in close accord with Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix was found when he was free of the shackles imposed by democratic parliamentary procedure. Mosley's rhetoric erupted in Spenglerian visions of national decline and a new fascist dawn. Fascism's political revolt brought violence and anti-semitism to British streets and these phenomena were examined in chapter eight where they are accounted for in terms of possible challenges and exaggerated stereotypes of underlying cultural themes. They were not necessary elements in Mosley's ideological matrix.

The philosophical expression of Mosley's ideological matrix was the subject of chapter nine and by briefly looking at the ideals of established philosophical figures such as Hegel, and lesser ones such as Thomson, and it was possible to construct a philosophical

elaboration of Mosley's ideological matrix to incorporate an apologia of his 1930's position. In outline it has been argued that Mosley was seeking a transformation of the nature of the Self, away from individualism and into a national collectivism: *Homo fascistus* would resolve any discrepancy between Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix and the world or experience.

This thesis has focused, in the main on the earlier period of Mosley's political biography in order to establish the role of the ideological matrix during just over two decades of intense political manoeuvring. Mosley, though, did not stop espousing his solutions to world problems. For example, in 1970 Mosley wrote an article 'Democracy: Action Within Parliamentary Government' in which he rehearsed arguments presented throughout his career which attempt to define democracy in terms of the "implementation of the peoples will" which would be effective only with a government able to act: "The failure of government to act results in disillusionment and eventually in the disintegration of society."⁴ Mosley remained faithful to the belief that a balance between the freedom of individuals and Government freedom could be arrived at without recourse to Parliamentary debate, and he recounted his persistent appeals since 1918 for problems to be tackled as an operation of war. The nation was to be consulted at the site of its generation, at the level of individual workers, taking seriously their ideas for the improvement their work and putting into action Mosley's Platonic association of man with his task.

⁴Mosley, 'Democracy: Action within Parliamentary Government', first published in *Eboracum*, York University, 1 12 1970, reproduced in [Mosley] *Broadsheet 6* (London: Mosley Secretariat, 14 01 1971)

Throughout Mosley's utterances was the urge to rebuild in the face of persistent decline, hence his demand for root and branch revision of the system of government: "Enough of Peter Pansy civilisation we need to restore the values of manhood," Mosley wrote in an article about the nations response to the disclosure of a Minister of the government visiting a prostitute: "All this uproar is a symptom not of propriety but of decadence" which could be answered by "Recognising the facts of a new age" and strengthening the governments power to act.⁵

In the introductory chapter of this thesis a number of apparent contradictions in Mosley's politics were outlined and it was suggested these may be viewed as paradoxes if the ideological matrix described ideal typically in this study is used as heuristic tool for analysis. For example, Mosley's apparent contradiction as he turned to socialism and away from the political home of his upbringing to the Conservative party, can be seen not as a cynical political ploy but as a realisation that the traditional conservative, 'Tory' idea of community did not allow for the modernization which he saw as vital to national strength. It was in socialism that the dynamic politics of tomorrow were to be found along with hopes that the nation could emerge as a representation of the whole of the people and not just a part of them. Socialism was vital, forward looking and offered a fresh approach to political problems. The contradiction in Mosley's politics evaporates when his background of an aristocratic love of the country is seen in the light of an utopian belief in the power of science to transform society into a better stronger country, and this was offered by modern socialism. Mosley had shifted the operative dimension

⁵Mosley, 'Truth and Decadence Reality and Humbug', *Broadsheet no.19* (London: Mosley Secretariat, 5 6 73)

of his political ideology to maintain a consistent fundamental ideological matrix. Adopting our ideal type ideological matrix Mosley can be seen as consistent as a conservative, a socialist, a national socialist, and a fascist, because throughout these changes in affiliation he remained a fundamental advocate of a strong nation.

Mosley's move from the politics of parliamentary democracy, where he was precociously successful, to the extra-parliamentary politics of fascism where he was a failure, indicate further contradictions which are resolved in the light of Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix. Here they are seen as an ultimate extension of his ambitions to achieve a strong, futurist Britain. Mosley did not see the Labour Party as revolutionary enough because it functioned under the restraining ethos of reform within liberal democracy. These restrictions appeared exaggerated to Mosley when the Party rejected his radical proposals to deal with unemployment. Mosley began to see these factors as symptoms of, and part of the cause of, national weakness and decline and so he jettisoned the Labour Party as an operative route to the expression of his fundamental ideology. Now he moved swiftly to adopt a revolutionary fascist quest for national socialism. It was his bid to create a strong Britain, harnessing all that modernism and science could offer in that task, which inspired Mosley's political rebellion.

In foreign policy matters Mosley also exhibited apparent contradictory positions. Mosley's early parliamentary career featured a keen interest in the League of Nations, illustrated by his being the secretary to the League of Nations' Union which sought to promote the League. Mosley wanted the League to be strong to guarantee the security of member states and to replace the old balance of power which he believed caused the

First World War. Later as a fascist Mosley stood by and uncritically watched the fascist regimes overrun the nations of Europe. This contraction, like the others, can be resolved in terms of Mosley's fundamental ideology.

Mosley saw the League of Nations as impotent because it lacked strength of leadership when it was challenged by Mussolini's bombing of Corfu in 1923.⁶ The failure to act against Italy was accounted for by Mosley as a weakness of will in the leadership of League members, and this feebleness left open the possibility of a return to the dangerous alliance system of the past which was to Mosley all but inevitable. In his autobiography Mosley described his change, from supporting a strong League of Nations to supporting a strong European Union, in terms of his quest for peace, and conveniently ignored his ideological fascist interregnum. Mosley argued that peace could be maintained in all these European structures, but the League of Nations was a product of democracies and was thus full of their weaknesses. But in his overlooked fascist phase, Mosley had schemed a Europe dominated by co-operating fascist blocks that had conquered Europe, but who could live together in relative harmony. It was a matter of strength of will:

"When the four great powers of Europe were Fascist, as they would be, the European problem could be solved for all time in the East without war, because none could resist under their united will In world fascism you have a guarantee of peace such as Democracy can never hope to present."⁷

There was no contradiction between the idea of the League of Nations and Mosley's fascist concert of Europe at the level of fundamental ideology where a strong nation is

⁶Mosley, *My Life*, 141

⁷Mosley, *The Blackshirt* no.101, 29 March 1935, 5

paramount, rather there was a shift in the operative dimension of his ideology creating a revised League, as Mosley said at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in September 1935,; "The real League of Nations would come from universal Fascism when every great nation was Fascist, bound together by a common creed."⁸ In fascism the total concept of Europe was to be redrawn. Modern science would provide the power, "to protect our own land but not to interfere in the natural spheres of other great nations."⁹ The heuristic value of the ideological matrix consisting of fundamental and operative ideological ideal types which dynamically respond to events in reality has been able to show how the apparent exoteric contradictions in Mosley's texts and utterances to be esoterically consistent.

This study has provided an original account of Mosley's politics through a close reading of texts representing his writings and reports of his utterances. This source material has been used to construct Mosley's ideological matrix: the origins of his political ideas. These ideas were expressed in a variety of forms and these have been analyzed and categorised according to the chronology of Mosley's life. In each phase a variant of Mosley's core ideological matrix became operatively expressed.

In addition, this study has constructed a useful biographic tool in the concept of an ideological matrix derived from the textual outpourings of the subject. An ideological

⁸Mosley, *ibid.*, no.124, 6 September 1935, 2

⁹Mosley' 'What Chance for Peace? The State of the War' *Action* no.211, 21 March 1940, 1

matrix enables an individual to be studied as a pure political being,¹⁰ a fount of ideas expressed in a variety of formulations, each one is unexceptional yet an evolving uniqueness emerges when seen in combination with the ideological matrix. The methodology established in this study could be usefully applied to other political, and less overtly political, individuals.

This study has advanced fascist studies by providing a convincing political biography of a leading fascist ideologue. Incorporating recent developments in academic fascist studies which have established the ideological basis of fascism, this study has advanced this understanding through the examination of Mosley's ideas while they matured into a fascist paradigm, and through their later reformulations. In addition, identification of the myth of the airman has emerged from this study and will provide a new and fruitful approach to the history of fascism, aviation, and more general histories of the twentieth century.

Mosley died on 3rd December 1980 and was cremated 5 days later at Père Lachaise cemetery in France, the country where he had chosen to live out his final years. His heir, the novelist Nicholas Mosley read Swinburn's chorus of Atlanta which Mosley had often read to his children. A measure of Mosley's role as a public figure can be assessed by Alexander Mosley's comment that among the telegrams of condolence none had been abusive: Mosley, like all old soldiers, had faded away. Until shortly before his death he had been commenting on international affairs with the fear of an imminent crisis and

¹ the 'pure political being' is not unaffected by social pressures but their textual production is accepted as an exoteric expression of some esoteric core.

destruction driving him on. In the penultimate broadsheet titled 'Prospect of another war? Dialogue with Russians' and circulated to his followers Mosley attempts to resolve the Cold War. Communism was the enemy it "unlike fascism desires to possess the world...[Fascism] was ultra-nationalist and consequently took a entirely different form in different countries with an undue, indeed dangerous lack of interest in other people." Mosley's answer was the division of the world in to self-contained continental units, "Within such areas each creed would have the practical opportunity to prove which was the best, and the rest would follow."¹¹ Mosley's search for answers to world problems stemmed from his consistent ideological matrix and its core structure designed to realize the dynamics of futurist national greatness. But Mosley's political ideas, that had flowered in the interwar period, were to wither after the war to be superseded by a far more biologically, and racially, centred permutation of a generic fascist core.

¹¹Mosley, 'Prospect of Another War Dialogue with the Russians', *Broadsheet No.39* (London: Sanctuary Press, 1980)

Appendix One

The Two Greater Britain's

Mosley prefaced the second edition of *The Greater Britain* by signalling the main alterations to the first edition and where greater policy detail had been provided.¹ These include alterations to the structure of a fascist government maintaining the economic argument which Mosley believed was gaining political acceptance across the nation since his resignation speech. Mosley boasted parts of his economic policy were adopted by Roosevelt to revive American industry and this New Deal did not need fascism because American conditions made their implementation easier than Europe.² Mosley noted continental attempts to create autocratic governments emphasised a need to convert minds and souls of the British nation to fascism. He also anticipated the absorption and nullification of fascist policy by liberal democracy, warning the Old Parties may copy fascist policies but it is the fascist spirit is the key to unlock the new civilisation:

"Fascism without fascists will not work. The task before us is nothing less than the creation of a new civilisation. Before we can really begin that task we must create a new spirit".³

Mosley wrote of a revival in spirit which precedes a material revival. This spirit "eludes

¹In this appendix *GB* refers to the first, 1932, edition of Mosley's *Greater Britain* and *GB2* refers to the second, 1934, edition of this book.

²see also *GB2*, 110n, where Mosley expressed his doubts of Roosevelt's plan without a fascist movement. Any success in America could not be matched in Europe without fascist policy and fascists because of Europe's "greater problems and more deeply entrenched interests and conventions".

³preface to *GB2*, np.

the description of the written word", yet attempts at such descriptions enhanced the mythic quality of the enterprise because the idea of 'spirit' is not easily quantifiable. The spirit "is a vital factor which is felt and lived by thousands. Thousands of men and women have dedicated themselves with selfless determination and sublime passion to the salvation of this land." The individual "finds a greater personality and purpose" when subsumed by a larger entity through fascism which is "a thing of the spirit." Fascism would purge the nation: "In an age of decadence and disillusion when all old values fail, the new flame purifies and inspires to loftier ambitions and mightier ends." Lofty words indeed, but Mosley was demonstrating political pragmatism by distinguishing between fascist achievements in the realm of the spirit and those of the material world: Mosley can claim support where there is none, and massive support where there is a little.⁴ Writing "*The spirit lives: the rest will follow*", Mosley marked a crucial shift in emphasis after two years of BUF existence and he uses the second edition of *The Greater Britain* to address criticisms levied against the BUF, for example the additional footnote in the second edition which argues that since use of the BUF Defense Force there was perfect order at all meetings.⁵

Mosley sought to redeploy 'meanings': he attempted to reestablish a connection between experience and knowledge and their expression in words, and one example was in the concept of freedom, Mosley argued a man is not free unless he has the financial

⁴Mosley does suggest that the BUF "have now [1934] reached a staged at which Fascist electoral organisation is being developed throughout the country ...made possible by the extraordinary rapidity of the Fascist advance and the acceptance of its policy", but this confidence is assigned to a footnote, *GB2* 188n.

⁵*GB2*, 187

capability to be free,⁶ yet in the second edition, he appears to restrict freedom in the moral realm. While the fascist morality did not exclude religious morality it was *within* the broad limits prescribed by Fascist State.⁷ Mosley's fascist freedom moved from being a property experienced by the individual when released from economic restraint, to one experienced only within, and through the confines of the nation. Furthermore, Mosley did not want fascism to conflict with institutional religion because, beyond its politically persuasive ability, religion was tapping the same inspirational source Mosley wanted to energise his fascist creed.

Dictatorship or strong leadership ?

Mosley used *The Greater Britain* to attack the pejorative use of 'dictatorship' associated with fascism arguing 'dictatorship' would have a new and non-tyrannical meaning under fascism. In the place of an old sense of dictatorship, indicating a Government ruling against the will of the people, Mosley's 'modern' sense of the word would indicate an emancipation of the people's will through a Government with the power to solve problems and implementing the peoples will.⁸ A synthesis combining the principle of election and 'executive efficiency' would release "the will of the national majority would prevail over obstructive minorities."⁹ Mosley's wordplay alludes to liberal democratic procedures while hinting at fascism's intolerance of 'obstructive minorities'. Pluralism would be squeezed out to allow for the 'popular will' of those whose "clearly allocated

⁶GB, 22

⁷GB, 32; GB2; the pages BUF news papers regularly carried articles by ministers of the church broadly supporting Mosley and the BUF.

⁸GB2, 26.

⁹GB2, 40.

function" in the corporate system could gauge the success or failure of the executive leadership.¹⁰

In both editions of *The Greater Britain* the ideas of strong leadership is a feature, but in the second edition this theme is expanded to promote the idea of a single leader. A single leader would 'undoubtedly' be "the more effective instrument", shedding the link made in the first edition between national characteristic and leadership style. Mosley had written in 1932, "in the case of the British character, a team with clearly allocated functions and responsibilities" was preferable to an individual.¹¹ This change indicates a further refinement moving from a universal fascism given form by individual national traits, to a fascism characterized by charismatic leadership.

'Democracy'

The reassigning sweep of Mosley's fascist pen wiped 'democracy' from the revised text to replace it with the terms 'popular will' and 'nation'. In the first edition Mosley attempted to redefine democracy, to suggest that fascism would bring about a democratic existence denied to the people by the 'Old Gangs'. In the second edition this reformist approach is abandoned and he make the following changes:¹² of promises to "preserve the *essentials of true democracy* [2nd ed. = *essence of popular will*] and combine them with the power of rapid decision without which *all semblance of democracy* [2nd ed. =

¹⁰*GB2*, 40.

¹¹*GB*, 24; *GB2*, 31.

¹²italics are mine and indicate those words or passages changed or replaced in *GB2* with those in parentheses for example (2nd. ed. = ...)

the nation] will ultimately be lost in chaos."¹³ 'Nation' and 'popular will' are almost synonymous and in the revised text and both terms to replace 'democracy'. Later in the 1934 edition 'democracy' is replaced by a third term 'State'.¹⁴ The new terms, 'nation', 'popular will', and 'State', are all used to replace 'democracy'. The rule of the people (democracy) was equated with the Mosley's sense of nation and an entity enmeshed with the whole people.

'Revolution' and Government

Revolution was central to Mosley's ideas. The mid-1920's and *Revolution by Reason* described revolution as essential to overthrow the existing system rather than being drawn into the system through gradualism. Revolution gained emphasis in the revised *Greater Britain*, for example, in a section titled 'Loyalty to the Crown' in 1932, has the words 'but Revolution in Methods of Government' added in 1934 suggesting a greater shift in power away from the traditional elites and towards a fascist government.

Further additions to the 1934 edition detail the changes fascism would make to the electoral procedure: a fascist parliamentary majority at a General Election would be given complete power of action in government echoing the Nazi use of emergency powers and achievement of power through a blend of democratic and non-democratic means. Local government would be replaced by 'executive officers', that is, fascist Member's of Parliament. The House of Lords also suffered in the second edition having

¹³*GB*, 24; *GB2*, 32.

¹⁴Describing his concept of occupational franchise and Parliament Mosley wrote in 1932, "Is not this in fact rationalised democracy?" and in 1934 he wrote, "Is not this in fact the rationalised State?", *GB*, 34; *GB2*, 46; 'democracy' is again replaced by 'State' on pages *GB*, 35; *GB2*, 47.

"ceased to represent that [industry and agriculture] interest and scarcely can be said to represent any other." The Lords would be replaced by a "Chamber which represents in a specialist sense every major interest of the modern State", a Chamber of technocrats.¹⁵ Reaffirming plans for an occupational franchise with technical efficiency Mosley planned to avoid the "intrigues of a Party Parliamentary system,"¹⁶ and be a "truer representation of the individual and of the complex components of the life of the modern State than prevails"¹⁷ providing a "technical Fascist system".¹⁸

Mosley had expected, in 1932, a crisis to bring him to power, this never came and he address this in the second edition. Mosley reasoned that the recovery was a temporary event in the cycle of boom and depression yet without a stable and permanent recovery, that is with fascism, "present evidence strongly supports the original argument of this book".¹⁹ Furthermore, the economic factor was a marker of the deeper concerns affecting 'civilisation', he wrote: "underlying all these transient phenomena [economic cycles] is the crisis of the system...We are faced with a crisis of present civilisation partly worldwide and partly peculiar to ourselves."²⁰ Britain did not responded to the permanent implications of the crisis, any benefits, such as an increase in credit coming from the move off the Gold Standard, were due to chance and not leadership: fascism would

¹⁵GB2, 41.

¹⁶GB2, 42.

¹⁷GB2, 44-45.

¹⁸GB2, 46.

¹⁹GB2, 47.

²⁰GB2, 69.

provide leadership. Other nations, notably America and Japan, were cited as taking advantage of a planned move from the Gold Standard with a deliberate policy and Mosley insisted planning would provide stability, reduce risk, and prevent alien influences draining national strength.

'Agriculture'

A section 'Progress in Agriculture' in the first edition of *The Greater Britain* was amended to 'Agriculture and Autarky' two years later,²¹ signalling the importance of agriculture to a self-sufficient community. Mosley was convinced, by an examination of the import/export figures, the Empire could be self-sufficient and able to survive exclusion of all foreign goods.²² If Britain alone could approach the autarkic ideal the Empire would assure it.²³ The only victim would be, "alien Finance of the City of London ... the constant threat to the stability of the nation ever since the war."²⁴ The importance Mosley attached to agriculture suggests a shift in Mosley's focus toward identifying the nation embodied in a group, or race, of people rather than in their actions, product, or culture:

"We have it in our power to restore prosperity to the countryside and there to revive the vital breed of men on whom our past greatness has rested...to build an industrial civilisation in comparably higher than has yet existed in this country within an area under the control of our own race...we have the power, but

²¹self-sufficiency

²²*GB2*, 125.

²³*GB*, 130.

²⁴*GB2*, 131.

Fascism alone has the Will."²⁵

A biological dimension emerges through the discourse of 'agricultural policy' which describes the British as a 'race' and identifies its origins and vitality in the national soil further suggesting a move towards: a move toward the Nazi example.

Empire and India

Mosley revised his thoughts on the Empire by confirming Britain would not interfere in domestic government of other countries by granting them the same autonomy given to all other fascist movements, implying a fascist government in the Dominions was a prerequisite factor.²⁶ In contrast to the Empire, Mosley virtually rewrote the section regarding BUF policy and India in the second edition. In 1932 Mosley wanted to target economic arguments directly at the Indian masses over the heads of politicians, but in 1934 Mosley placed emphasis on Britain's historical right to rule the Indians which stems from "the power of original conquest."²⁷ Mosley had moved from inspiring the masses to revolt to the imposition of a revolution from above. Britain had a 'duty' to rule India, a duty 'vigorously maintained' under fascist law and while preserving the sacred Indian realities fascism, "will override custom and convention where it is necessary to release the people from poverty." As in Britain, Mosley sought to release and transform Indian national energy, "from the political sphere of talk to the economic sphere of action", but the Imperial stamp is clearly influential: "If India must look to the West in place of developing her own traditional culture, let her acquire not the old clothes but the new

²⁵*GB2*, 133.

²⁶*GB2*, 138.

²⁷*GB*, 137; *GB2*, 140.

clothes of the West",²⁸ and in return the West can learn from India's of 'spiritual values'.

Europe

Mosley's consideration of Europe in the 1934 edition of *The Greater Britain* hinged upon the successful emergence of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany to complement Mussolini's Italian Fascism. European peace might emerge and a "Brotherhood of Fascism could and should build the enduring peace of Europe."²⁹ Memories of the First World War horrors, still fresh in the minds of many, made the mention of a permanent peace a useful political manoeuvre and particularly attractive to those fearful of national dissolution in the wake of communism and Mosley proposed a reconstructed League of Nations to maintain national coherence and leadership: "To deny that Leadership [of the Great Powers] is to deny both the spiritual and material realities of modern Europe".³⁰ And Europe supplanted British reconstruction in the 1934 edition, with a European plan demanding the will and power to attack the problems of plenty: "That will and power can only come from a Fascist Europe united by the Brotherhood of Fascism and the common determination to preserve and to elevate European culture in a higher and greater world morality."³¹

A new emerging european identity would develop, "Under Fascism", and Mosley added, "the outlook of the new European generation will be expressed in a closer synthesis of

²⁸GB2, 143.

²⁹GB2, 153.

³⁰GB2, 153.

³¹GB2, 154.

nations, commercialised rivalries will be diminished and controlled and legacies of the unhappy past will be buried in a united effort of the new European culture to build a new civilisation."³² But Mosley's permanent peace would not involve disarmament because this would not guarantee peace, Europe Mosley wrote, "must rely on an entirely new psychology and we may well ask where Europe can discover that new psychology except in Fascism We will certainly seek peace and Disarmament and we will secure these blessings for mankind in the Fascist Europe of the future."³³ Domestically fascism acted as a demonstration of freedom though strength and Mosley argued for a paramilitary force to defend BUF open air meetings against attacks from 'reds', remarking, "Now we hold meetings everywhere in perfect order with very rare exceptions."³⁴ Accused of importing ideology from Germany or Italy Mosley was soon to respond, movement which succeeds in this country must be indigenous and peculiar to the British mind and nature."³⁵

This reading of the revision to *The Greater Britain* has demonstrated Mosley's fundamental ideological matrix responding to world events such as the rise of fascism and adapting its articulation, or operative dimension, in tandem with the changing world of its reception.

³²GB2, 154.

³³GB2, 155-156.

³⁴GB2 footnote, 187.

³⁵Mosley, *Political Quarterly*, vol.III, no.1, January - March 1932, 27- 32, esp 30.

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