

Do the British “Fascist” Movements of the Inter-War Period fit the definition of generic fascism and what, if any, political success did these groups experience?

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In the turbulent era between the First and Second world wars a new political movement arose that would alter the European political landscape forever. This new movement would bring the nations of Europe to their knees during the Second World War. On the verge of doom Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, assessed the situation as follows: “Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization... If we can stand up to it, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world... including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age.”¹¹⁷ The name for this new political movement was fascism. Originating in Italy in 1919 under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, the word itself derives from the Italian word *fasces*, the emblem that represented the power, authority, and unity of Imperial Rome. *Fasces* are bundles of sticks held tightly together, symbolizing unity, with an axe protruding out of the side of the bundle. In nineteenth century Italy, the word *fascio*, also meaning bundle, began to be used as a label for small rebel groups. Mussolini founded the *fasci di combattimento*, “combat groups”, in 1919, marking the beginning of fascism. Fascism spread across Europe, attaining political success in Italy and Germany. In his speech, Churchill was referring to the conquests of Nazi Germany across Europe in early 1940, which resulted in Britain standing alone against Germany in the fight for a free Europe. Churchill’s speech aimed to prepare the British people for the seemingly impossible battle Britain would face in the coming months in order to protect the liberty of their country. The rhetoric of Churchill and the British government at the time suggests that it would be unlikely that fascism would have a presence in Britain; however, “fascist” groups existed in Britain since 1923 and remained a nuisance for the government right up until the outbreak of the Second World War. The goal of this paper is to determine whether these British “fascist” movements fulfill the definition of generic fascism laid out below and to examine what political success British fascists experienced. This paper will argue that the fascist movements in Britain during the interwar period did not fulfill the characteristics of generic fascism and they achieved minimal to no political success. Prior to examining fascism in Britain further, we must first establish a definition of ‘generic fascism’.

Accurately defining ‘generic fascism’ is extremely difficult because fascism lacks a single political doctrine like, for example, *the Communist Manifesto* for Marxists. For the purpose of this paper, the definitions of Stanley Payne and George Mosse are used in order to determine whether the fascist movements in Britain truly fulfilled the essential aspects of a fascist movement. Both scholars incorporate the fundamental characteristics of fascism into their definitions, which is a combination of myth and action. Important sub-themes within the two scholars’ definitions are the mobilization of the masses with an elite group or leader at the head of the movement, the destruction of liberal institutions, and the use of violence in political action. Key to a fascist movement is the rejection of established values

¹¹⁷ Winston Churchill. “Their Finest Hour,” last modified June 18, 1940, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/1940-finest-hour/122-their-finest-hour>. Accessed March 22, 2011.

and a call for the destruction of liberal institutions.¹¹⁸ Fascism is a form of popular sovereignty, in which instead of elected assemblies, a group of elites that expresses the “general will” represents the people.¹¹⁹ In regards to violence, Mosse argues, the fascist movements violent actions stemmed from the First World War, which desensitized the majority of Europeans, making fascist violence seem trivial to the public and allowing the fascists to use violence as a political tool.¹²⁰ A fascist movement is not complete without the creation of what Payne calls a “civic religion” or in Mosse’s terms the “Third Way”. A necessary component was the creation of national myths that bonded the people together with the fascist elite and provided a third option from Marxism and capitalism.¹²¹ Stemming from these myths was the idea of the “new fascist man”. Mosse describes this man as “...naturally, masculine: fascism represented itself as a society of males, re-enforced by the struggle for national unity that created fellowships such as “Young Italy”, or the German fraternities and gymnastic societies.”¹²² The core of fascism, which both Payne and Mosse make apparent in their definitions, is the combination of these national myths, which act as a catalyst for the fascists to take action, often violent, against liberal institutions and enemies of the state.

Payne’s analysis of British fascism is quite critical, referring to fascism in Britain as a “political oxymoron”. According to Payne, since Britain was a “prosperous, economically developed, and relatively balanced society, with well-educated citizens and established parliamentary traditions” there was no need for revolutionary nationalism, thus fascism experienced little success.¹²³ In contradiction to the larger fascist movements in Italy and Germany, British fascists preached peace and prosperity versus war and expansion because of Britain’s well-established empire.¹²⁴ Ultimately, the violence that began to surround fascist movements disgusted the majority of Britons, curbing the growth of fascism and eventually leading to the internment of prominent fascists during the Second World War.¹²⁵ Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow present the clearest evidence of fascism as a political failure in Britain. They explain, “in fact, fascist parties never won a parliamentary seat in Britain and only two local council seats in the inter-war period.”¹²⁶ This information alone makes it quite clear that fascism failed in Britain whether the movement met the definition or not. Scholars tend to focus on the British Union of Fascists (BUF), led by Sir Oswald Mosley, which was the most successful of the British fascist groups. Phillip Rees argues that Mosley and the BUF strove for a “non-sectarian authoritarian solution to the problems of stagnating advanced capitalist states but whose ultimate failure was the cognitive one of having selected an inappropriate model, the ideology reflecting the delayed industrialization of Italy.”¹²⁷ In addition, Rees argues the BUF failed not because of “virtues of the British Constitution” or the British ruling class’ opposition to the use of violence, but rather it failed because “these ruling classes had not yet exhausted

¹¹⁸ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 8

¹¹⁹ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward A General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), 2.

¹²⁰ Mosse, *the Fascist Revolution*, 15.

¹²¹ Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*, 42.

¹²² Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*, 30.

¹²³ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 303

¹²⁴ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 305

¹²⁵ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 305

¹²⁶ Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow, “Introduction,” in *British Fascism*, ed. Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 9

¹²⁷ Phillip Rees, “Changing Interpretations of British Fascism,” in *British Fascism*, ed. Kenneth Lunn and Richard C. Thurlow (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 200.

all their traditional means of preserving capitalism.”¹²⁸ Mosley tried to implement a movement unsuited for a developed state like Britain and failed to convert those in power, resulting in very little success. In regards to Mosley’s New Party, a prelude to the BUF, Matthew Worley argues that the New Party never posed a threat to the British political system and this was reflected in the 1931 general election. It gained little support and accomplished nothing.¹²⁹ Worley believes Mosley’s “vanity and egocentricity” damaged his aspirations and led him away from the political center towards politics of violent expression and ultimate failure.¹³⁰

Perhaps the most telling example of the failure of fascism in Britain is from a former member of the BUF. A.K. Chesterton, an ex-BUF lieutenant, expressed his loss of faith in fascism following the Second World War. In his biography of Chesterton, David Baker discusses Chesterton’s loss of faith after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, which only increased after the failure of Mosley’s movement and later the revelation of the Holocaust.¹³¹ In addition, Mosley’s movement failed to create the “classless brotherhood within its own ranks” often preached by Mosley, resulting in upper-middle classes in leadership positions and lower classes serving as rank-and-file members.¹³² Chesterton went as far as saying “the Fascist edifice which he... constructed was about as stable as a house built of cards. Its organization was a joke...”¹³³ Certainly Chesterton soured towards fascism and Mosley, expressing his thoughts on the movement in 1947: “Fascism certainly failed. It failed so disastrously [that] it is impossible even to mention the word without invoking, not what its adherents meant when they used it, but what its deadliest enemies intended people to believe it to have meant. And that is defeat indeed!”¹³⁴

One defender of fascism in Britain, not surprisingly, was Sir Oswald Mosley. Understandably so since Mosley led the most successful fascist movement in Britain, but his argument embellished the accomplishments of fascism and what it might have done for Britain if the economic crisis worsened and the Second World War had not occurred. “Our British movement achieved so much in face of steadily declining unemployment figures that it cannot be doubted we should have won Britain if the crisis had deepened.”¹³⁵ Mosley believed that the economy was on the verge of another downturn in 1938, which would have allowed the fascists to step in, but the rearmament surge followed by the war saved the economy. Mosley points out that he was not the only one who held this opinion,

...a leading journalist of the Left, Hannen Swaffer, wrote in *World Press News* on August 5, 1943, under the heading ‘Saved by the War’, that it was ‘left to the war and 18B’ (imprisonment without trial) ‘to deal effectively with Mosley and his movement,’ and concluded: ‘Yes, but for the war we might today have been a Fascist country’.¹³⁶

Unfortunately for Mosley, the conditions for success never occurred and fascism went down as a failure in Britain. Mosley remained proud of his work and having led

¹²⁸ Rees, “Changing Interpretations”, 190

¹²⁹ Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* (Reading, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

¹³⁰ Worley, *The New Party*, 10.

¹³¹ David Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A.K. Chesterton and British Fascism* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 187.

¹³² Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, 187

¹³³ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, 188

¹³⁴ Baker, *Ideology of Obsession*, 189

¹³⁵ Sir Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson (Printers) Ltd, 1968), 310.

¹³⁶ Mosley, *My Life*, 310

what he claims to be a movement that “stopped Red violence and restored free speech to Britain.” If the situation arose where Britain was under threat again he would gladly do it again.¹³⁷ However, his argument did not concur with historical fact: fascism failed, whatever the circumstances. Ultimately, this paper supports the arguments of Payne, Rees, and others who argue that British fascism was unsuccessful.

Prior to examining the BUF and Mosley, it is important to examine the earlier “fascist” movements in Britain, to determine if they experienced any political success, and whether they fulfill this paper’s definition of fascism. The first political organization to proclaim itself to be fascist and second only to the BUF in significance was the British Fascisti, founded in May 1923, to be later renamed the British Fascists (BF).¹³⁸ Twenty-eight year-old Rotha Lintorn-Orman founded the movement; impressed by Mussolini’s “March on Rome” in 1922, she strove to create a similar movement in Britain. Like the rest of the radical right, the BF was thoroughly opposed to communism and socialism; in their opinion communism was simply a label that covered any number of socialist organizations who desired to depose the King, constitution, and Empire.¹³⁹ From the beginning, the goals of the BF focused more on protecting Britain from the communist threat, rather than proclaiming fascist ideology. In fact, in its early days the BF maintained strong connections with the party system, with many of its members possessing dual membership with the Conservative Party¹⁴⁰. In its early stages the BF was nothing more than a radical right party professing more aggressive ideas against the left. A commander in the BF, Lionel Hirst, expresses the views of the BF bluntly in 1927: “A Socialist is the most vile specimen of humanity that has ever been seen.”¹⁴¹ Despite her initial admiration of Mussolini’s movement, Lintorn-Orman shied away from wearing black shirts to avoid connection to the violent actions of Mussolini’s *squadristi*.¹⁴² In fact, the BF wore no uniform at all, only wearing a badge with the words ‘For King and Country’ which encircled the initials of the group, which in time was replaced by just the letter F.¹⁴³ The views of the BF remained undeveloped and certainly not fascist until the late 1920s. This stagnation was due to Lintorn-Orman’s poor comprehension of Italian fascist doctrine and the failure of her deputies to have any better understanding than their leader. The President of the BF at the time, Brigadier-General Blakeney, famously considered fascism as an adult offshoot of the Boy Scouts.¹⁴⁴ The BF more than anything promoted anti-Bolshevik views, the “ideal of class-friendship”, and presented itself as defenders of the traditional society and status quo.¹⁴⁵

The BF began to reform itself after the Great Strike in Britain in 1926 and began to develop more of a fascist ideology. The BF’s doctrine began to reflect the doctrine of Mussolini, beginning with its 1927 Manifesto, which focused on anti-trade union policies calling for the outlawing of strikes and the “abolition of card voting.”¹⁴⁶ Further indications of the BF’s shift towards a more fascist-like ideology

¹³⁷ Mosley, *My Life*, 315

¹³⁸ Steven Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism: The Attitude of Early British Fascists towards Mosley and the New Party” *Contemporary British Politics* (Dec. 2009): 496.

¹³⁹ Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism”, 496

¹⁴⁰ Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism”, 496

¹⁴¹ Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism”, 496

¹⁴² Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39 Parties, ideology, and culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 64

¹⁴³ Nicholas Mosley, *Beyond the Pale: Memoirs of Sir Oswald Mosley and Family* (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 271.

¹⁴⁴ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 63

¹⁴⁵ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 64

¹⁴⁶ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 66

was the advocating of the Corporate State, led by E.G. Mandeville Roe, a relatively new member of the BF who held great enthusiasm for the new economic ideas coming out of Italy. Mandeville Roe admired the industry of the Italian Corporate State, in which “disputes are settled within industry itself” rather than becoming political issues and argued that the Italian state was “a democracy more efficient than any which existed before it.”¹⁴⁷ Not until the early 1930s did the BF truly begin to exemplify characteristics of fascism. In 1933, it released a 24-point political program, calling for the dismantling of the existing party system and its replacement by the Corporate State, with a distinctly more anti-Semitic view, calling for a ban on Jews from holding official state offices, voting, and participating in Britain’s political, economic, and cultural life.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, this shift came too late for the BF, and had begun losing members to Mosley’s BUF in 1932, including Mandeville Roe, who saw Mosley as a more dynamic leader, while Lintorn-Orman saw him as a “near communist”.¹⁴⁹ BF members continued to defect to the BUF and due to lack of funds and support, the BF ceased to exist by 1935.

When examining the history of the BF it becomes quite evident that the movement was not fascist and its political impact was minimal. Until 1933, when it released its 24-point political program, the BF was nothing more than an ultra-conservative movement. Since the movement dissolved less than two years after releasing the new program and lost several members to Mosley’s BUF throughout that time, the program never became significant. Many scholars of the BF agree that the movement differed very little “in terms of outlook and policy” from the Conservative Party and the BF’s “impact on the wider society and political life” was “negligible”.¹⁵⁰

In his study of the BF, Thomas Linehan argues that few characteristics that make up authentic fascist ideology existed in their ideology; there was no rebirth mythology, nor a desire to develop a new “fascist man”.¹⁵¹ Until 1933, the BF never indicated any desire to overthrow the liberal institutions of Britain or use violence as a political tool to advance their cause. In his memoirs about his father, Nicholas Mosley briefly discusses the BF, referring to them as “mostly middle-class men who had no experience of, nor indeed taste for, serious revolutionary nor counter-revolutionary violence: they never went in for the intimidation of civilians by street fighting as their counterparts on the Continent did.”¹⁵² In addition, the BF never had an absolute leader; riddled by internal dispute and splits into different factions from the beginning, the BF failed to unite around one leader, a vital part to the success of fascist movements on the continent. One impact the BF did have was unintentional and damaging to their group; namely influencing the BUF. The BF’s method of “stewarding” during meetings, with “hints of political violence,” et an important model for the BUF, which became famous for ejecting hecklers and leftists from their meetings in a less than civil manner.¹⁵³ Additionally, several defectors who left for the BUF brought “administration” and “discipline” to Mosley’s movement, which it needed in its early existence.¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, the BF does not fit the definition of generic fascism; rather it resembled a right-wing conservative movement. In addition, the BF had minimal political impact, never winning a seat in any government body. The BF failed as a political movement and at fulfilling the

¹⁴⁷ Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism”, 499

¹⁴⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 67

¹⁴⁹ Woodbridge, “Fraudulent Fascism”, 502

¹⁵⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 68-69.

¹⁵¹ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 71.

¹⁵² Mosley, *Beyond the Pale*, 272.

¹⁵³ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 69.

characteristics of a generic fascist group, but they did lay a base for other fascist movements to come.

The Imperial Fascist League (IFL) under the leadership of the former army veterinarian Arnold Leese was another early fascist group that emerged in 1928. The IFL was one of the period's most fanatical, uncompromising, and idiosyncratic fascists. During its existence, the IFL adopted a paramilitary structure, wore black shirt uniforms, and believed that democracy was interfering with the 'laws of nature' allowing the unfit to thrive at the expense of the fit.¹⁵⁵ The ideology of the IFL centered upon race as the fundamental component, hoping to establish a new aristocracy of race, which only those "pure Aryan stock" could be a part of.¹⁵⁶ Leese often concerned himself more with this "racial nationalism," than economic solutions as a road to "save" Britain.¹⁵⁷ Leese strongly believed in the idea of Mussolini's Corporate State, which would remain a fundamental part of the IFL's platform for its entire existence.¹⁵⁸ However, the IFL advocated for the maintaining of the monarch and lacked ideology pushing for the overthrow of other liberal institutions. The IFL focused the majority of its efforts on race relations and attempted to reveal the 'Jewish Conspiracy', while it failed to develop any national myths or advocate the use of violence for political gain.

Originally a member of the BF, Leese became fed up with the organization's lack of what he considered, real "fascism". From the beginning of his time in the organization, Leese worked to change the name of the BF, the initials of which he thought, "were just asking for it!"¹⁵⁹ Leese left the BF, coming to the understanding that the organization was "merely Conservatism with knobs on it", the only reason for its continued presence being the persistent effort of the Communists to break up its meetings which led to media attention.¹⁶⁰ Leese blamed the ultimate failure of the IFL and fascism in Britain on Oswald Mosley. Mosley had the money and the connections to surpass the IFL in media coverage and national prowess, taking "what little wind there was out of the IFL's sails".¹⁶¹ According to Leese, Mosley practiced "kosher" fascism and hindered any success of further development of the IFL by recruiting potential members to his movement and forcing the IFL to frequently explain to its audience that it was not the BUF, but something quite different. Ultimately, the IFL advocated a right-wing platform similar to the other fascist movements in Britain, with the addition of extreme racism and anti-Semitism along the lines of the National Socialists in Germany. The group was the least successful of all the groups discussed here in both rallying members, never surpassing a few hundred, and winning political gains. Leese is an interesting figure to examine; however neither he nor the IFL were effective in terms of political gains and the IFL fails fit the definition of 'generic fascism'.

Britain's most notorious and successful "fascist" group from the interwar period, the British Union of Fascists (BUF), officially formed on October 1, 1932 under the leadership of Sir Oswald Mosley. The BUF stemmed from Mosley's failed New Party, which had launched less than two years prior. The BUF would become Britain's largest fascist group and irked the British government to such an extent that several political actions were taken to hinder further development of the movement.

¹⁵⁵ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 76.

¹⁵⁶ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Woodbridge, "Fraudulent Fascism", 502.

¹⁵⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism*, 74.

¹⁵⁹ Arnold Leese, *Out of Step: Event in the Two Lives of an anti-Jewish camel-doctor* (London: The Carmac Press, 1951), 49.

¹⁶⁰ Leese, *Out of Step*, 49.

¹⁶¹ Leese, *Out of Step*, 52.

The BUF experienced small successes early in its existence, including a meeting in Albert Hall in 1934 that drew 10,000 people and significant media attention in Britain and abroad.¹⁶² Yet, by 1936, the BUF was experiencing a decline in membership; however, in October they held the most successful rallies since their inception. In November 1936, this success was quickly curtailed by the government, which passed The Public Order Act prohibiting the wearing of political uniforms in public and forbidding the formation of any paramilitary organizations with the potential to usurp the police and army.¹⁶³ In the aftermath of The Public Order Act, the BUF faced an internal feud resulting in the extremely anti-Semitic members of the party splitting off and forming the National Socialist League, thus moving the BUF's platform away from anti-Semitism.¹⁶⁴ The years 1938-39 saw the BUF struggling to survive with low membership and a troubling financial situation. While events were taking place on the continent that would launch Europe into the Second World War, the BUF came under increasing pressure from the British government. Once war broke out the government decided to end the nuisance that was the BUF by enacting Defence Regulation 18b (1A), which permitted the arrest of Mosley and other leading party officials. The government took a final step, pronouncing the BUF an illegal organization in July 1940 thus bringing an end to Britain's most prominent fascist movement.¹⁶⁵

In 1932, Mosley published *The Greater Britain*, his manifesto for the BUF and fascism in Britain. Upon examining *The Greater Britain*, it becomes clear that Mosley's ideology does not fulfill all the characteristics of a generic fascist movement. However, the ideology does meet some characteristics of generic fascism including the attempt to mobilize the masses around one leader (Mosley), the desire to create a new "fascist man", the aspiration to launch the Corporate State and the attempt to have every man become a member of the state in the public sphere. Mosley's ideology lacks several aspects of a generic fascist movement, perhaps the most important being strong national myths that aimed to unite the people. Not until their internment did members of the BUF develop a strong myth for their movement, but by that time, it was too late. It is important to examine *The Greater Britain* to understand further what aspects of fascism Mosley advocated and perhaps more importantly what aspects he disapproved of or lacked that hindered the BUF from ever becoming a true fascist organization.

Mosley opened *The Greater Britain* by discussing the British political system and why it was not suitable for the modern era. Mosley contended that the system was designed for 19th century Britain and was no longer relevant.¹⁶⁶ The author then argued that this out of date political system "creates bad government and hampers the individual citizen" and fascism has the ability to revitalize it.¹⁶⁷ Fascism, to Mosley, was not a "creed of dictatorship in the continental manner", rather fascism was a creed of "effective government" that would once again be a voice for the people, unlike the contemporary Parliament which took up manners of irrelevance to Britons.¹⁶⁸ Mosley argued that the fascist solution to this problem was to grant the party "entrusted with government" absolute power because the debate process hinders the functions of the government. However, the government must

¹⁶² Charles A. Selden, "10,000 Britons Hail Mosley's Fascism in Test of Power," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, April 23, 1934, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/100962144/fulltextPDF?accountid=14214>.

¹⁶³ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 107.

¹⁶⁴ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 111.

¹⁶⁵ Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39*, 114.

¹⁶⁶ Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, (Suffolk: Richard Clay and Sons Ltd, 1932), 11.

¹⁶⁷ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 23.

¹⁶⁸ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 20.

still be subject to dismissal by a vote of censure by the Parliament.¹⁶⁹ Mosley concluded his discussion of the British political system by arguing that the structure of the fascist movement combined with the “suggested structure of Government” will produce “true democracy” with quick decision-making, avoiding the chaos of debate on irrelevant particulars.¹⁷⁰ From the beginning of his manifesto, it becomes clear that Mosley’s movement will not fulfill all the fundamental characteristics of generic fascism. Mosley argued that the Parliament in Britain was weak and outdated, however he was not argue for the overthrowing of the institution, rather fascism would improve it by limiting the ability for debate, resulting in a much more effective government. By calling for the maintenance of Parliament Mosley failed to adhere to a fundamental trait of fascism, the desire to overthrow liberal institutions, thus nullifying any chance of his movement becoming truly fascist early on in his work.

Mosley subsequently began a discussion of the Corporate State, which he described as “the main object of a modern and Fascist movement”.¹⁷¹ In a Corporate State, all interests are subordinate to the well being of the community and if any interest tries to supersede the community, the power of the Corporate system will “descend upon them”.¹⁷² The Corporate State will eliminate class warfare because, as an impartial body, it will equally distribute the profits created by industry, thus ending questions over wages.¹⁷³ Mosley strongly emphasized the point that unlike communism, fascism will not destroy all elements of the old state, which he argued happened in Russia under Lenin; Rather, fascism will incorporate “useful elements” of the state into the Corporate system.¹⁷⁴ Already we see Mosley failing to meet the standards of the definition of generic fascism, by arguing for the continuation of existing institutions. This becomes ever clearer when Mosley proclaimed oyalty to the King, which he determined was a quality aspect of the state, thus he “respects and venerates the Crown”.¹⁷⁵ He did call for the destruction of the House of Lords; however, Mosley’s argument in support of the King contradicts the basic definition of generic fascism. It is true that Mussolini did not remove the King in Italy, but he did make him virtually obsolete; Mosley argued for the combination of the Monarch and the Corporate State and hoped for the King’s support in the rise of his movement. The author continued by discussing Members of Parliament (MP) in the Corporate State, specifically the manner in which they elections would take place. Instead of a residential basis, MPs will be elected by their occupation; for example, “an engineer will run as an engineer” and those who vote for the engineer will be fellow members of that trade, who can best determine which candidate is suitable to represent their trade in Parliament.¹⁷⁶ Mosley concluded by arguing that the present political system had become stagnant and corrupt, bribery was rampant, and the electoral system was a “farce”. The present system could not lift Britain out of another economic crisis, barely doing so in 1921 and would likely fail to do so during the present crisis of 1932. Without the Corporate State, there was a strong likelihood that Britain will turn, violently, Communist.¹⁷⁷ As previously mentioned, Mosley argued for the amending of the existing liberal institutions, such as Parliament, rather than eliminating them altogether. This continually emerges in

¹⁶⁹ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 21.

¹⁷⁰ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 24.

¹⁷¹ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 26.

¹⁷² Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 27.

¹⁷³ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 28.

¹⁷⁴ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 30.

¹⁷⁵ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 33.

¹⁷⁷ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 35.

Mosley's ideology and inhibits his movement from fitting the definition of fascism used in this paper.

Mosley continued by discussing how fascism would alter the lives of British citizens. The author argued that British citizens had little to no freedom; the government deeply involved itself in the personal lives of everyone and treated the nation like children, wasting time passing legislation to inhibit citizens from harming themselves. This overprotective government according to Mosley "transformed Parliament into a bleating of ineffective sheep; which blundered into the War, the Peace, the Debt Settlement, and the Financial Crisis."¹⁷⁸ Mosley greatly emphasized "public service-private liberty" as fundamental to his idea of fascism. In essence, what this means is that when a person is in public they must conform all their actions to benefit and protect the state; in private one may do as one pleases, as long as they are not decadent and harmful in any way towards the state.¹⁷⁹ Mosley also mentioned physical fitness as an essential part of fascism, that he wanted "men, not eunuchs" for the movement because they would accomplish the goals put before them. Moving from men to women, Mosley claimed that under his fascist movement while women engaged in professional industry will belong to the corporations of that occupation, motherhood will also be an industry because it is "the highest calling" and vital for the state, thus they should be represented equally with industry.¹⁸⁰ In this section, Mosley sounded more like a true fascist, advocating Mussolini's ideas about the state, the idea of a fit, "fascist man" willing to protect the state, and the sanctity of motherhood, which most fascist movements emphasize because they need people to continue the movement. Mosley's ideas in this section best reflect generic fascism; however it does not change the outcome that his movement does not fit the definition used in this work.

Mosley's major argument was that Britain was in a social, economic, and political crisis, the state was drifting along on the verge of collapse, and either Fascism or Communism would prevail.¹⁸¹ If Communism were to arise, his movement would meet it with all the force they could in order to save Britain. He further argued that fascism was a "world-wide movement, invading every country in the hour of crisis as the only alternative to a destructive Communism." He additionally argued that fascism would take a different shape in Britain than those countries on the Continent, with British characteristics and avoiding the "excesses and the horrors" of the struggles on the Continent.¹⁸² Mosley went on to dispute the claim that his movement promoted violence; on the contrary, his group only used violence to protect themselves and their meetings, which were often attended by Communist aggravators. Only when they were met by "red terror" would Mosley willing use violence to combat what he saw as the most dangerous threat to Britain. Violence was not sought or promoted, but at the same time they were unwilling to back down from Communists who threatened hem, thus violence often occurred.¹⁸³ Mosley made it clear that his movement would never resort to violence against "the forces of the Crown", that violence reserved for the "forces of anarchy."¹⁸⁴ Mosley continually fails to fit the criteria for a generic fascist movement in this section. True, like most people on the right, Mosley distrusted communists, perhaps taking it one-step further by labeling them as the biggest threat to Britain. However, putting aside his hatred for Communists, Mosley frequently made points contrary to the

¹⁷⁸ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 37.

¹⁷⁹ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 38.

¹⁸⁰ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 41.

¹⁸¹ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 150.

¹⁸² Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 154.

¹⁸³ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 156.

¹⁸⁴ Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 158.

definition of fascism used here. Claiming that fascism could be adopted to fit Britain's needs and work with Britain's political system nullifies the movement from becoming fascist because he was willing to work with the liberal institutions already in place. In addition, Mosley's refuting that his movement promotes violence is in direct contrast to a genuine fascist movement, which promotes violence to attain political means. Mosley's complacency towards violence is one more aspect that distances his movement from an authentic fascist movement.

Upon examining *The Greater Britain*, it is quite clear that Oswald Mosley's ideology was not fascist. The only characteristics defined by Mosley that resemble true fascism are the emphasis of creating a "fascist man" and the desire to establish a Corporate State. He continually goes against the characteristics of generic fascism when he discusses only altering Parliament, respecting and defending the sanctity of the Crown, and denying that his movement promoted violence. If his ideology were truly fascist, he would advocate the destruction of Parliament and the monarch, and use violent action for political gain. In addition, Mosley did not mention myths, whether about re-birth or the national mystique. They were not part of his ideology, but are essential to a genuine fascist movement. Mosley's focus was the Corporate State and combating Communism, but these traits alone do not warrant the label of fascist, especially when so many key elements are absent from his work.

Mosley's adamant stance against using violence needs more examination because the lack of violent behavior is one of the fundamental reasons why the BUF fails to fulfill the definition of generic fascism. Beyond not condoning violence, Mosley went out of his way to dispute claims that the BUF advocated violence and frequently took the position that the BUF only used violence defensively. In his autobiography, Mosley stated, "among all the profusion of falsehoods which these events generated, I most resented the imputation that I took pleasure in violence because I had to organize the blackshirt movement for protecting my meetings."¹⁸⁵ The frequent claims of violence against the BUF made no sense to Mosley, who took great pride in his speeches and the size of the audience the BUF attracted. He thought it crazy to purposely interrupt them with violence. Whatever political affiliation, violence was not prominent in Britain; the BUF often found their political enemies perpetuated the violence, despite their own reputation. Rank-and-file BUF member John Charnley supported this in his autobiography, specifically discussing the violence surrounding the BUF's rally at Olympia in 1934. Charnley described the BUF as trying to leave the meeting in an orderly fashion while the hostile crowd frequently attacked them. Charnley pointed out that the police collected a variety of weapons from Communists attackers, including bicycle chains and woolen stockings full of broken glass; in addition, all the official reports exonerated the BUF.¹⁸⁶

However, similar to Mosley, Charnley expressed anger that despite the official reports, the BUF received the blame for the violence, tainting their image. When Mosley discussed the events at Olympia, he could not comprehend why his stewards received the blame for punching men who were attacking them with razors and pipes.¹⁸⁷ Both Mosley and Charnley's disgust with being blamed for violence exemplifies one of the elements missing from the BUF that are required in order to be a true fascist movement. The lack of violence separated the BUF from the true fascist movements on the continent, notably the Fascists in Italy and the National Socialists in Germany. Nicholas Mosley wrote, perhaps the most telling

¹⁸⁵ Mosley, *My Life*, 289.

¹⁸⁶ John Charnley, *Blackshirts and Roses: an autobiography*, (London: Brockingcay Publications, 1990) 73.

¹⁸⁷ Mosley, *My Life*, 297.

excerpt on violence and the BUF, “Throughout all my father’s fascist years in England no one, whether friend or enemy, was killed in a street fight...”¹⁸⁸ In addition, the author pointed out that at the height of the BUF’s reputation for violence, at the time of the Olympia meeting in 1934, only three people spent the night in the hospital. Numbers alone reveal that the violence surrounding the BUF was nothing close to the level of violence on the continent and further support the position that the BUF did not condone violence in anyway, thus failing to fit the definition of generic fascism.

Perhaps the most important piece missing from the BUF’s platform that is necessary to fit the definition of generic fascism is the presence of national myths. The creation of these myths, or in Mosse’s terms, the “Third Way”, is an essential aspect of a fascist movement in order to bond the people with the fascist elite. Mosley and the BUF failed to establish national myths when politically active; the closest example of these myths came after the government interned prominent members of the movement during the Second World War. The time prominent BUF members spent in internment camps was similar to Hitler’s time in prison in 1923, where discussions amongst members turned into “think tanks” for the future.¹⁸⁹ Internment unified members of the BUF from all over Britain, a major obstacle before the war. Their time interned by the crown bolstered many of the fascists’ thinking, leading to MI5 stating in 1945 that internment “did less than nothing” to diminish fascist beliefs.¹⁹⁰ For British fascists, internment represented the ritualized conception of sacrifice for the state, often equating it with the “hero’s death” of the Nazi pantheon, which would lead to the state’s rebirth.¹⁹¹ However, while the men inside strengthened their resolve for the movement, British society continued to associate Fascism with war and death, not a mythic rebirth. Upon release, many former BUF members and their families faced harassment and often suffered psychological trauma from their internment, leading to a change in their political views.¹⁹² The “myth of internment” was short lived, with many former BUF members altering their political views upon their release and the failure of fascism to connect with the British people, who suffered through drastically different experiences during the war, often victims of the fascists on the continent in one way or another. Mosley became a social pariah, representing to many Britons what they had fought against during the war.¹⁹³ The creation of the “myth of internment” was too late to be effective and failed quickly after interment ended. In its prime, the BUF never created a national myth; by the time they had, fascism was tainted with the images of World War II and stood no chance of gaining acceptance in British society. The lack of development of a national myth is the biggest failure of the BUF in becoming an authentic fascist movement.

The characteristic of generic fascism that the BUF most successfully developed was the establishment of loyalty to one leader, around whom the entire organization revolved; this leader was Sir Oswald Mosley. A leadership cult developed around Mosley, with many members of the BUF more loyal to him than the movement. From the early days of the movement, Mosley’s superb oratory skills and charisma helped him develop an intense devotion amongst his men, which lasted throughout and beyond the Second World War. The most telling evidence of this loyalty comes from Mosley’s men. John Charnley, rising in the ranks of the BUF

¹⁸⁸ Mosley, *Beyond the Pale*, 269.

¹⁸⁹ Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the resurrection of British fascism after 1945*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007,) 16.

¹⁹⁰ Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 18.

¹⁹¹ Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 20.

¹⁹² Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 24.

¹⁹³ Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 28.

during the 1930s, frequently reflected on his devotion to Mosley and dedicated an entire chapter of his autobiography to discussing Mosley in terms of society as a whole. Charnley's faith in Mosley's leadership was so great that he believed that if Britain had followed Mosley he would have prevented the war, the Holocaust, and saved millions of lives.¹⁹⁴ This passion was common amongst BUF members, even after their arrest and subsequent internment. The government's destruction of the BUF successfully encouraged the bulk of former members to separate themselves from fascism, but not from Mosley. He suffered through internment with them, and represented whatever hope they had left for success. Fascist internees founded the "Hail Mosley and F' Em All Association" in an attempt to maintain and honor the tradition of Mosley and the BUF throughout their detention.¹⁹⁵ Certainly, Mosley had a tremendous affect on his men; a leading BUF lieutenant Harold McKechnie described his loyalty as follows: "I accept Sir Oswald Mosley in the same way as the average Catholic accepts to the Pope."¹⁹⁶ In a similar vein, Charnley proclaims, "There's never been a man like OM. I would have died for him."¹⁹⁷ Despite this immense devotion, the BUF does not meet the definition of generic fascism. The rallying of the movement around one leader is an aspect of a true fascist movement; however, it is merely a minor part in a much larger picture, which the BUF failed to fulfill.

The BUF was the most successful, self-proclaimed, fascist party in Britain; however, they were, like all the interwar fascist groups, insignificant to the British political system. The "success" of the BUF must not be mistaken for success on the larger political stage; rather they experienced success in comparison with other fascist groups. Charles W. Hurd, writing for the *New York Times* in 1937, argued that the fascism symbolized by the BUF, had the least effect on public life of any political movement to develop after the First World War.¹⁹⁸ Hurd went on to say that Mosley's movement only received the attention they did because of the enthusiastic Communist and anti-fascist opposition which often unintentionally put the BUF in the news. Without the stern opposition, Hurd believed Mosley and the BUF would have died out long before.¹⁹⁹ Hurd continued by pointing out that many Britons resented the BUF because it magnified the threat of the Communists, while in reality this threat was negligible, because most British Communists considered themselves Britons first and Communists second.²⁰⁰ The BUF was a political failure, with minimal political impact, never winning a seat in a major government body and consisting of no more than a few hundred members at the time of its disillusion. The failure of the BUF, the most successful British fascist movement, only further supports the argument that fascism failed tremendously in Britain.

As a political movement fascism experienced tremendous political success in Europe during the Inter-War period, taking hold of two major European powers and eventually conquering almost all of the continent. Britain stood alone against the fascist powers, yet its own political system was not free of fascist groups. However, unlike continental Europe, fascism failed miserably in Britain. The groups that called themselves "fascists" in Britain fail to meet the definition of 'generic fascism'

¹⁹⁴ Charnley, *Blackshirts and Roses*, 62.

¹⁹⁵ Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 14.

¹⁹⁶ Macklin, *Dyed in Black*, 10.

¹⁹⁷ Charnley, *Blackshirts and Roses*, 94

¹⁹⁸ Charles W. Hurd, "Mosley's Fascists Shrink in Number," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, October 17, 1937, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/102142089/12E6860FE2676B574DF/14?accountid=14214>.

¹⁹⁹ Hurd, "Mosley's Fascists Shrink".

²⁰⁰ Hurd, "Mosley's Fascists Shrink".

established in this work and their greatest political accomplishment was winning two local council seats. The most prominent fascist movement, Oswald Mosley's BUF, never surpassed a few thousand members and lacked several criteria necessary of a true fascist movement. Fascism emerged in Britain only four years after Italy, but the groups were poorly funded, failed to rally support, and appeared alien to many British citizens. While Mosley's BUF in particular made great efforts to distinguish itself from its counterparts on the continent, political failure was inevitable for such a radical movement in the economically prosperous, well developed, and traditional society of inter-war Britain. The Second World War quickly ended the efforts of Britain's fascist groups, with many of the prominent members interned throughout the war. Upon examining the work and memoirs of several of the men involved in these movements, it is clear that despite what they called themselves, these groups do not fit the definition of 'generic' fascism and experienced no political success.

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