

**Modern and Anti-Modern Elements in the Discourse of the
British Union of Fascists**

Maija Sihvonen
University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies
English Philology
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Käsittelen pro gradu -tutkielmassani brittiläistä fasistijärjestöä, British Union of Fascists (BUF), joka toimi vuosina 1932–1940 johtajanaan Oswald Mosley. BUF oli Britanniassa toimineista fasistiliikkeistä jäsenmäärältään suurin ja verrattuna myös muihin eurooppalaisiin fasistijärjestöihin sillä oli yksityiskohtaisimmin laadittu ohjelma.

Tarkastelen BUF:n, erityisesti Mosleyn, tekstejä ja keskityn siihen, kuinka BUF:n ohjelmassa modernit ja anti-modernit piirteet kohtasivat ja muodostivat ristiriitaisen ideologian. BUF väitti olevansa edistysellinen liike, toisaalta se taas vetosi voimakkaasti myös perinteisiin. Lähestymistapani on kielellinen: tutkin BUF:n ideologiaa diskurssien kautta. Diskurssin määrittelen Michel Foucault'n tapaan tiettyjen sääntöjen mukaan muodostuneiksi lausumiksi ja teksteiksi, joilla on vaikutuksia ihmisten elämään. Esitän, että BUF rakensi ohjelmansa ja ideologiansa osin brittiläisessä yhteiskunnassa jo olemassa olevia diskursseja hyödyntäen, joista esimerkkinä imperialistinen, eepinen, ksenofobinen (antisemitistinen) ja patriarkaalinen diskurssi. Käyttämällä useita, osin vastakkaisiakin, diskursseja BUF pyrki voittamaan puolelleen mahdollisimman laajan kannattajakunnan.

Norman Fairclough'n tapaan tarkastelen diskursseja myös vallan välineenä. Paul Chilton toteaa, että politiikkaa tehdään etupäässä kielen kautta, ja Fairclough'n mukaan se, joka hallitsee merkityksiä eli se, jonka määritelmät hyväksytään yleisenä totuutena, harjoittaa ylintä valtaa myös yhteiskunnassa. BUF pyrki vakiinnuttamaan diskurssinsa ja saamaan siten ideoilleen yleisen hyväksynnän, mutta epäonnistui tässä.

Aihealueina keskityn ristiriitoihin, joita muodostivat menneiden ”kulta-aikojen” ihailu ja halu palata niihin ja toisaalta vallankumouksellisuus-retoriikka, populistinen demokratian ja kansanvallan korostaminen ja toisaalta toimintatapoihin ja ohjelmaan sisältynyt elitismi, naisten yhdenvertaisuuden korostaminen ja toisaalta perinteisen patriarkaalisen yhteiskuntanäkemyksen suosiminen, sekä rationaalinen maailmankatsomus, mikä näkyi esimerkiksi uskossa tieteen mahdollisuuksiin ratkaista yhteiskunnan ongelmat ja toisaalta materialistisen maailmankuvan halveksiminen ja uskonnollisuuden ja mystiikan korostaminen.

Loppupäätelmäni on, ettei BUF, toisin kuin usein väitetään, edustanut merkittävää poikkeamaa yleisestä poliittisesta ja kulttuurisesta ilmapiiristä, vaan oli monessa kohdin linjassa muiden, myös yleisen hyväksynnän saaneiden, ns. ”arkijärjen” aseman saavuttaneiden, diskurssien kanssa.

Avainsanat: fasismi, diskurssi, ideologia

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1 Introduction

1.1 Theory

The subject of this thesis is the British Union of Fascists (BUF), a fascist movement headed by Oswald Mosley and active between 1932 and 1940. It is commonly regarded as the most significant fascist movement in Britain, although there were also others, such as the British Fascisti (BF), formed by Rotha Lintorn Orman in 1923, and the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) by Arnold Leese in 1929. I will explore the modern and anti-modern elements in the BUF's programme and attempt to show that also in a democratic society with long parliamentary tradition like Britain there already existed language that fascists could use. The aim is to approach the BUF's ideology by looking at its texts and the discourse it used.

There exist a number of studies on the BUF; especially from the 1990s onwards the movement has been critically examined by scholars, such as Thomas Linehan, Richard Thurlow and Stephen Cullen, but earlier studies have concentrated mainly on the movement's political history in a chronological manner. Neill Nugent was one of the first scholars to study the ideas put forward in the BUF's programme: in an article published in 1977 he pointed out the contradictory elements in the BUF's ideology. Only recently, however, have there been attempts to look at the cultural history of the movement more consistently and view the BUF's ideas in the culture of the 1930s. To my knowledge, there exist no studies that concentrate on the contradictory nature of the movement by looking at its use of language so this is a new approach to the BUF.

The research material consists of the BUF's, mostly Mosley's, writings published at the website <http://www.oswaldmosley.com>. The texts range from 1932 to 1939: according to Cullen, *The Greater Britain* (1932) formed the main source of the BUF's ideological and

policy inspiration and contains all the main elements of the BUF.¹ *Tomorrow We Live* (1938) was Mosley's last major statement.

The BUF summarised its objectives as follows:

All shall serve the State and none the faction; All shall work and thus enrich their country and themselves; Opportunity shall be open to all, but privilege to none; Great position shall be conceded only to great talent; Reward shall be accorded only to service; Poverty shall be abolished by the power of modern science released within the organised state.²

These statements also contain many of the central themes that will be handled in this thesis, such as the call for strong leadership, the emphasis on the state over the individual, the promise of equality, and the stress on science. These themes also formed contradictions in the BUF's ideology: the BUF simultaneously declared its commitment to traditions and at the same time regarded itself as a modern movement which despised the 'old gang', the old parties and the press. As Robert Skidelsky notes:

To the historian fascism is Janus-faced. One face looks forward, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, to the rational control and direction of human life; the other face looks backwards to a much simpler, more primitive, life; when man struggled to live and express himself against the incalculable buffets of fate"³

Some scholars even regard the tension between the modern and anti-modern elements as the most significant of the contradictions within the movement's ideology. D.S. Lewis notes that "the most striking example of this oscillation, observable in all fascist movements, was the tendency to look forwards and backwards simultaneously – to draw inspiration from the past whilst claiming to be the vanguard of the future".⁴ The BUF attempted offer a synthesis of the contradictory elements:

As such, the fascist utopia appeared to overcome the 'strategic value conflicts' – industrialism vs anti-industrialism, private property vs common ownership, religion vs secularization,

¹ Stephen Cullen, "The Development of the Ideas and Policy of the British Union of Fascists, 1932–40", *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (1987): 118.

² Souvenir programme, *Earl's Court Speech* (1939), 23.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

³ Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London: Macmillan, 1975) 299.

⁴ D.S. Lewis, *Mosley, Fascism and British Society 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 35.

revolution vs gradualism, statism vs communitarianism and democracy vs authoritarianism – which the utopian imagination had long struggled over.⁵

The term ‘modern’ is a vague concept as such. Stanley Payne defines modernisation as industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation and rationalisation. He notes that “these four processes are central to what most social scientists have referred to as modernization”.⁶ Payne also states that in general fascism has been seen as an opponent to central features of western liberal society such as urbanisation, industrialisation, liberal education, rationalist materialism, individualism, social differentiation, and pluralist autonomy.⁷

The themes present in the BUF’s ideology can be seen as a reaction to the common anxieties that the modernisation process caused; urbanisation and secularism, for example. Thurlow points out that “British fascism, like its European counterparts, had its roots deep in the social tensions and ideas fostered by an age of modernization and change”.⁸ The central ideas of British fascism did not develop in a vacuum but went back to the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. As Thurlow notes, the years 1880–1914 were crucial to the emergence of British fascist ideology: the political activism that the problems of the time generated foregrounds fascism. The Edwardian radical right brought up many aspects that were to become the foundation for the later British fascism but Mosley was willing to break more openly with the parliamentary system.⁹ Fascist movements that developed in the 1920s utilised British fears about national degeneracy, the lack of virile leadership, and international conspiracies allegedly orchestrated by Bolsheviks and Jews. The ideas that were used in the BUF’s ideology were thus not of fascist invention; the BUF developed its ideology around the common themes of the time: nation, gender, and democracy.

⁵ Philip Coupland, “The Blackshirted Utopians”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33 (1998): 265.

⁶ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 472.

⁷ Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism – Comparison and Definition* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980) 187.

⁸ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain – A History, 1918–1985* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) 1.

⁹ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* 13-15.

To study the BUF by looking at the written material has its problems. As a fascist movement the BUF was unique in the sense that it had a clear programme and its beginning was marked by a publication of a political programme, *The Greater Britain*, in 1932. Cullen states that “the BUF was the most programmatic fascist organization in Europe”.¹⁰ However, as Martin Pugh notes, “fascism in power has not always been faithful to the ideas used en-route to power”.¹¹ It should be remembered that the declarations and manifestos of the BUF’s leading members do not straightforwardly reflect the attitudes of the rank and file. This should not mean, however, that an adequate analysis could not be made by concentrating on the ‘official’ material. It is valid source as well, and shows how the movement wanted to represent itself. As Cullen notes, “Mosley’s writings are of vital importance for an understanding of the BUF as a movement, as throughout the career of the BUF Mosley’s view of politics dominated”.¹²

As for ideology, Roger Griffin attempts to put together a definition that fits fascism:

Ideology is a set of beliefs, values and goals considered in terms of their implications for the maintenance of the socio-political status quo (where ideology will tend to act as a conservative, reactionary force), for its improvement (where it becomes a reformist, gradualist force), or for its overthrow and replacement by an alternative order (where it will exhibit its utopian, revolutionary dimension).¹³

In this thesis, politics is examined through language. It is necessary to discuss political language also to show that many features in the BUF’s language were in fact typical of much political language in Britain at the time. As Paul Chilton points out, political activity simply does not exist without using language, politics is essentially constituted in language.¹⁴ Chilton

¹⁰ Cullen 120.

¹¹ Martin Pugh, *‘Hurrah for the Blackshirts!’ – Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London: Random House, 2005) 6.

¹² Cullen 118.

¹³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1994) 17.

¹⁴ Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 6.

notes that “political discourse is the use of language in ways that humans, being political animals, tend to recognise as ‘political’”.¹⁵

Chilton notes that binary structure is typical of political language: “the tendency in much discourse is towards antonymous lexical choices, and other lexical choices that must lead to hearers making mental models that are binary in character”.¹⁶ The BUF’s programme was also built around opposing forces, such as past/present, rational/irrational, and dictatorship/democracy. It is also typical of political language to see oneself as the centre and attempt to represent one’s opinions as correct and thus legitimise them:

Discourse worlds require entities in it to be relativised to the self, the self is the speaker, but the speaker may claim identity with the hearer and third parties,

role-players in the discourse world are ‘positioned’ more or less close to ‘me’ or ‘us’,

the self is positioned at the intersection that is conceptualised not only as ‘here’ and ‘now’ but also as ‘right’ and ‘good’.¹⁷

Political discourse is also connected to emotions, such as “territorial belonging and identity (‘home’), love of family, fear of intruders and unknown people”,¹⁸ which were also strongly present in the BUF’s programme. Chilton notes that “such emotions might have an innate basis and be stimulated automatically in the political use of language”.¹⁹

Ancient rhetoric also offers some useful tools for analysing the texts. Aristotle’s three forms of rhetoric, *ethos* (appeal based on the speaker), *pathos* (appeal based on emotion), and *logos* (appeal based on logic), are intertwined with each other in the BUF’s discourse. This can be seen especially in the fifth chapter where the religious and rational elements are discussed.

The concept of discourse is a key issue in this thesis. As has been pointed out by various scholars, discourses are notoriously difficult to define. Sara Mills divides Michel Foucault’s

¹⁵ Chilton 201.

¹⁶ Chilton 203.

¹⁷ Chilton 204-5.

¹⁸ Chilton 204.

¹⁹ Chilton 204.

definition of discourses into three categories. The first one is simply “‘the general domain of all statements’; that is, all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effects in the real world”; the second is “‘an individualizable group of statements’”, that is “‘groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common’”, and the third most focused definition: “‘a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements’”, where the emphasis is more on the rules and structures that form particular utterances and texts.²⁰ Discourses are powerful because they “‘structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity’”.²¹

Cultural theorists often point out that discourses do not exist on their own, but are situated in social interaction. Typically, and most powerfully, they are bound to different institutions, where they are created and developed. Mills points out that especially in Michel Pêcheux’s thinking the interaction of discourses is important: discourses are in dialogue with and often in opposition to each other.²² This brings the power aspect to discourses, which social psychologists often stress. One of the scholars who has examined discursive power and struggle over language is Norman Fairclough. He connects language to power through different groups’ ideologically diverse discourse types which compete with each other for legitimacy, that is, the position as common sense where things are taken for granted and therefore are not questioned. This is achieved in the process of naturalisation. Preparing consensus through common sense is, according to Fairclough, the most effective way to rule. In this way ideology is linked to power, but also to language, as language is the common form of social behaviour where common-sensical assumptions come into use. Ideology is the primary means of preparing consensus. Language, then, is both a site of the struggle and at stake in it. The power in question is the power to define legitimate word meanings or correct

²⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge 1997) 8.

²¹ Mills 15.

²² Mills 11.

and suitable communicative norms, among others, which are an important aspect of social and ideological power.²³ The naturalisation of word meanings is an “effective way of constraining the contents of discourse and, in the long term, of knowledge and beliefs”.²⁴ In politics, for example, opposing parties or political movements struggle for acceptance to their discourse types. It is a struggle for “control over contours of political world, legitimizing policy and sustaining power relations”.²⁵

Fairclough states that there is a constant ideological conflict going on. The diverse competing ideologies derive from social groupings’ different positions, experiences and interests, which may conflict with each other in terms of power. These groups may be social classes, ethnic groups or groupings connected to some specific institutions, for example.²⁶ This links language to practice, the ‘actual world’: discourses have effects in real life, they are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”.²⁷

The BUF’s texts can be seen to participate in the ideological struggle, attempting to gain the status as dominant ideology by building its programme on already existing commonly accepted discourses in British society.

1.2 History of the BUF

Next I will outline the background of the BUF in a chronological manner. The idea is to introduce the movement and explain where it came from. I will then briefly explain the main idea of the BUF’s programme, the corporate state, for it formed the basis which was to include all spheres of life in the fascist state. I will then move on to the modern and anti-modern features: first the traditional and revolutionary elements will be covered, then the authoritative and democratic, followed by the BUF’s attitudes to women and gender roles,

²³ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (New York: Longman 1989) 88-9.

²⁴ Fairclough 105.

²⁵ Fairclough 90.

²⁶ Fairclough 88.

²⁷ Foucault (1972), cited in Mills, 17.

and finally I will discuss the rational and religious elements before moving on to conclusions. It can be noted that the themes handled in this thesis overlap and are inter-connected.

Oswald Mosley was born in 1896 in Staffordshire to a gentry family. He was educated at Winchester school and went to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst at the age of seventeen. In the First World War, he served in the Royal Flying Corps. Mosley started his colourful political career when he entered Parliament as a Conservative MP for Harrow in 1918. His programme in the election included the basic themes of the BUF such as minimum wages, state control of transport and electricity, state-financed smallholdings and slum clearance, protecting British industry, defending the empire and excluding all unwanted foreigners. In the House of Commons Mosley proved himself to be an eloquent orator, a feature which was later to become an important feature of his political career.

In 1920, Mosley left the Conservative Party and in 1922 he returned to politics as an independent conservative for Harrow. In 1924 he joined the Labour Party, which his attacks on the government had brought him closer to. The depression brought an important turning point for Mosley. In 1930, when he was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, he wrote a memorandum which consisted of actions to be taken against the economic depression, such as tariffs, protection of home markets, control of the bank to promote investment, development plans for agriculture and roadbuilding to create jobs, as well as the rationalisation of basic industries. These ideas were not originally Mosley's but came from John Maynard Keynes,²⁸ ILP Socialism,²⁹ and protectionist-imperialist views, among others.³⁰ Already at his point, then, Mosley started building the BUF's discourse on other prevailing discourses. Mosley's memorandum also outlined a strategy for reorganising the government in a way that was to

²⁸ A British economist who advocated interventionist government policy.

²⁹ Independent Labour Party

³⁰ Pugh 177.

become the foundation of his ideas of the corporate state. Mosley's views were contrary to the government's ideas of how the recession should be handled.

The memorandum was rejected, although there were many who thought Mosley's criticism hit the nail on the head. The disillusioned Mosley then left the Labour Party, and in 1931 he founded the New Party, whose programme, titled *A National Policy*, contained essential components of fascist ideology. The programme was taken mainly from the memorandum Mosley had produced the previous year. It also included measures such as establishing a cabinet of five or six which would conduct the work of the government, and the establishment of commodity boards comprising representatives from management and employees of a specific industry, as well as of consumers' and other groups' representatives. However, it was difficult for the New Party to find a distinctive political message or a group of voters to target, and the election of October 1931 was a total failure for it: all candidates were defeated. After that, the New Party began to collapse.

In the early 1930's, during the existence of the New Party, Mosley's keen interest in fascism became clear to the disappointment of some members. In January 1932, Mosley visited Rome to see how fascism worked in Mussolini's Italy. The New Party closed down in April and in the following summer Mosley wrote *The Greater Britain*, in which he analysed Britain's economic problems and outlined the idea of a corporate state as the solution. In October 1932, the British Union of Fascists was launched. It included the remnants of the New Party.

Scholars usually divide the BUF's evolution into at least two distinctive phases. In the first one, from the BUF's creation in 1932 to the summer of 1934, it gained a certain amount of respectability, more than it was ever to attain again. Pugh even states that "buoyed by the

backing of Rothermere's press,³¹ sustained by generous funding, and emboldened by the low morale among government supporters, Mosley posed a serious threat to the conventional politicians during the first half of 1934".³²

The BUF had a defence force for each of its established branches. The London Defence Force was the largest and best trained of these and resided in the barracks of 'Black House', the BUF's national headquarters in King's Road, Chelsea. Approximately 150 men lived permanently in the Black House and wore a black shirt as a uniform. However, outside London the BUF did not have an even representation. Large areas were placed under the same administrative bloc led by an Area Administrative Officer. The new newspaper *Blackshirt* was launched in 1933.

The events in fascist countries, especially in Hitler's Germany affected the BUF in many ways. When Hitler became the German Chancellor in January 1933, he decided to abandon the Disarmament Convention, withdraw from the League of Nations and repudiate the Treaty of Versailles, which caused anxiety in Britain. The suppression of German trade unions in May 1933 also stirred up the Labour Movement's hostility towards the BUF. However, Hitler was not seen merely as a threat. Sympathizers argued, for example, that Hitler's regime brought stability to central Europe.³³

The break-up with Rothermere marks the end of the first phase in The BUF's development. Lewis notes that Rothermere offered the BUF the opportunity to distinguish itself as a new and more active alternative to the conservatives, while still distinctly remaining conservative.³⁴ When Mosley refused, anti-semitism became again a visible element in the BUF's propaganda.

³¹ Lord Rothermere owned *The Evening News* and the *Daily Mail*, among others.

³² Pugh 153-4.

³³ Pugh 130.

³⁴ Lewis 66.

In the earlier phase of the BUF, the Italian model of fascism had been more prominent. Mosley frequently visited Italy and received financial support from Mussolini. The BUF also wanted to stand out from other fascist movements such as the International Fascist League (IFL), which was closely linked to the German Nazis because of its anti-semitism. In summer 1936, however, there was a turn to the spirit of German national socialism. The movement's name was changed to 'British Union of Fascists and National Socialists'. The initial emblem, the Italian bundle of rods, *fasces*, was replaced with a flash in a circle in the same year. Claudia Baldoli states that the shift was connected to two main reasons: the desire to supersede Italian fascism and the new concept of "Anglo-German complementarity in the New European Order".³⁵

In 1936, several anti-fascist organisations emerged, for example the Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the Ex-Servicemen's Movement Against Fascism, albeit the BUF as well as the New Party had faced opposition throughout their existence, usually from the Left. BUF meetings were often disturbed and ended in violent clashes. The biggest confrontation took place on the 4 October 1936 as a massive anti-fascist mobilisation stopped the BUF march in London's East End in a clash later referred to as the Battle of Cable Street. The violent events led the government to take action in order to suppress the conflict. The Public Order Act became effective from the 1 January 1937. It forbade political uniforms in public places with certain exceptions, the formation of quasi-military organisations designed to take the normal functions of the police and army, and employment or display of physical force to promote political objectives.

Despite the preparations, the BUF never contested a general election. In 1937, the BUF's downhill had begun. When Hitler invaded Austria, in 1938 the BUF launched a peace campaign with the slogan 'Mind Britain's Business'. It organised a series of demonstrations,

³⁵ Claudia Baldoli, "Anglo-Italian Fascist Solidarity? The Shift from Italophilia to Naziphilia in the BUF", *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Julie Gottlieb (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) 157.

which culminated in the Earl's Court public meeting in July 1939, which gathered approximately 11,000 listeners. The peace campaign continued when the Second World War broke out in September 1939. In 1940, the leading fascists were arrested, and in July 1940, the government pronounced the BUF an illegal organisation on the basis of Defence regulation 18b.

As for the membership of the BUF, G.C. Webber has estimated that it reached its peak of 40,000–50,000 during the first half of the 1930s.³⁶ Lewis notes that the membership of the BUF was largely middle-class.³⁷ Working-class members came from non-unionised labour force sections, such as domestic service and agriculture. The BUF attempted to address particular groups, usually members of the middle class, by exploiting the problems of certain occupations and geographical areas. The anti-semitic campaign in East End, where there was a Jewish community, is an example of this. After 1935, Mosley's East End campaign attracted members from the working and middle classes, which shared the BUF's anti-semitism and its views on social, cultural, and political issues. From 1938, the appeasement campaign again gathered members from the middle class. Although fascism found supporters among the upper classes, this did not translate into support for the BUF. Pugh suggests that the reason for this was their dislike for Mosley, caused by his decision to join the Labour Party, which was considered as betrayal, as well as the property owners' disapproval of the BUF's radical social and economic programme.

Some intellectuals were also attracted to the BUF, but the relationship between them was complex. According to Lewis, the attitudes to intellectuals in the BUF ranged from suspicious to hostile. For example, authors Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham and George Bernard Shaw were associated with the movement in its early phase. The author Henry Williamson wrote articles for *Action* and the poets Roy Campbell and Ezra Pound made

³⁶ G.C. Webber, "Reassessments of Fascism", *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 (1984): 577.

³⁷ Lewis 74.

contributions to the *Fascist Quarterly* which was founded in 1935 and which, according to Lewis, was “the most significant attempt to curry favour with British intellectuals”.³⁸ However, it should not be surprising that intellectuals were not drawn to the BUF on a larger scale, considering its anti-intellectual discourse which emphasised action and rejected theory. Mosley often mocked the “pallid ‘intellectuals’”,³⁹ calling them “mincing sissies who would not fight for King or country”.⁴⁰

The amount of female members seems somewhat surprising, considering the fascists’ ideas of women’s role as mothers and housewives rather than active participants in the society. The Women’s Section was established in 1933. It has been estimated that 25 per cent of the BUF’s members were women.⁴¹ However, views on women’s role in the BUF seem to differ greatly. Pugh states that women were active participants in the BUF (for example towards the end of the 1930s they were especially active in the BUF’s peace campaign),⁴² whereas Lewis emphasises women’s traditional roles in the movement, despite the promises of equality in the BUF’s programme.⁴³ According to Pugh, women joined in the movement for the same reasons as men but in addition BUF’s radical view of women’s issues was an important motivation.⁴⁴

Linehan has studied the motivation for joining the BUF. He notes that the basic motives were patriotism, taken in its extreme form, desire to prevent the disintegration of the Empire and militant anti-communism as well as anti-semitism for some. The recession of the 1930s and disillusionment with the establishment and liberal democracy, and Mosley’s detailed

³⁸ Lewis 77.

³⁹ Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live – British Union Policy* (1938), 92.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> (pdf) [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

⁴⁰ Oswald Mosley, *Earl’s Court Speech* (1939), 26.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

⁴¹ Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39. Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 166.

⁴² Pugh 142.

⁴³ Lewis 79.

⁴⁴ Pugh 143.

programme to solve the economic and social problems permanently, also drew people to the BUF. Others found its paramilitary style with marches, uniforms and rites appealing.⁴⁵

Thus, it can be noted that the BUF appealed to many different social and age groups. This also reflects the BUF's attempt to offer something for everyone and represent people on the basis of nationality. This also caused its inherent paradox: how to create a mass movement from the common people and to integrate upper classes in it. It turned out the BUF failed both in recruiting members from the upper classes and mobilising the masses.

At the heart of the BUF's programme lay the idea of the corporate state, which was the BUF's all-embracing answer to the contemporary problems in British society. The aim of the corporate state was to obliterate class conflict and make the British economy healthy again. Its implementation was compared to a revolution. The economic system would even prevent war. Mosley stated that "fascism alone can preserve the Peace, because alone it removes the causes of war. The main cause of war is the struggle for markets".⁴⁶ This is because the BUF was created in a time of economic crisis. Therefore, the economic aspect was correspondingly emphasised in its ideology. Although it was stated that the corporate state was mainly an economical – and rational – solution, it included various other aspects as well. The corporate state represented the BUF's alternative system to the establishment, which was typical of the fascist movements in order to show that they were able to work better than the existing established government. The concept of an organic state was not new: it had existed in the works of Aristotle, Plato, Machiavelli, Hegel, and the early racist writer Benjamin Kidd at the end of the nineteenth century.

The corporate state held various interesting modern and anti-modern features. In the BUF's writings, the corporate state was represented simultaneously as a decidedly modern

⁴⁵ Linehan, *British Fascism* 167-8.

⁴⁶ Oswald Mosley, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* (1936), 33.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> (pdf) [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

solution and a return to the glorious past. It also encapsulated other modern and anti-modern elements, such as individualism and authoritarianism, and conservative and revolutionary elements. The idea of the corporate state was described in Alexander Raven Thomson's writing *The Coming Corporate State*, published in 1938. Raven Thomson, who had joined the BUF in 1933, was considered one of the chief architects of the BUF's ideology, and *The Coming Corporate State* was his most widely read work.

In the corporate state, there would be representation for workers, consumers and employers, and each line of industry would have its own corporation. A corporate government, a small cabinet of three or four fascists with Mosley as the leader, would then control the corporations. The government would be entrusted with lot of power: it could be dismissed only if the parliament of the people voted against it.

The system was designed to be self-regulative: the corporations would regulate consumption so that it would stay in line with demand, and production by raising salaries when productivity increased. The idea of self-sufficiency was also essential: foreign goods would be excluded or set to the minimum. It was thought that this would lead to full employment because there would not be any competition for the cheap labour force. Private enterprise would still be encouraged. Corporatism was the BUF's answer to the depriving force of capitalism: "under Fascism private enterprise may serve but not exploit".⁴⁷ The markets would be harnessed to the common good through the corporate state. Lewis states that "the corporate state was never a threat to the essence of the capitalist system".⁴⁸ Although the BUF criticised capitalism, it deployed the capitalist discourse, where the markets were to provide wealth to everyone.

The House of Lords was to be replaced with a Senate which would consist of representatives from the corporations chosen by the government. Mosley criticised the House

⁴⁷ Mosley, *100 Questions* 17.

⁴⁸ Lewis 45.

of Lords and called it an “anachronism”.⁴⁹ Raven Thomson noted that “under British Union, the House of Lords will be replaced by a new chamber of ‘notables’, people who have given great service in their own lifetime”.⁵⁰

The corporate state consisted of 25 corporations, which would include all the adult population. In each corporation, the owners, shareholders and managers of a specific industry would appoint their representatives, the employees theirs and the government would choose the consumer representatives. Corporations would then be divided to smaller sub-divisions, and together they would represent all workers, employers and consumers of the industry.

Above the corporations was the National Corporation, which was to control the individual corporations. It would consist of representatives from the corporations according to their size and importance and its task was to control economic planning and arbitrate in disputes between or within corporations. The National Corporations would be assisted by an Investment Board and an Import and Export Board.

Elections were to be organised not on a geographical but on an occupational basis. People from a specific line of industry were considered to be the experts in matters that concerned that industry – hence the idea that everyone could decide on matters he or she knew the best: “an engineer shall vote as an engineer; and thus bring into play, not an amateur knowledge of foreign and domestic politics, but a life-long experience of the trade in which he is engaged”.⁵¹ Here the modern technocratic discourse was in use: society was to be organised so that experts would rule in a specific line of business.

⁴⁹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 23.

⁵⁰ Alexander Raven Thomson, *The Coming Corporate State* (1938), 41.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

⁵¹ Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1932), 7.
<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

2 Tradition and Revolution

One of the striking contradictions in the BUF's ideology, and fascism in general, is its revolutionary nature on the one hand and hankering after the past on the other. As the BUF represented itself as a revolutionary force, it attempted to emphasise its dynamic nature and differentiate itself from the old parties, Right and Left alike for, as Mosley declared, "parties and the Party game belong to the old civilisation, which has failed".⁵² The BUF stated that it was going to replace the present corrupted society with a new one. However, the BUF also advocated traditionally conservative values (discipline and loyalty, for example) and emphasised that it did not want to destroy but to preserve and restore values that it considered lost in modern society. Mosley stated that "whatever is good in the past we both respect and venerate".⁵³ The corporate state was also offered as a return to the glorious past. According to Mark Neocleous, "it is clear then that one of the central tensions in fascism is between a certain kind of revolutionary activism, a positive appreciation of modernity and technological advance, on the other hand, and an institutional conservatism, nostalgic lamentation and reactionary turn to the past, on the other".⁵⁴

Scholars disagree on whether fascism is in the end a form of ultra-conservatism and essentially against modernisation or strives genuinely for revolution. Griffin states that fascism does not essentially reject modernisation per se,⁵⁵ and Webber argues that although the BUF shared anxieties about industrialisation and cultural decline, it believed "most consistently in industrial renewal, healthy secularism and a break with the past".⁵⁶ Payne, on the other hand, states that "fascism in general would [...] be understood as the kind of radical

⁵² Mosley, *100 Questions*, 11.

⁵³ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 5.

⁵⁴ Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997) 69.

⁵⁵ Griffin 47.

⁵⁶ G.C. Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right 1918-1939*. (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 69.

mass movement that was primarily opposed to modernism, as distinct from communism and certain others that have purportedly prompted modernization”.⁵⁷

Fascism responded to many of the general anxieties of the time. Dan Stone points out that “the first half of the twentieth century was a period of ideological turmoil in which fascism was by no means an option solely of social outcasts, but seemed to many to be the most dynamic way both of defending tradition and responding to the modern world”.⁵⁸

Webber notes that anxieties caused by the industrialisation process took in general two forms in Britain, the negative being anti-semitism and the positive the rise of ruralism.⁵⁹

For the BUF, the nation was the very natural basis of the state. According to the BUF, society should be built on nationality, not on class, which was to be eradicated. This was also represented as true equality. Mosley stated that “differences of social class will be eliminated. They arise from the fact that in present society the few can live in idleness as a master class upon the production of the many.”⁶⁰ The fact that the corporate system would be founded on the nation state showed, according to Lewis, its need to find a common denominator to rise above class.⁶¹ Nation itself was a solid, tangible, and uncomplicated concept for the BUF. It was perceived as homogeneous: the BUF did not acknowledge pluralism.

As in fascism in general, xenophobia and anti-semitism were inherent in the BUF’s ideology. At the beginning of the twentieth century there existed anti-semitic discourse in British society and in politics across parties. One expression of this was *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published in Britain in 1920, which described a purported Jewish conspiracy whose aim was to destroy the Christian national states and bringing them under an international Jewish rule. This was to be done by weakening their unity through such

⁵⁷ Payne, *History of Fascism* 472.

⁵⁸ Dan Stone, “The Far Right and the Back-to-the-Land Movement”, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Julie Gottlieb (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) 184.

⁵⁹ Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right* 57.

⁶⁰ Mosley, *100 Questions* 9.

⁶¹ Lewis 42.

disintegrating ideologies as liberalism, socialism and communism, for example. Although the book turned out to be a forgery, antisemitic suspicions prevailed. Anti-semitic feelings were coupled with fear of Bolshevism. Although the far Left was on the margins of British politics, there were still anxieties about a Bolshevik revolution.

Landowners were angered by free trade, which meant, for example, that Britain imported cheap grain, causing a decline in domestic agriculture. Protectionists also criticised Britain for allowing foreign countries to protect their markets with tariffs and at the same time sell their goods to Britain at below cost price. Pugh notes that this led to the common belief that faceless cosmopolitan financiers and wealthy Jews, who had no loyalty to the country, were maneuvering this kind of policy.⁶² This was a belief that the BUF readily exploited.

In the BUF, some of the members were more devout anti-semites than others, and the emphasis on anti-semitism in the policy varied. William Joyce, the Director of Propaganda, represented a committed anti-semite. Thurlow notes that “in essence Mosleyites argued that culture created national and racial difference, while racial nationalists believed that race determined culture. Mosleyites believed in a neo-Lamarckian evolutionary process, while racial nationalists were genetic determinists influenced by Social Darwinism”.⁶³ The International Fascist League (IFL) and the Britons Society, for example, were enthusiastic supporters of the latter type. However, in the East End, where anti-semitism had a strong foothold and the BUF a vast support, the speakers did not hesitate to use racial arguments against Jews, and Mosley also noted that Jews were ‘orientals’ and therefore differed from the Britons “physically, mentally and spiritually”.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, it was stated that the BUF did not attack Jews on the basis of their religion or race, “for we dedicate ourselves to service of an empire which contains many different

⁶² Pugh 11.

⁶³ Richard Thurlow, “The Developing British Fascist Interpretation of Race, Culture, and Evolution”, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Julie Gottlieb (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 66.

⁶⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 43.

races and any suggestion of racial persecution would be detrimental to the Empire we serve”.⁶⁵ In the main, the BUF’s anti-semitism stressed the alleged cultural difference between the Jews and the British. Jews who lived in Britain were also constantly blamed for their unwillingness to integrate into British culture and what was seen as their ‘nationlessness’ was considered a threat. Mosley often used the common anti-semitic argument that Jews were disloyal to the country where they lived. Jews were thus represented as aliens who formed a threat to the cultural unity because “many Jews regard themselves first as members of Jewry and secondly as British citizens”.⁶⁶ What that essential Britishness was that bound British citizens together was not explained.

Jews were also represented as a threat by repeatedly connecting them to the arch enemy of the BUF: ‘money power’ and international capitalism. In a publication titled *Our Financial Masters* from 1937, Raven Thomson attempted to show that the British economy was in alien, that is, Jewish hands by introducing various Jewish financial houses and blaming them for conducting unscrupulous business and exploiting their work force. The texts also reveal that although the BUF claimed in public that it had nothing against Jews as a race, it did use expressions which referred to Jews in a negative sense. For example, Mosley called the members of government “the jackals of Judah”.⁶⁷ The BUF thus deployed a xenophobic discourse: Jews were represented as the ultimate ‘Other’; they could be tolerated but would never be ‘real’ Britons because they were simply too different, and they were defined with negative characteristics, such as dishonesty and disloyalty to the country, which made Jews the opposite of a ‘true Briton’.

Webber notes that the right sought ways to re-establish the ‘integrity’ they thought society had lost. In some cases this meant employing unifying myths which “tapped Britain’s

⁶⁵ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 42.

⁶⁶ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 42.

⁶⁷ Mosley, *Earl’s Court Speech* 11.

rural, religious, and cultural heritage”.⁶⁸ Philip Morgan states that “all fascist movements [...] displayed the same evocation of nationalist myths, whether it was the Elizabethan age for the BUF, or the Medieval Burgundian empire for Rex”.⁶⁹ Raven Thomson, for example, referred to the Tudor period as “the high point of our national life” because it combined the “seafaring and Empire building of Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake” and the “philosophy and science of Francis Bacon and the poetry and drama of William Shakespeare”.⁷⁰

The BUF also celebrated virtues that were seen in Britain’s past. The lyrics in the BUF’s songs emphasise Britain’s past glory. For example, the BUF’s anthem *Britain Awake!* stated “Britain, assert thine ancient honour” and “we’ll build a Britain fit for heroes”.⁷¹ The BUF favoured an epic discourse, exemplified here by the grandiloquently ‘ancient’ language: ‘thine’. Values that were seen as belonging to the glorious past, like heroism and bravery, were highlighted and came up repeatedly in the BUF’s rhetoric. The BUF was to restore and re-awaken these characteristics: “our creed and our Movement instill in man the heroic attitude to life because he needs heroism”.⁷² As all political movements, by using the patriotic discourse, the BUF attempted to represent itself as the true defender of the allegedly national values that were seen as lost in the modern world. Physical education was important in the corporate state. In this respect, too, ancient Greece was the model for fascist Britain. The ideal Briton was athletic in the Spartan model, brave, and willing to make sacrifices for the nation. Raven Thompson compared contemporary Britain to Rome in its decline and expressed the wish to return to the model of Greece, the era of athletes, not the dulling “policy of bread and circuses” of ancient Rome.⁷³ Thus, this was not merely a return to the past: ancient values were to show the direction to the future. Mosley stated that “our new Britons require the

⁶⁸ Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right* 112.

⁶⁹ Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003) 193.

⁷⁰ Raven Thomson 60.

⁷¹ Souvenir programme 18.

⁷² Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 53.

⁷³ Raven Thomson 53.

virility of the Elizabethan combined with the intellect and method of the modern technician".⁷⁴ It was highlighted that the modern era differed from the past: "the modern world differs profoundly from the forms and conditions of the ancient world".⁷⁵ According to Cullen, "the 'modern movement' of fascism was to be the catalyst that would revive the imperial virtues of manhood, greatness and self-sacrifice".⁷⁶

The BUF was not the only movement that was worried about the decline of physical health. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a general fear of decadence and diminishing vitality expressed for example by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West* (first volume published in 1918 and translated into English in 1926) where he contrasted the corrupt 'Age of Civilisation' with the golden 'Age of Culture'. In Britain, this fear resulted in various responses. For example, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska notes that the physical culture movement originated in the late nineteenth century. In 1898, Eugen Sandow founded Britain's first physical culture magazine *Sandow's Magazine*, and after that various other magazines followed. In 1906, the Health and Strength League was launched with the motto 'sacred thy body even as thy soul'.⁷⁷ The movement was interested in the 'body beautiful' and, like fascists, built its discourse on racial fitness and cultural deterioration.⁷⁸ Physical fitness and celebration of vitality were connected to patriotism, just as with the BUF. However, the difference was that the physical culturalists were not interested in the 'hyper-masculine' brutalized fascist man",⁷⁹ and most physical culturalists had no need to turn to fascism, despite the similarity of their discourses.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 53.

⁷⁵ Oswald Mosley (1933): speech in the English-Speaking Union, quoted in Oswald Mosley, *My Life* (London: Book Club, 1968) 323.

⁷⁶ Cullen 124.

⁷⁷ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain", *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006): 599-601.

⁷⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska 595-6.

⁷⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska 597.

⁸⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska 609.

The state was also interested in the fitness of the nation. The Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration was established in 1904 as a reaction to the poor physique of the recruits for the army during the Boer War. Pick notes that it rejected the argument that Britons as a 'race' were unfit, but the problem was found among the poor. Pick notes that "the Committee rejected degeneration in one sense, but its recommendations were based nevertheless upon a vision of an immutably feckless and hopeless stratum of the poor; it proposed an eclectic series of measures to improve environment, but also to survey constantly the body of 'this undesirable class'".⁸¹ The National Government elected in 1931 had the 'National Fitness Campaign' which was aimed at the adult population and was a response to the unsatisfying results at the Olympic Games in 1936, where Germany was successful. A Board of Education delegation visited Germany in order to learn about physical education there and expressed its admiration for the German methods, especially for the 'Strength through Joy' programme.⁸² Although its resources were rather limited, the campaign exemplifies the general concern for national fitness. As Pick notes, "the National Fitness Campaign aimed to harness the pursuit of individual fitness to the promotion of national vigour and imperial power".⁸³ Thus, the discourse of a healthy nation which included the fear of degeneration, already existed in Britain.

The BUF also attempted to emphasise its ties to the British past. Pugh notes that because fascism aimed at restoring a sense of community, nationhood, kingship and hereditary leadership, the BUF was able to present itself as a return to English traditions, not as an alien innovation.⁸⁴ By using symbols that referred to a glorious history, it attempted to create a continuum between itself and the past. The use of fascist symbols was also explained

⁸¹ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration – A European Disorder, c. 1848 – c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 185-6.

⁸² Zweiniger-Bargielowska 606.

⁸³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska 609.

⁸⁴ Pugh 10.

by referring to tradition: it was claimed that the fasces and the fascist salute were used in Britain in the past and thus had a direct connection to British history:

The Fasces, too, are a symbol used in Britain for the last 2,000 years and are to be found on most of our great monuments. The symbol was brought to Britain by our Roman ancestors, who were here for four centuries and their stock remained forever. The Fasces were the symbol of the Roman Empire. What more fitting than that they should be used by the Empire which succeeded and surpassed the Roman Empire?⁸⁵

The BUF considered itself as the direct successor of the Roman empire: "from the Rome of the past was derived the tradition of civilisation and progress during the past two thousand years, of which the British Empire is now the chief custodian".⁸⁶ The BUF emphasised that its fascism was first and foremost national. It stated that "in our ordered athleticism of life we seek, in fact, a morality of the Spartan pattern. But this must be more than tempered with the Elizabethan atmosphere of Merrie England".⁸⁷ The BUF also introduced a new national symbol, "the flash of action in the circle on unity",⁸⁸ during the BUF's 'Mind Britain's business' campaign in 1935.

Another form of the return to the past was ruralism. The back-to-the-land movement went across the political spectrum, but in the interwar period "representations of the landscape were crucial to the development of a specifically British far Right ideology".⁸⁹ This was in reaction to the changes that took place at the turn of the twentieth century which caused cultural pessimism and the fear that the basis of cultural and social life was under threat. The fascist critique of urbanisation in the 1920s remained vague and not clearly defined. Urban decadence was connected to the deterioration of the British people and race, by the Imperial Fascist League (IFL) and the British Fascisti (BF). Linehan states that in the inter-war period many British fascists saw the city as the ultimate symbol of decadence and cultural destruction in the modern age: "the perception that modern cities were centres of

⁸⁵ Mosley, *100 Questions* 8.

⁸⁶ Mosley, *100 Questions* 6.

⁸⁷ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 19.

⁸⁸ Mosley, *100 Questions* 8.

⁸⁹ Stone 182.

revolutionary intrigue and subversion, and that the ‘slum-dweller’ was particularly receptive to seditious propaganda, would become a common fascist fear as the 1920s and 1930s unfolded”.⁹⁰

Thus, there was a general feeling of loss and nostalgia which the BUF exploited. Linehan notes that there was a general aesthetic concern about England’s vanishing landscape and picturesque ‘old world’ villages. In addition, there was a belief that the nucleus of the national character resided in rural society, not in the city, and the land or countryside was seen as a timeless place expressing something eternal and enduring. The nation’s spiritual values were seen to reside there.⁹¹ This romantic rural discourse was an important building block for the BUF: England was seen as a big common village. Not surprisingly, the longing for the countryside was reflected in the fascists’ art criticism; the BUF favoured the classical and representational. It admired the genre paintings of native artists, such as the Scottish painters Allan Ramsay (1713–1784) and David Wilkie (1785–1841). Linehan notes that especially landscape painting appealed to the fascists: “not only did they acclaim nature and people’s apparently deep metaphysical affinity with it, they also expressed uncomplicated, reassuring images free of contradictions and conflict”.⁹² Aesthetically, the BUF was thus anti-modernist.

The stress on the countryside and the importance of invigorating agriculture was also significant because the BUF advocated economic self-sufficiency. But Mosley’s followers, too, saw themselves as guardians of the pastoral ideal. The corporate state was ‘an organic form’ which would restore the lost connection of people to the land: “a real local leadership will again be required in a revitalised countryside. The original owners of the land in most cases gave such leadership until death duties and the victory of urbanisation broke the

⁹⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism* 245-6.

⁹¹ Linehan, *British Fascism* 250-1.

⁹² Linehan, *British Fascism* 279.

system”.⁹³ Mosley stated that “British Union policy resolves the conflict between town and country and welds their interests in a new national harmony”⁹⁴ because the “British Union knows that no people can live that is uprooted from the soil and that the universal urbanisation of a population spells a doom inevitable and historic”.⁹⁵ The ‘City of London’, in contrast, was seen as a nest of decayed democracy and money power. Many urban phenomena were criticised: for example, Mosley often expressed his horror at the state of the slums.

Nevertheless, Linehan notes that unlike other interwar fascists, the BUF’s attitude to urbanisation was not straightforwardly negative. Although it might be tempting to view the BUF’s critique of the modern city as an expression of reactionary fascist anti-modernism, it in fact “viewed itself as a force seeking to control the city and thereby sustain its cultural life, albeit along lines which conformed to its narrow definition of culture”.⁹⁶ The BUF’s commentary on the place and role of the city in modern life remained somewhat vague, reflecting its inability to resolve the contradiction between the anti-modern and the modern elements in its ideology.⁹⁷

The same ambiguity applies to the BUF’s attitude to industrialisation. Linehan notes that British fascism, especially the BUF, regarded itself as a counterrevolution against the Industrial Revolution.⁹⁸ By criticising the Industrial Revolution’s legacy, the BUF wanted to identify itself with the anti-industrial resistance which had its roots in the pre-Victorian era. Raven Thomson noted that “the rise of the machine has ruined handicrafts and damaged artistry” and that “the British Union will combat this tendency by means of recreational organisation which will be largely devoted to restoring lost handicrafts”.⁹⁹ The BUF thus

⁹³ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 38.

⁹⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 32.

⁹⁵ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 33.

⁹⁶ Linehan, *British Fascism* 255-5.

⁹⁷ Linehan, *British Fascism* 256.

⁹⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism* 257.

⁹⁹ Raven Thomson 56.

expressed the same concerns as the Arts and Crafts Movement, which developed in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was a reaction to modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation. It strongly criticised capitalism and mass production and promoted craftsmanship and artisanship. Mass production was seen as destroying individual creativity, whereas medieval guilds were seen as the model for the ideal craft production system. The Arts and Crafts Movement thus had a political agenda: labour and art were to be united and in the ideal society workers participated in the whole production process instead of contributing to a specific part of serial production. The central figures of the movement were John Ruskin and his disciple William Morris, a socialist artist and social reformer. To some extent, Ruskin, for example, expressed the same patriarchal concerns as the BUF: Eileen Boris argues that Ruskin rejected political democracy, feminism and worker control of production.¹⁰⁰ Morris and Ruskin believed that art could improve society. The urge to return to a more ‘honest’ way of living found in the past in order to find solutions to present problems was the essence of the nostalgic discourse the BUF exploited, familiar from Ruskin’s and Morris’ social criticism.

Linehan points out, however, that although it is tempting to consider the British fascists as reactionary anti-modernists, considering their negative attitudes to the machine and the technological age, it is not obvious because “in fascist discourse there are frequent declarations of unbridled faith in technological progress which are quintessentially modern in tone”.¹⁰¹ This was especially true among the Mosleyites and was manifested in the way the BUF’s spokespersons were fascinated with technological modernity, aeroplanes and automobiles, for example. Thus, Linehan continues, “on a closer examination, this hostility towards the machine reveals itself to be not a blanket condemnation of the machine age and modernity but a critique of particular variants of it, namely those models promoted by liberal

¹⁰⁰ Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor. Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1986) 6.

¹⁰¹ Linehan, *British Fascism* 263.

capitalism and communism”.¹⁰² The BUF would build anew a model where man would master the machine in accordance with its idea of the revived community. Linehan calls this “the alternative modernising project”¹⁰³ and notes that “if Mosleyite fascism did nurture an anti-technological agenda, it hoped to temper the modernisation process, rather than halt it altogether”.¹⁰⁴

Although the BUF’s ideology was in many ways bound to the past, it also simultaneously expressed a break from it. Thurlow notes that “fascism resulted from the frustration with, and alienation from, a system in which politicians were obsessed with the conventions of party politics to the detriment of the need for radical change”.¹⁰⁵ Mosley constantly talked about ‘a dynamic age’, which required changes in the outmoded political system. With the New Party, Mosley had first attempted a break from the party system which he had condemned as ineffective. The BUF’s political agenda was based on a fundamental change in society that was found necessary. Raven Thomson stated that “such a fundamental change will amount to no less than a revolution”.¹⁰⁶ The BUF also strongly emphasised its role as a revolutionary force by calling itself “a modern movement”¹⁰⁷ and a “creed of dynamic change and progress”.¹⁰⁸ The change it demanded was to be aided by science.

Despite the BUF’s criticism of modern phenomena, it believed firmly in the potential of science to solve the ‘modern crisis’. Influenced by Spengler, Mosley believed in the cyclical development of cultures. He stated that “we have reached the period, by every indication available to the intellect, at which each civilisation and Empire of the past has begun to

¹⁰² Linehan, *British Fascism* 263.

¹⁰³ Linehan, *British Fascism* 263.

¹⁰⁴ Linehan, *British Fascism* 263-4.

¹⁰⁵ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* 30.

¹⁰⁶ Raven Thomson 1.

¹⁰⁷ Oswald Mosley, “The Greater Britain”, *History in Our Hands* ed. Patrick Deane (London and New York: Leicester University Press: 1998) 29.

¹⁰⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 29.

traverse that downward path to the dust and ashes from which their glory never returned”.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Spengler, however, he believed that cultures do not necessarily have to perish, and stated that Spengler was too pessimistic. Mosley respected Spengler and his theory of the life-cycle of civilisations, but stated that he had erred when he predicted the doom of Western culture. He stated that “if you look through the Spenglerian spectacles, you are bound to come to a conclusion of extreme pessimism because they obscure the factor which for the first time places in the hands of man the ability entirely to eliminate the poverty problem”.¹¹⁰ A board of scientific research was to be established in the corporate state to promote inventions as “scarcely any body of men have suffered so severely from corruption as have inventors, upon whom we depend for ultimate material progress and even for existence in the stress of war”.¹¹¹

By emphasising the need for revolution, the BUF claimed to separate itself from conservatism: the Conservative party belonged to the ‘old gang’ and was criticised for inefficiency. This was connected to the younger generation’s revolt against the old system. After the First World War, there was a generation gap between the old and the new generation. The older generation was seen as inefficient and feeble and in the eyes of the younger generation it had monopolised political power. This was also a central theme in the BUF’s ideology: “to succeed, such a movement must represent the organised revolt of the young manhood of Britain against things as they are. The enemy is the ‘Old Gang’ of our present political system”.¹¹² The old parties were accused of betraying the younger generation and its expectations:

At the end of the War, they found Britain raised by the efforts of the young generation to a pinnacle of power and of greatness. Their rule of fourteen years has surrendered that position,

¹⁰⁹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 51.

¹¹⁰ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 321.

¹¹¹ Raven Thomson 24.

¹¹² Mosley, *Greater Britain* 24 (web).

and has reduced this country, at home and abroad, to a low and dangerous condition. Again we raise the standard of youth and challenge that betrayal.¹¹³

The New Party, the BUF's predecessor, was named to underline this difference. Here the modernist discourse, "Make it New",¹¹⁴ is clearly discernible: new and vital was juxtaposed with old and stagnant.

If the BUF separated itself from the conservatives, so it did from the Left and especially from the revolution of the Left. Bolshevism was strongly criticised. The BUF opposed 'economic chaos' and 'red anarchy' attributed to the revolution from the Left. Mosley stated that fascism differed profoundly from destructive communism because "its achievement is revolution, but not destruction".¹¹⁵ Attributes such as 'sacred' or 'saving' were attached to the fascist revolution to make the distinction from chaos and disorder associated with the communist revolution completely clear.

The BUF's revolution was to be organised and therefore differ from the 'anarchist' revolution: "we shall prepare to meet the anarchy of Communism with the organised force of Fascism".¹¹⁶ Revolution was to be led by calm, organised will: "ultimately, nations are saved from chaos not by Parliaments, however elected; not by civil servants, however instructed: but by the steady will of an organized movement to victory".¹¹⁷ The revolution was, however, to be peaceful: "the aim of such a movement must be revolutionary in the fundamental changes which it seeks to secure. But all these changes can be achieved by legal and by peaceful means, and it is our ardent desire so to secure them".¹¹⁸ The BUF attempted to separate itself from violent revolution by stating that "Fascism is the greatest constructive and revolutionary creed in the world".¹¹⁹ It was also pointed out that the BUF

¹¹³ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 24 (web).

¹¹⁴ Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1934).

¹¹⁵ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 4 (web).

¹¹⁶ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 26-27 (web).

¹¹⁷ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 16 (web).

¹¹⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 26 (web).

¹¹⁹ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 29.

proclaimed loyalty to the king: “British Union recognises the traditional dual sources of sovereignty in our national life, KING and PEOPLE”.¹²⁰

However, the BUF was prepared to resort to violence if needed. Mosley noted that “other and sterner measures must be adopted for the saving of the State in a situation approaching anarchy”¹²¹ although he at the same time swore loyalty to the king by claiming that “in no case shall we resort to violence against the forces of the Crown; but only against the forces of anarchy if, and when, the machinery of state has been allowed to drift into powerlessness”.¹²²

It is noteworthy, then, that the BUF’s revolutionary rhetoric in some points resembles that of Marxism. The BUF used the victim discourse similar to that of Marxism. Revolution was justified because it was a revolution in which the oppressed turn against their oppressors. The people were represented as victims of economic slavery. The lyrics of the BUF’s anthem *Britain Awake!* declared that “we will be victors of to-morrow, who are the victims of to-day”,¹²³ and “we will avenge the long betrayal”.¹²⁴

Although it was emphasised that the revolution was to be peaceful, the BUF’s revolution was connected to the themes of will, action, and effort, which were key to the BUF’s program. Will and action were entwined with each other; will was the basis of action, and without will nothing could be done. Mosley saw himself as a man of action and considered will as an important, if not the most important, characteristic of the ideal Englishman. The BUF’s emblem, lightning in a circle, was also supposed to represent its dynamic character.

¹²⁰ Raven Thomson 47.

¹²¹ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 31 (web).

¹²² Mosley, *Greater Britain* 32 (web).

¹²³ Souvenir programme 17.

¹²⁴ Souvenir programme 17.

The idea of constant struggle is central to the texts. Mosley believed that an enormous economic crisis was around the corner and therefore rejected the conventional political methods and adopted instead a paramilitary style for the new movement, which included also the adoption of symbols that expressed struggle and dynamic action. In fact, the struggle was the basis of being politically active, and struggle in itself was an inherent part of the BUF's policy. When Mosley talked about the creation of the BUF, he described it as a struggle and called fascism "the steel creed of an iron age".¹²⁵ Neocleous notes that in fascism war is the highest form of political activity.¹²⁶ This idea brings together political and perpetual struggle. Captain Robert Gordon-Canning stated that "only through trial and struggle can progress be achieved, only through pain is a child born, only through action can union be achieved".¹²⁷ Action in itself was important, and crisis was in a way necessary to create action. As Mosley stated, "it is possible that we may not come to any clearly marked crisis: and here arises a still greater danger. The industrial machine is running on two cylinders instead of six. A complete breakdown would be a stronger incentive to action than the movement, however cumbrous, of a crippled machine".¹²⁸ The BUF valued a crisis as something that shook people to act, because it also claimed to offer a solution to that crisis. Mosley noted that "in crisis the British are at their best; when the necessity for action is not clear, they are at their worst".¹²⁹ Here the BUF used the crisis-oriented revolutionary discourse that both Left and Right shared.

The BUF also simplified political problems by representing them as a battle between two parties, the right and the wrong. As Mosley writes, "this fight between us shall be a fight to a finish, in which we or they [the old parties] shall perish for ever".¹³⁰ Action and change

¹²⁵ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 32 (web).

¹²⁶ Neocleous 18.

¹²⁷ Robert Gordon-Canning, *Inward Strength of a National Socialist* (1938), 6.

<http://www.oswaldmosley.com/downloads/free_ebooks.htm> [accessed 30 Oct. 2007].

¹²⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 32-3 (web).

¹²⁹ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 32 (web).

¹³⁰ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 7 (web).

were emphasised as the basis of any positive development and change was necessarily a struggle. The lyrics of *Britain awake!* declared that “we fight for Union and Mosley, We fight for freedom and for bread!”¹³¹

The BUF claimed to include the best of both aspects: stability and progress. The outcome was the “new synthesis of fascism”.¹³² Mosley states that “our Fascist Movement seeks on the one hand Stability, which envisages order and authority as the basis of all solid achievement; we seek on the other hand Progress; which can be achieved only by the executive instrument that order, authority and decision alone can give”.¹³³ The BUF thus regarded its strength as the fact that it took “something from the Right and something from the Left” and added to it “new facts to meet the modern age”.¹³⁴ Considering the fact that the BUF attracted many disillusioned Conservatives, who regarded the BUF as a more dynamic form of conservatism, the movement was, to some extent, successful in representing itself as active conservatism, at least in the first half of the 1930s. Mosley summarised this in the following way:

In the ranks of Conservatism there are many who are attracted there by the Party's tradition of loyalty, order and stability - but who are, none the less, repelled by its lethargy and stagnation. In the ranks of Labour there are many who follow the Party's humane ideals, and are attracted by its vital urge to remedy social and economic evils - but who are, none the less, repelled by its endless and inconclusive debates, its cowardice, its lack of leadership and decision. These elements comprise the best of both Parties: and to both Fascism appeals.¹³⁵

The BUF attempted to prove that the corporate state was both a new creation and something that was derived from the past and aimed at preserving old values. Thurlow notes that “the BUF [...] saw itself as a continuation of a tradition which linked feudalism, the guild system, Tudor centralized authority and the spirit behind the achievement of Empire to their own

¹³¹ Souvenir programme 17.

¹³² Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 324.

¹³³ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 12.

¹³⁴ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 324.

¹³⁵ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 10 (web).

conception of the corporate state”.¹³⁶ This also illustrates the BUF’s attempt to represent itself as a third way between the traditional Left and Right division.

Morgan notes that ”fascist movements combined a subversive, anti-establishment search for a new order, offering new and alternative forms of organisation, mobilisation and control in developing mass societies, with having as their constant reference point national cultural or racial traditions and values”.¹³⁷ Similarly, the BUF stressed that its revolution was in line with traditional national values using discourses from both Left and Right.

The texts do not move on the past-present axis in a straightforward way. Various phenomena regarded as negative, such as ‘internationalism’ and ‘money power’, are seen as something belonging to the present, whereas the British Empire, for example was praised as something lost, belonging to the good old days although it was at its height in the 1930s. However, the past as such was not automatically idealised, nor was the modern rejected. Science, for example, was greatly appreciated as the alleged solution to the economic crisis.

Griffin points out that fascists’ hankering after the past should not be understood literally, but rather the elements of national tradition were used “with an essentially mythic force as the inspiration of the new order because of the ‘eternal’ truths they contain for the nascent national community”.¹³⁸ The values of the past were to show the direction for the future. Cullen notes that “the BUF saw itself as embodying all the essentially British virtues of the past, whilst at the same time holding all the necessary virtues for a truly ‘scientific’ and modern future”.¹³⁹ Griffin states that rather than being a rejection of modernism, fascism represents an alternative to it:

Fascism’s essentially palingenetic, and hence anti-conservative, thrust towards a *new* type of society means that it builds rhetorically on the cultural achievements attributed to former, more ‘glorious’ or healthy eras in national history only to invoke the regenerative ethos which is a

¹³⁶ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* 151.

¹³⁷ Morgan 192.

¹³⁸ Griffin 49.

¹³⁹ Cullen 124.

prerequisite for national rebirth, and not to suggest socio-political models to be duplicated in a literal-minded restoration of the past.¹⁴⁰

Fascists also often allied themselves with the Conservatives, but fascism was not committed to the Right. The relationship between the conservative newspaper proprietor Lord Rothermere and the BUF provides an example of this: they shared views to a certain extent, and both were willing to see the other as a mouthpiece for their ideas. The initial success was partly due to Lord Rothermere, who openly supported the BUF in his newspapers from January 1934, when he wrote an article titled *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*. However, the Rothermere press portrayed Mosley as a reactionary Conservative rather than a fascist. Morgan notes that Rothermere saw Mosley like he did Mussolini, as a Conservative who would defend the country against the threat of communism, and calls it “a case of mistaken identity”.¹⁴¹ Personally Lord Rothermere rejected anti-semitism, and the idea of the corporate state was simply ignored in the Rothermere press. Initially, the BUF was willing to compromise in order to gain publicity and new recruits. For example, anti-semitic attitudes were dampened for a while. However, in June 1934 the BUF lost Rothermere’s support due to a violent clash between fascists and their opponents in a mass meeting at Olympia hall and Hitler’s bloody purge in the SA, also known as the Night of the Long Knives. As Mosley was not willing to drop the term ‘fascist’, abandon anti-semitism or otherwise compromise, the relationship between Rothermere and the BUF was ended, though the *Daily Mail* continued to express some sympathy for Mosley and the Blackshirts.

¹⁴⁰ Griffin, 47.

¹⁴¹ Morgan 96.

3 Leadership and Democracy

In the BUF's ideology, it was emphasised that the corporate state would protect the interests and freedom of the individual better than the existing system. The BUF promised to make the political system a servant of the people instead of being the people's master. However, at the same time the states interest superseded the rights of an individual and the individual was also in every way subordinate to the state. Raven Thomson described the corporate state as a philosophical conception "which recognises the nation as an organism of a higher order, transcending the individuals of which it is composed".¹⁴² Crimes against the state were regarded as more severe than crimes against individuals. Mosley stated that "lies against the nation should be dealt with even more severely than lies against the individual".¹⁴³ For example, freedom of speech, which in democracy is considered as a central right, was in the fascist system seen as a potential threat to the state, and Mosley continuously stated that under fascism the press would not be "free to tell lies".¹⁴⁴

In its rhetoric, the BUF used the populist discourse which juxtaposes 'the elite' and 'the people', supporting the latter. The BUF claimed to advocate democracy and the power of people. It also claimed that in the corporate state the will of the people would prevail: "power belongs to the people alone".¹⁴⁵ As the class was to be replaced with nation in the corporate state, it was stated that citizens would for the first time be given equal opportunities and make use of their talents. For example, the BUF claimed to offer women "much larger permanent representation than they have been granted under so-called Democracy".¹⁴⁶ The BUF promised that no one would be given privileges on the basis of their background. "A man

¹⁴² Raven Thomson 2-3.

¹⁴³ Mosley, *100 Questions* 10.

¹⁴⁴ Mosley, *100 Questions* 13.

¹⁴⁵ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 5.

¹⁴⁶ Raven Thomson 37.

shall be valued by what he is and not by what his father was".¹⁴⁷ Philip Coupland notes that the idea was manifested in the BUF's uniforms: "in fascist discourse at least, the black shirt symbolized a classless brotherhood of British 'youth'".¹⁴⁸ The upper class was mocked: "the snob and the parasite shall go"¹⁴⁹ (which one might consider ironic, considering Mosley's own background). Mosley stated that "above all they [the rich] have created the fatal distinctions of social class which the British Union is determined to remove for ever".¹⁵⁰ Instead, "in place of class and privilege shall arise the brotherhood of the British".¹⁵¹

Daniel Pick points out that there was general pessimism about "the ramifications of evolution, the efficacy of liberalism, the life in and of the metropolis", and "the future of society in a perceived world of mass democracy and socialism" already in the 1870s and the 1880s.¹⁵² One of the central anxieties that the twentieth century had brought along was the fear of the uneducated masses and the collapse of community because of free individualism. Robert Paxton notes that the fear of the dissolution of community solidarity due to urbanisation, industrialisation and immigration was expressed, for example, in the works of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim and his German colleague Ferdinand Tönnies.¹⁵³ The BUF's ideology was strongly influenced by this. National factions and disunity were perceived as a grave threat to the state:

Today the nation faces a foe more dangerous because he dwells within, and a situation no less grave because to all it is not yet visible. We have been divided and we have been conquered because by division of the British alone we can be conquered. Class against class, faction against faction, party against party, interest against interest, man against man, brother against brother has been the tactic of the warfare by which the British in the modern age for the first time in their history have been subdued.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 39.

¹⁴⁸ Coupland, *Black Shirt in Britain* 110.

¹⁴⁹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 39.

¹⁵⁰ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 39.

¹⁵¹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 41.

¹⁵² Pick 180.

¹⁵³ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2004) 35-6.

¹⁵⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 51.

The corporate state was designed to be the great synthesis, it was to offer harmony and co-operation. Raven Thomson stated that “sane functioning of the nation as a whole can only be attained by collaboration between the various industrial factors, not by their mutual hostility”.¹⁵⁵ This, in turn, required control. Lewis notes that fascism’s idea of the corporate state was founded on the liberal concept of the state as a regulative mechanism, but, unlike in liberalism, such a mechanism would control all spheres of life.¹⁵⁶ This idea of the state was similar to Mussolini’s. According to Lewis, this illustrated fascism’s tendency to move beyond the concept of the state as a machine by ascribing to it qualities of an almost mystical nature.¹⁵⁷ Mosley’s idea of the corporate state was similar to Mussolini’s definition of fascist Italy: “all within the State; none outside the State; none against the State”.¹⁵⁸ The key feature of the corporate state was thus necessarily control and the idea that it would reach into every part of life. Neocleous notes that in the fascist ideology individual liberty is perceived as a property of the state and the individual is then only free within its bounds, as a part of it.¹⁵⁹

As the aim of all activity was the well-being of the state, understood in fascist terms, the individual freedom the BUF was talking about was very different from what is generally associated with freedom of choice. It was stated that within the corporate state people would be free to do whatever they wanted as long as they did not harm the state. All actions that were considered as a threat to national unity were prohibited. However, defining harmful actions would be in the hands of the fascist leadership. Strikes, for example, were seen as an unnecessary threat to the state, and in the corporate state they would have been banned. Trade unions were also seen as a threat to national unity: “the Trade Unions will no longer be

¹⁵⁵ Raven Thomson 7.

¹⁵⁶ Lewis 42.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis 42.

¹⁵⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain 2* (web).

¹⁵⁹ Neocleous 25-6.

instruments of class war”.¹⁶⁰ They were only seen as an obstacle: “in our labour organisation there will be no place for the trade union leader who, from sectional or political motives, impedes the development of a vital service”.¹⁶¹ Because the BUF thus considered as a threat what in democracy is regarded as normal tensions between different political agents, the national harmony it so dearly cherished was necessarily forced.

Another telling example of the suppression of the individual is that art, the ultimate means of self-expression, was to be controlled by the state and in the corporate state it was to be placed in a corporation of its own. Raven Thomson stated that “art is the expression of the spirit of the whole community, or it is nothing but neurotic self-exhibitionism”.¹⁶² In the corporate state “the artist no longer lives apart as a Bohemian rebel against society, but enjoys the patronage of the people themselves”.¹⁶³ The BUF thus rejected the idea of the artist as an outsider or commentator on society: artists were to be integrated in society in the name of the common good, and the artist was to serve the community like a representative of any other profession. In this sense, too, fascism resembled socialism: the discourse of the ‘whole’ where the individual was to serve the community was used by both Left and Right.

The BUF despised avant-garde and modernist art. Linehan notes that “modern art, with its morbid imagery and obsessive attachment to life’s darker side, was the art of putrefaction and ultimate death, to the fascists, and as such they believed it to be the antithesis of true art”.¹⁶⁴ Like Nazis, the Mosleyites regarded the sculptures of Classical Antiquity as representatives of true beauty. In art, too, the BUF’s longing for clarity reflected its longing for order in society. The unpredictability of modernism annoyed fascists, and, like many other

¹⁶⁰ Mosley, *100 Questions* 27.

¹⁶¹ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 3 (web).

¹⁶² Raven Thomson 55.

¹⁶³ Raven Thomson 56.

¹⁶⁴ Linehan, *British Fascism* 274.

contemporaries, they accused modernists of celebrating the distorted and immoral, and disrespecting the rules of harmony. The function of art was to elevate and inspire.

Service to the state, the fact that citizens were obliged to work for the state if they wanted to be a part of it, was constantly emphasised. The idle upper class, whose position was inherited, not earned, was one of Mosley's favourite targets. He demanded, for example, that the House of Lords be abolished because the seats were inherited, not earned with active service for the state. The feudal idea of no reward without service was to be taken into use again: "the British Union will restore the good feudal principle that land is held directly or indirectly of the Crown for service, insisting that no land is held in absolute right, but that the owners owe a feudal duty of service to the Crown".¹⁶⁵ Here, again, an epic discourse can be noted: land was to be given as a reward for service, as in feudal society where knights served the king and received land in return.

Citizens of the fascist state were not to live just for themselves but always to take into consideration the state's interest. Even their bodies were public property. Mosley noted that "we do not mind in the least seeing him [a citizen of the fascist state] in a public house or club, provided that he is not there to excess, and does not there squander his health or his resources. In many things the distinction is between relaxation and indulgence".¹⁶⁶ It was also considered as the duty of the citizens of the fascist state to keep themselves fit as they "must learn that physical fitness apart from being a pleasure to themselves is an obligation which they owe to the nation".¹⁶⁷ It was the task of fascism to teach "men and women 'to live like athletes' in order to fit themselves for service of their country".¹⁶⁸ In this way, the BUF attempted to take the role that the church had traditionally had as the county's moral guardian, which can be noted in the way that the BUF deployed traces of a moral discourse.

¹⁶⁵ Raven Thomson 41.

¹⁶⁶ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 19 (web).

¹⁶⁷ Raven Thomson 53.

¹⁶⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 11 (web).

The state's control thus reached not only to the individual's work in the public sphere, but also to their free time in the private sphere. Raven Thomson states that "a serious obligation of the Corporate State will be the organisation of leisure".¹⁶⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, among the activities the state was to offer, sports and all kinds of physical activities were highly regarded. The BUF was thus concerned about the concomitant phenomena of urbanisation: increasing spare time and how to control it. Free time was seen as a potential threat and it must "be directed by authority into channels that will benefit both State and people, improving the physical well-being of the race by an ordered athleticism, and developing the cultural standards of the masses by recreational activity".¹⁷⁰ The discourse of a healthy nation is thus perceivable also here.

One of the sociologists who made attempts to explain the change that the modernisation process caused was the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. In his book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) he made a distinction between the two types of group formations: community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).

Community is an organic formation, defined ideally by blood ties between people, whereas society is a mechanical formation.¹⁷¹ In community shared work, place, and habits connect people and a kind of natural consensus on, for example, the idea of the natural division of work is important. Tönnies notes that it is a special kind of social force that binds people together in a community. Community is exemplified by a village, where everyone more or less knows one another, and its basic element is the house.¹⁷² By contrast, in society people live together but they are not connected to each other like in the community, and

¹⁶⁹ Raven Thomson 52.

¹⁷⁰ Raven Thomson 54.

¹⁷¹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der Reinen Soziologie* (Leipzig: Buske, 1935) 3.

¹⁷² Tönnies 15-26.

individuals strive mainly for their own interest.¹⁷³ Society is based on the idea of exchange: people's actions to each other are based on what is beneficial to their interest and what they receive in return, and the essential means of exchange is money. Money is the force that holds a society together.¹⁷⁴

The same themes were present in the BUF's discourse. The BUF was alarmed about the atomised individuals of society and sought the organic nature of community. The corporate state was simultaneously a decidedly modern solution and a comforting return to the past, an almost medieval construction with its strict emphasis on the community over individual. Pugh states that the BUF saw a similar idea in the medieval system:

Fascists also commended the medieval guilds for sustaining an economic and social system based on communities; the guilds controlled output, prices and wages in the interests of consumers and workers just as the corporate system would do. The fall of feudalism and the guilds had opened the way for rapid economic development, but it had also promoted the damaging cult of the individual and accelerated competition leading to the destruction of stable communities.¹⁷⁵

This also resembles the discourse of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which called for community and the feeling of togetherness seen in the past.

In the corporate state, the idea was to connect the atomised individuals of the modern society more closely together and thus overcome the 'money power' that the BUF saw as a destructive force in the modern society. The corporate state was designed to function as a kind of village on a larger scale where the natural ties could be restored between people and where the "hard-working simple British folk"¹⁷⁶ was seen to reside. However, this also suggests strong social control.

It was claimed that there existed no contradiction between the authoritarian status of the state and respect for individual freedom because the two were inseparable: "there is no need for any conflict between the individual and the State, as neither can exist without the other. It

¹⁷³ Tönnies 40.

¹⁷⁴ Tönnies 46.

¹⁷⁵ Pugh 10.

¹⁷⁶ Mosley, *Earl's Court Speech* 8.

is only by a true balance between the needs of individual and State that progress can be achieved for both”.¹⁷⁷ The subordination of the individual was explained as being in the common interest and, ultimately, serving the interests of the individuals as well. The authoritarian status of the corporate state that gave the state power over the individual was defended with the claim that the system was actually giving “a true balance to the interests of individual, group and nation”.¹⁷⁸ The individual was free when the community was free: “the interest of the nation transcends the interest of every faction, but, in recognising the overriding interest of the community, the individual as a member of the nation secures his own ultimate advantage”.¹⁷⁹ The same idea was also present in socialist discourse.

Mosley stated that “in their public life we ask of men a greater obligation and a higher service. In private life in return we accord them a greater freedom”.¹⁸⁰ People would have “a complete liberty to live and develop as an individual”.¹⁸¹ However, it can be noted that there was a fine line between private and public in the corporate state; one could state that they were almost inseparable. Mosley reasoned that strong control by the state was necessary in order to obtain individual freedom: “the beginning of liberty is the end of economic chaos. Yet how can economic chaos be overcome without the power to act?”¹⁸²

The individual was thus to be represented by corporations. Through them, individuals could have their voices heard. In fascism, the individual as such is nothing, but only exists as the representative of a nation. Despite the fascist emphasis on individuals, people were treated as units that needed to belong to some wider social unit, be it a family or a corporation: “through Corporate life the individual wins meaning and reality for freedom of speech”.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Raven Thomson 59.

¹⁷⁸ Raven Thomson 4.

¹⁷⁹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 27.

¹⁸⁰ Mosley, *100 Questions* 11.

¹⁸¹ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 321.

¹⁸² Mosley, *Greater Britain* 14 (web).

¹⁸³ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 17.

The authoritarian features were emphasised by mocking democracy. The political sphere had changed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The liberals and Labour became stronger and there was a crisis of conservatism. Pugh notes that “alarmed by the pace of the social change and the rise of the labour movement, and frustrated by its own impotence, sections of the Edwardian right began to display a dangerous disillusionment with conventional politics”,¹⁸⁴ which led to the hardening of opinions. The language to protect the national interest strikingly resembled the BUF’s agenda.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the national government headed by Ramsay MacDonald faced criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. The government struggled with rising unemployment rates and a growing budgetary deficit. Between 1929 and 1930 unemployment had risen from 1.1 to 2.5 million. Ramsay MacDonald’s government was heavily criticised from both Right and Left and its failure to overcome the problems was considered as a sign of failure of parliamentary politics to handle the depression. Pugh notes that in this atmosphere of growing discontent, the fascist critique of British parliamentary democracy started sounding credible to many.¹⁸⁵

The main argument against democracy was its inefficiency. For Mosleyites, the worst crime seemed to be inertia. The government and the old parties were represented as weak and ineffective, and in his writings Mosley repeatedly ridiculed his political opponents for their lack of will. In contrast to the BUF, which had a plan to act and was willing to make real changes, Mosley blamed the government for being ‘paralysed’. None of the old parties were able to create anything but chaos. They were accused of “futile and paralytic discussions so characteristic of a timorous democracy”.¹⁸⁶ In other places, Mosley criticised the government and ‘old gang’ for not being able to act, only forming committees and negotiating. The BUF

¹⁸⁴ Pugh 16.

¹⁸⁵ Pugh 116-7.

¹⁸⁶ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 10 (web).

wanted to substitute “a new system of action suited to the modern age for the system of talk which belongs to the past”.¹⁸⁷ The idea of democracy as negotiation and discussion about the common interest were thus ridiculed as futile, and swift action was taken as the ideal.

Democracy was also criticised for allowing too much freedom for the individual. In the fascist state the individual would never exceed the community: “fascism recognises the desirability of individual freedom of expression and initiative, as a basis of healthy social life, but it does not place this principle before all others, as does decayed Democracy”.¹⁸⁸

However, the BUF did not reject democracy per se. The texts play with the concept of democracy and give it a new meaning. Old ‘democracy of talk’ was contrasted with the ‘real’ democracy of the people fascism was to offer. The BUF thus wanted to represent itself as standing on the side of the ‘common man’. This was emphasised by mocking the idle upper classes and the useless elite. It claimed to restore true equality, unlike liberalism, which “with its hideous doctrines of greed and self-interest, poorly disguised as liberty, equality and fraternity, must be completely eradicated from the public mind. In its place, the British Union must set co-operation, service and patriotism”.¹⁸⁹

However, as Griffin notes, even though the creation of national community was set as the goal, this was not a democratic process.¹⁹⁰ Although fascism seems to aim at mobilising the masses and uses revolutionary language in its rhetoric, in the end it is not willing to leave the revolution to the people alone, but it is the elite that is understood as better interpreting the needs of the people and controlling the process.¹⁹¹ According to Griffin, “fascism must always in the last analysis be imposed by an elite in the name of a national community *yet to be realized*, and whose realization, even once the movement is installed in power, will

¹⁸⁷ Mosley, *100 Questions* 11.

¹⁸⁸ Raven Thomson 3.

¹⁸⁹ Raven Thomson 29.

¹⁹⁰ Griffin 41.

¹⁹¹ Griffin 41.

initially (and in practice indefinitely) involve re-education, propaganda and social control on a massive scale".¹⁹² Therefore, it seems that fascism is always "populist in intent and rhetoric, yet elitist in practice".¹⁹³

The equality the BUF endorsed certainly did not mean that everyone would be able to do anything in the fascist state. The 'recognition of the functional difference' was supposed to distinguish fascism from socialism. The difference between a manager and cleaning lady was thus 'functional', not 'social'. Although it was stated that everyone was equal by birth, it was also strongly emphasised that people were not equal in regard to their talents and abilities. Mosley noted that "it is still greater folly to presume that all men are equally gifted in mind, muscle, or spirit; from that fallacy arises the fatal tendency of the present phase to slow down the pace of the fastest to that of the slowest".¹⁹⁴ The same idea was extended from individuals to nations. Mosley expressed the generally accepted colonialist discourse by stating that "we shall challenge the illusion that backward and illiterate populations are fit for self-government when obviously they are not".¹⁹⁵ As some were born leaders, other nations were the 'natural' leaders of others.

The BUF believed in the need for a strong leader who was the heart of the BUF. He had full powers in the movement, including the right to change the constitution and appoint or dismiss officers as he wished. Considering that the BUF's policy was based on the idea of equality, the strong cult of the leader seems contradictory. Mosley believed in the Spenglerian notion of Caesarism. According to George Mosse, Caesarism for Spengler "seemed to be brute power exercised by a leader devoid of any moral restraints",¹⁹⁶ but this leader is still a unifying force and the only one who can halt the degeneration process. Caesar "destroys in

¹⁹² Griffin 41.

¹⁹³ Griffin 41.

¹⁹⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 39.

¹⁹⁵ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 31.

¹⁹⁶ George L. Mosse, "Caesarism, Circuses, and Monuments", *Journal of Contemporary History* 6 (1971): 178.

order to create”¹⁹⁷: “caesarism is the force which manages to destroy existing liberal institutions and to produce a new unity of political form pointing to the future”.¹⁹⁸ Mosse also notes that in Spenglerian thinking “the amorphous mass will be integrated into a higher unity through the strong will of the leader who, though also a practical man, is able to activate their deeper longings”.¹⁹⁹ In Caesarism, Mosley was interested in the effort of one person to prevent crisis. He noted that “what really interested me in Spengler was his realisation that at certain points in history the fact-men, supported by popular but realistic movements, always emerged to arrest the decline of a civilisation”.²⁰⁰ This longing for a strong leader also exemplifies imperial discourse.

In the BUF, idolising the leader was also encouraged. The *Song of the Union* declared that “Mosley leads on in Britain’s Name” and in *Britain Awake!* “we fight for Union and Mosley”.²⁰¹ The leader was thus put on a pedestal. The distinction between ranks was also made with uniforms. As Coupland notes, the leading figures wore more expensive suits made of finer fabric than the members from lower ranks.²⁰² Despite the populist appeal, Mosley was building an image of the upper-class leader, not a common man. He was without doubt more of a snob than he admitted and did not even want to identify himself with a worker: he dressed, behaved and talked like an aristocrat. However, Mosley the leader was seen to merit his place on the basis of his superior skills.

Mosley noted that voluntary discipline and strong leadership were necessary because the real changes that the BUF demanded required absolute authority. Mosley states that “the only effective instrument of revolutionary change is absolute authority. We are organised, therefore, as a disciplined army, not as a bewildered mob with every member bellowing

¹⁹⁷ Mosse 178.

¹⁹⁸ Mosse 178-9.

¹⁹⁹ Mosse 179.

²⁰⁰ Mosley, *My Life* 330.

²⁰¹ Souvenir programme 17.

²⁰² Coupland, *Black Shirt in Britain* 110.

orders”.²⁰³ This was contrasted with the lack of effort of liberalism. Strong leadership was also connected to responsibility. Leadership was necessary, it was argued, because the leadership principle meant “personal and individual responsibility”. Mosley claimed that “authority can never be divided because divided authority means divided responsibility” which “leads to the futility and cowardice of the committee system”.²⁰⁴ The idea of a strictly organised army where everyone knew their place was familiar from army discourse. The fascist state was to be modelled after the army in the colonies.

When the BUF faced accusations of favouring dictatorship, it attempted to make a clear distinction between dictatorship and its leadership principle: “British Union and leadership seek not to be dictator to the people but servant of the people”.²⁰⁵ It was argued that a strong leader was a means to democratic ends. Mosley argued that “the Dictatorship is the Dictatorship of the will of the people expressed through a leadership and Government of their own choice”.²⁰⁶ Thus, the authoritarian leadership was represented as an organised and more powerful form of democracy. It was stated that the aim was the “substitution of a dictatorship of the will of the people for the present dictatorship of finance”.²⁰⁷ Mosley also tried to tackle the accusation by referring to the collective: “modern Caesarism, like all things modern, is collective. The will and talent of the individual alone is replaced by the will and ability of the disciplined thousands who comprise a fascist movement. Every Blackshirt is an individual cell of a collective Caesarism”.²⁰⁸ By referring to ‘modern Caesarism’, Mosley combined modernist and epic discourses. The real dictatorship, it was claimed, was by no means to be found in fascism but it was the arch enemy of the BUF, the ‘dictatorship of the finance’,

²⁰³ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 15 (web).

²⁰⁴ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 9.

²⁰⁵ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 9.

²⁰⁶ Mosley, *100 Questions* 12.

²⁰⁷ Mosley, *100 Questions* 26.

²⁰⁸ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 323.

which manifested itself everywhere in the corrupt society, not the least in the tyrannical ‘financial Press’.

The idea of a strong leader also expressed aspirations of leadership on a larger scale. With a strong leader in charge, Britain could rise to the position where it belonged, on top of other nations. Mosley stated that in the corporate state, under a strong leader, “it will not be a question of other nations leading us, but we, the British, again will lead the world”.²⁰⁹ Like many contemporaries, the BUF was concerned about Britain’s deterioration to a second rate power: “the supreme danger is that Britain may sink, almost in her sleep, to the position of a Spain - alive, in a sense, but dead to all sense of greatness and to her mission in the world”.²¹⁰ It expressed the same colonialist discourse as the Right in general. Thurlow notes that “in politics, criticism of the party system and Britain’s decline as a world power were to lead to the growth of right-wing nationalist sentiment, whose main concern was a perceived crisis of empire”.²¹¹ The First World War had deepened this crisis for many. It was believed that the destruction of the Empire would be harmful to the British, but the BUF was also convinced that “the dissolution of the British Empire would bring with it chaos and harm to masses of people living within the Empire”.²¹²

Thus, the individual did not interest the BUF, but rather the community. The BUF longed for the community it saw in the past where people were apparently more closely bound together. The BUF did not suggest a return to an organic society as such, but it longed for the apparent stability of rural society, and offered the corporate state as a similar solution. But to do that, it needed to restore centralised authority. The idea of a community headed by a strong leader also resembles the concept of a medieval community, where everyone had their God-given place and at the top of the hierarchy was the monarch. However, Mosley did not

²⁰⁹ Mosley, *Earl’s Court Speech* 18.

²¹⁰ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 33 (web).

²¹¹ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* 20.

²¹² Gordon-Canning 6.

clearly state who would have been the monarch in the fascist state, he or the king. In its writings, the BUF swore absolute loyalty to the king, and it seemed to expect that in the fascist state the monarch would have been a kind of an onlooker more than an active ruler.

Pugh notes that “fascism exalted the authority of the state against what it regarded as a divisive and outworn individualism; it emphasised loyalty to the group, the promotion of national unity, belief in generating national consensus, and the cult of leadership”.²¹³ Fasces, the fascist emblem, also symbolised this. Mosley stated that “the bundle of sticks symbolises the strength of unity” and “the axe symbolises the supreme authority of the organised State to which every section and faction owes allegiance”.²¹⁴

The BUF simultaneously exploited and feared the idea of the masses: it claimed to be the true representative of the people and the force through which the people could have their voices heard, but it did not trust the people to make the ‘right’ decisions and thus advocated strong control over them.

²¹³ Pugh 5.

²¹⁴ Mosley, *100 Questions* 6.

4 Women and the BUF

The BUF's views on the role of women are a good example of its contradictory nature and the fact that theory and practice often had a complex relationship in the movement. The BUF is often considered as a movement that glorified the 'male' virtues and the masculine to such an extent that there was hardly any space left for the 'feminine'.

In the BUF, modern and traditional views on women's role in society collided. It is true that women were continuously praised as mainly wives and mothers. Furthermore, some statements even expressed misogynist attitudes. At the same time, however, the BUF wanted to identify itself with revolutionary thinking, and claimed that in power it would treat women as equal to men. It was stated that in the corporate state women would not be excluded from the job market but would have the right to stay working if they so wished. Despite this contradiction, the BUF was able to attract many female members.

The values and attitudes expressed in the writings of the BUF do not reveal the whole truth about women's role in the movement. It needs to be taken into account that almost all of the most famous texts were written by men. Naturally, women's interpretations of their own role and femininity also varied because they had varying backgrounds, came from different social classes, and had also various reasons for joining and supporting the BUF.

The ambiguous relationship between the BUF and women can also be seen in scholars' varying interpretations of the subject. For example, Martin Durham states that the BUF "presents a particularly challenging case to the conventional wisdom on the relationship between fascism and women"²¹⁵ and that "if the German case is closest to our expectations as to what the extreme right must believe about the rightful place of women, then the British

²¹⁵ Durham, *Women and Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 26.

Union of Fascists is furthest away”.²¹⁶ On the other hand, Julie Gottlieb holds a more critical view on the BUF’s attitudes to women and argues that “with Mosley busy in the occupation of moulding his followers to his Spartan and athletic likeness, there was scarce intellectual energy left to design the new fascist woman”²¹⁷ and that “Mosley’s sexual politics were conditioned by his own sense of masculine supremacy and the imminent triumph of the masculine sensibility. While individual women could join in the struggle to establish his masculine Britain, by necessity, the feminine had to be purged”.²¹⁸

Scholars also disagree on the evolution of the BUF’s attitudes to women. Unlike Cullen, who states that the national socialist thinking became visible in the BUF’s policy to women, and that women were more vigorously encouraged to stay home and concentrate on the wellbeing of their families,²¹⁹ Durham argues that both traditionalist and modern views on women were present in the movement’s ideology from the beginning.²²⁰

In order to attempt to form a view of women’s role in the BUF, research should not be confined only to the theoretical texts, but practice should be taken into consideration as well. Still, as Durham notes, existing sources do not reveal the whole truth either, and a complete picture of women’s activities in the BUF between 1932 and 1940 remains unclear.²²¹

Traditionally, women’s ‘natural’ place had been at home as wives and mothers. For example, the important Victorian medical-psychiatrist Henry Maudsley portrayed childless women as “being plagued by the ‘unrest of organic dissatisfaction, a vague void of being, the dim craving of something wanting to full womanhood’”.²²² This patriarchal discourse was

²¹⁶ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 169.

²¹⁷ Julie Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003) 211.

²¹⁸ Gottlieb 209.

²¹⁹ Cullen 133.

²²⁰ Martin Durham, “Gender and the British Union of Fascists” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 524.

²²¹ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 50.

²²² Pick 212.

persistent over a long period of time. British fascism developed at a time when women's role in politics, the family and the labour market was disputed in public.²²³

Despite its democratic reputation, there were already several misogynist features in British politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, before 1918 women did not have the right to vote. Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was suppressed between 1912 and 1914. Women's right to vote (granted for women over 30 in 1918 and for all in 1928) and the growing number of female voters also raised anxiety in the 1920s. Women had been given the right to work during the First World War, but their attempt to continue working after the war faced less enthusiasm and sometimes even strong opposition. Many opponents feared that gender roles would be reversed. Many men also felt threatened by the new role of women and as Pugh notes, they sometimes "expressed their personal insecurity by extravagant displays of hostility towards women and became vulnerable to the demands for virile leadership and contempt for democracy".²²⁴ Falling birth rates in the 1920s also worried contemporaries, and single women were often seen as a threat to the nation. This was related to the fears of moral and physical corruption: new masculine women and effeminate weak men, a theme also present in fascism. Women were also more active in demanding their rights. Durham notes that "while the feminist movement as such was relatively weak and fragmented, feminist ideas continued to circulate in the 1930s and the memory of the pre-war suffrage movement remained strong".²²⁵

Neocleous states that "fascism's [...] demand for a return to traditional gender roles is a response to the misery and anxiety generated by modernity – urban disentanglement, sexual frustration and social alienation". Unable to find a solution, fascism "seeks a revival of more 'natural' forms of social process seemingly lost from history: [...] sexual frustration and

²²³ Durham, *Gender and the British Union of Fascists* 514.

²²⁴ Pugh 33.

²²⁵ Durham, *Gender and the British Union of Fascists* 514.

conflict to be resolved by a return to ‘normal’ male-female relations”.²²⁶ In the BUF’s case, however, the relationship to women and gender roles is more complex. In its programme, the BUF deployed both feminist and anti-feminist discourses.

Considering the BUF’s policy within its historical context, its promise not to exclude women from the job market and to offer them a choice can be seen as attempts to market itself and stand out as a modern force with modern solutions. It was stated that “a National Movement built in a country where there is a majority of women, does not deserve its title unless the women have within it opportunities and responsibilities commensurate with their numerical and cultural importance”.²²⁷ It was claimed that “Fascism in Britain will maintain the British principle of honouring and elevating the position of women”.²²⁸

As with other issues, the corporate state was to be the panacea for the problems women faced in the job market: low wages and unemployment, among others. It was stated that “the present sex war in industry will be brought to an end by Fascist economic policy, because a sufficient demand for labour will be created to provide work for all”.²²⁹ In the corporate state, there was to be a corporation for married women, where women for the first time, so it was argued, could make decisions about matters that concerned them. In this way, the BUF used an empowering feminist discourse to attract women. The corporate state was the great synthesis that ended the ‘sex war’ by placing nation above gender, as it placed nation above class. However, many scholars consider this promise of equality as mere lip service. For example, Lewis notes that “by advocating a programme of full economic rights for employed women, without any genuine commitment to sexual equality, the BUF was proposing the mass unemployment of women”.²³⁰

²²⁶ Neocleous 81.

²²⁷ Souvenir programme 22.

²²⁸ Mosley, *100 Questions* 16.

²²⁹ Mosley, *100 Questions* 28.

²³⁰ Lewis 53-4.

Contemporary feminists were often equally critical to the BUF's promises. Durham notes that active organisations descending from the militant suffragette movement strongly opposed fascism and argued that it represented a threat to women's rights.²³¹ While some women were attracted to fascism, feminists were mostly alarmed about it and did not believe its promises of equality. For example, the feminist writer Winifred Holtby was not convinced at all that the BUF's fascism would not differ from that of the Nazis', who denied women the right to participate in politics or working life. In an essay written in 1934, Holtby criticised the BUF's exaltation of womanhood stating that "throughout history, whenever society has tried to curtail the opportunities, interests, and powers of women, it has done so in the sacred names of marriage and maternity".²³²

As an organisation, the BUF was dominated by men. Although there were women candidates and members, the leading members were exclusively male. Men and women were separated in the BUF, and female members had their own Women's Section, which was founded in 1933 with Lady Magkill as its leader, and even a short-lived newsletter, *The Woman Fascist*, which was established in March 1934. However, Gottlieb notes that "structural gender segregation did not prevent women from participating fully in the construction of the movement".²³³ She also states that the BUF "had not institutionalized inequality to a higher degree than the mainstream parties in the 1930s" and in that sense at least it did not differ from other political movements of the time.²³⁴

What did female fascists do in the movement? Typical tasks for female members were canvassing and office work, among others, but they were also offered physical training, fencing classes, and speaking classes to teach them to perform convincingly in political

²³¹ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 30.

²³² Winifred Holtby, "Black Words for Women Only", *History in Our Hands. A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture and Politics from the 1930s*, ed. Patrick Deane (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1998) 343.

²³³ Gottlieb 65.

²³⁴ Gottlieb 78.

debates. There was also a small women stewards' squad, which was trained in ju-jitsu, to attend the meetings. Women were thus not excluded from the physical education that was considered as vital for the citizens of the corporate state. Gottlieb notes that women were also rewarded for their devotion to the movement and they were allowed to participate relatively freely in the movement's other activities.²³⁵ Women also participated in politics, and unlike in Germany, in British fascism women were allowed to run as candidates.²³⁶ Between 1936 and 1938, eleven of the eighty prospective parliamentary candidates that Mosley chose were women. One of the candidates was Norah Elam, a former suffragette, who was given much attention in the BUF press, and whose suffragette past was praised by Mosley himself.²³⁷

Considering the masculine image of the BUF, it may sound somewhat surprising at first that the movement actually was able to recruit former suffragettes in its ranks, the most well-known being Mary Richardson, Norah Elam, and Mary Allen. In the BUF press, their suffragette past was by no means apologised for, but it was emphasised and exploited in the campaigning. Gottlieb considers it ironic that the ex-suffragettes "embraced their title as 'suffragettes' and retained identification with a cause that was anathema to the political destiny they prescribed for Britain during the 1930s".²³⁸ Gottlieb suggests that they were women who were disappointed with the outcome of female enfranchisement and had thus rejected parliamentary democracy.²³⁹

In their writings, the ex-suffragettes attacked women's movements and mainly "limited their journalistic output to articles on women's issues, suffrage-related memories, and the barrenness of inter-war feminist policies".²⁴⁰ Fascist women thought it was a mistake on the

²³⁵ Gottlieb 65.

²³⁶ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 170.

²³⁷ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 59.

²³⁸ Gottlieb 171.

²³⁹ Gottlieb 170.

²⁴⁰ Gottlieb 167.

part of the feminist movement to take the side of anti-fascists.²⁴¹ Of course, the BUF very well understood their propaganda value and eagerly referred to them to point out the difference from the continental forms of fascism; therefore, Gottlieb calls them “mascots for the BUF’s women’s policy”.²⁴² Nevertheless, their activities and feminist background were publicly appreciated in the BUF.

Durham notes that the BUF was also interested in making contacts with women’s associations. For example, women members debated publicly with representatives of feminist organisations.²⁴³ The BUF did not directly oppose feminism but saw itself as a movement that strove for the same goals. Durham emphasises the “conscious attempt by the BUF not to position itself as a bulwark against feminism, but, remarkably, as perfectly compatible with it”.²⁴⁴ It was fascism that was to represent women, not the feminist movement, which put gender before nation.

Besides the politically active women, there was also a number of those who were less interested in the ideology. Mosley had noted that women were important in establishing the BUF. Fascism was not a wholly rational choice for women, but neither was it for men. Idolising and worshiping the leader played a part in women’s role in the BUF. Mosley was an idol to many and appealed to women with his handsome figure, wit and military style, attempting also deliberately to build the image of the ‘fascist Valentino’. Mosley was also renowned as a womaniser who had numerous love affairs during his marriage to his first wife. According to Gottlieb, “Mosley’s masculine fascism” was sustained by “the enthusiasm among some British women for the sexually charged atmosphere in which their hero was worshipped”.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Durham, *Gender and the British Union of Fascists* 521.

²⁴² Gottlieb 166.

²⁴³ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 53.

²⁴⁴ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 170.

²⁴⁵ Gottlieb 211.

According to Durham, “the BUF contained virulent strands of anti-feminism, and this is particularly evident in the extremely strong sense of gender stereotypes among leading male supporters of Mosley”.²⁴⁶ Despite the promise of equality, in the BUF’s writings the idea was put forward that women’s preferred position was to be wives and mothers whose place was at home, not in politics. The spinster MP was often referred to as the unacceptable image of the ‘normal’ woman. For example, Mosley stated that “in such matters as food prices, housing, education and other subjects [...] the opinion of a practical housewife is often worth more than that of a Socialist professor or spinster politician”.²⁴⁷ Thus, a sexist anti-feminist discourse was strongly present in the BUF’s rhetoric: although it was admitted that women could work, the basic assumption was that the ‘sensible’ place for women was at home.

Although the BUF attempted to represent itself as a modern movement and to appeal to women by emphasising their equality, it should be noted that the feminine was also used in other, traditionally patriarchal ways. It is rather curious that feminist and anti-feminist discourses could coexist in the same text. For example, Mosley noted that the modern challenges were such that “no ordinary party of the past, resting on organisations of old women, tea-fights and committees, can survive in such a struggle”,²⁴⁸ and declared that “we will sweep away this legislation by a Parliament of old women”.²⁴⁹ In statements like these, political opponents who were criticised for weakness and lack of initiative were compared to women. This shows the BUF’s contempt for what they saw as effeminate men. It should be noted, however, that feminising political opponents as a means of ridiculing them was not a fascist invention but was used, for example, by Conservatives as well. Matthew Hendley notes that “faced with strong reform-minded opponents after the Liberal land-slide of 1906,

²⁴⁶ Durham, *Gender and the British Union of Fascists* 522.

²⁴⁷ Mosley, *100 Questions* 16.

²⁴⁸ Mosley, *The Greater Britain* 16 (web).

²⁴⁹ Mosley, *100 Questions* 11.

the Conservatives and the Primrose League²⁵⁰ responded by portraying their opponents unflatteringly dressed in women's clothing or overwhelmed by family situations", and continues that "the humour was combined with sharp political criticism and formed a continuum with the BUF's later condemnation of the unmasculine aspects of parliamentary politics".²⁵¹ Unlike in the fascist propaganda, however, the critique was not aimed at the whole political system, but at a single party (Liberals).²⁵²

Statements such as the one above also contrasted old women and young men. Sometimes this juxtaposition, the degenerate versus the virile, was spelled out so amazingly clearly, that one has to wonder how the women members of the BUF reacted to statements such as "we seek to create a nationwide movement which will replace the legislation of old women by the social sense and the will to serve of young men".²⁵³ This reflects the emphasis on youth and vitality in the rhetoric of the BUF, which were almost invariably connected to the masculine. Gottlieb states that "the mystique surrounding Mosley the Leader was reinforced by the cult of masculinity which laid the foundation for the BUF ideology and organization"²⁵⁴ and that the BUF's fascist future was "unabashedly masculine and youth oriented".²⁵⁵ Although it can be noted that especially Mosley quite systematically mentioned also women when he talked about the members of the movement or the citizens of the future corporate state, the feminine was often equally systematically dismissed in statements like "in our own movement [...] we seek to create in advance a microcosm of a national manhood reborn".²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ An organisation founded in 1883 for spreading conservative principles in Great Britain.

²⁵¹ Matthew Hendley, "Women and the Nation: The Right and Projections of Feminized Political Images in Great Britain", *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed Julie Gottlieb (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) 22.

²⁵² Hendley 24.

²⁵³ Mosley, *The Greater Britain 20* (web).

²⁵⁴ Gottlieb 209.

²⁵⁵ Gottlieb 107.

²⁵⁶ Mosley, *The Greater Britain 20* (web).

It was also hinted that home and children were issues that belonged mainly if not exclusively to women, because they were constantly referred to as ‘women’s questions’. Mosley stated that “women’s questions are usually handled by ageing spinsters, for the simple reason that most women with any practical experience of maternity find the conflict between home and public life so intolerable that they retire again to a sphere where their true interests lie”.²⁵⁷ Obviously, working and having a family was not perceived as a problem for men.

That women found the combination of working and being mothers problematic and would willingly stay home if they had the chance was an often repeated argument in the BUF’s writings. It was stated that in the present system women were actually forced to work against their will – or at least, against the will of the majority of women – because their husbands could not support them. In the corporate state, women would no longer have to work long hours in factories but could stay home and concentrate on their families while their interests would be represented by a specific corporation. Again, it should be noted that the BUF represents itself as a modern movement that bases its policy on the freedom of choice for women. The present system is represented as the repressive one.

Gottlieb calls this the politicisation of domesticity and states that “both women’s domestic sphere and men’s public sphere were political, and the health of the national community depended on harmonious relations and a sound home life”.²⁵⁸ The family was thus to be a microcosm of the fascist state.

By raising the occupations of mother and housewife to the status of professions, the BUF acknowledged the importance of women, but simultaneously defined the role which it considered the most suitable for them. The idea was neither new nor specifically fascist, but the BUF went further with by forcefully emphasising the ‘natural’ connection between women and home due to their apparent inclination for nursing. According to Neocleous, this

²⁵⁷ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 12.

²⁵⁸ Gottlieb 102.

is typical of fascism. He states that it legitimises factuality by resorting to nature; historical intentions are given a natural justification.²⁵⁹ Fascist notions of gender roles are a model example of naturalising; the ‘natural’ and ‘right’ positions of men and women in society were derived from the roles dictated by nature. Therefore, despite the use of feminist discourse, the BUF also attempted to naturalise women’s position as housewives. However, Durham argues that this did not necessarily mean that women would have been excluded from public life.²⁶⁰ He also differentiates the BUF’s policy, where the need to raise the birth rate was not given a central role, from the case of German National Socialism where the idea of reproduction was taken to its extreme.²⁶¹

Gottlieb states that “instead of aggressively anti-woman, the BUF’s gender ideology should be understood as an expression of *feminine fascism*”.²⁶² Women were not totally rejected, and their ability to decide on and have political power in matters that concerned the domestic sphere was acknowledged, but at the same time they were placed in that sphere because it was seen as their ‘natural’ place. Just as the BUF did not believe that all people were equal in character, it was stated that “men and women are born with varying gifts and capacities”.²⁶³ According to the BUF, this did not have to lead to women’s unequal position because both sexes were equally valued in fascism, although they had different roles. This was also one of the central ideas behind the corporate state: those who were experts in a specific field could decide on matters that directly concerned them. Women were regarded as experts in the domestic sphere, which again gives voice to a sexist discourse. The present political system was seen as chaotic because it allowed everyone to decide on everything no matter what their expertise in the field was. The basic assumption was that women were

²⁵⁹ Neocleous 77-9.

²⁶⁰ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 170.

²⁶¹ Durham, *Women and Fascism* 169.

²⁶² Gottlieb 104.

²⁶³ Mosley, *100 Questions* 9.

willing to stay home, but in the present system they were compelled to work. Women in the movement, at least to some extent, seemed to accept the view that in the end, motherhood was one of the most important tasks of a female fascist.

Thus, the policy of the BUF to women was contradictory and ambiguous, and so was the practice. In its statements, the movement was sending mixed messages: on the rational level, it promised equality of the sexes and praised the effort and courage of the ex-suffragettes, but on the level of imagery, the politically active woman, for example, was characterised as 'the spinster MP'. There existed no clear consensus on these matters in the BUF, but contradictory views of gender confronted each other.

5 The Rational and the Spiritual

The BUF's ideology was, on one hand, supposedly rational: the programme was supposed to be based on facts, and stressed the role of science in the corporate state. On the other hand, irrational elements in the form of religious language and symbols were an inherent part of the BUF's discourse; the BUF overtly praised the mystical and irrational and despised the material. Although Roger Eatwell states that the religious side in British fascism was less pronounced than in Germany and Italy,²⁶⁴ the BUF's writings appealed strongly to emotions and the writers often used religious language, despite the apparent rational emphasis. Sometimes the writings adopted an ecstatic religious tone, which is perceivable in Mosley's *Earl's Court Speech*, for example. In addition, the spiritual was connected to the idea of war as a mental state. Linehan states that "the BUF's revolutionary strivings had their basis in a creative fusion of science and faith, of the secular and the sacred, the material and the spiritual".²⁶⁵

However, as Eatwell points out, it should be noted that religious language is not restricted to fascism or even to the right, but in fact all ideologies have features of religions.²⁶⁶ The attempt to appeal to emotions as such, the *pathos* aspect of rhetoric, is in fact typical of much political language. What makes the BUF's rhetoric particularly interesting is the way it allowed the *pathos* and *logos* aspects to exist side by side. According to Neocleous, "rejection of theory in favour of practice [...] represents fascism's understanding of itself as *faith*, that is, the equivalent of a *religion* rather than a (rational) doctrine".²⁶⁷ However, Eatwell notes that "what linked fascists was not so much the desire to forge a new religion, as the quest to

²⁶⁴ Roger Eatwell, "Reflections on Fascism and Religion", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4 (2003): 163.

²⁶⁵ Thomas Linehan, "The British Union of Fascists as a Totalitarian Movement and Political Religion", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 406.

²⁶⁶ Eatwell 155.

²⁶⁷ Neocleous 14.

forge a holistic nation, linked to a radical syncretic Third Way (neither capitalist nor socialist) state”.²⁶⁸ Some scholars also see fascism as more like a religion than a political movement. However, as Griffin notes, considering fascism as a religion would not be useful, and in order to be able to discuss it among other political ideologies, it should be treated as a political ideology although it does tend to adopt some rhetorical features of religion.²⁶⁹

The BUF strove to represent itself as a rational movement in public. This can be seen in the attempts to produce rational argumentation and use hard facts and statistical data, which Mosley especially often quoted in his writings and speeches. It was frequently emphasised that decisions should be based on facts and scientific knowledge. In the BUF’s programme, logical thinking was represented as the basis on which the corporate state was to be built: Mosley stated that “we have rationalised industry and most other aspects of life, but we have not rationalised the State”.²⁷⁰

In its anti-intellectual discourse, the BUF rejected scholarly intellectualism and populistically celebrated the rational down-to-earth attitude of the ‘practical British folk’. Mosley resolutely built an opposition between the idle and selfish intelligentsia, which was represented as alienated from real life, and the ‘common people’ with their practical, uncomplicated logic. Mosley expressed his contempt for intellectuals, by stating that “the opinion of a practical housewife is often worth more than that of a socialist professor”.²⁷¹ Fascism was described as a ‘realist creed’, dealing with issues that were seen as real problems instead of creating futile theories. It was stated that fascism “has no use for immortal principles in relation to the facts of bread-and-butter”.²⁷² By representing itself as a force which was born out of the real needs of the people and was the result of the crisis of

²⁶⁸ Eatwell 158.

²⁶⁹ Griffin 30-1.

²⁷⁰ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 1 (web).

²⁷¹ Mosley, *100 Questions* 16.

²⁷² Mosley, *Greater Britain* 30.

inefficient democracy, the BUF wanted to distance itself from the old parties: Mosley stated that the BUF “did not begin with the wiseacres and the theorists” but “was born from a surging discontent with a regime where nothing can be achieved”.²⁷³ The BUF thus attempted to make a virtue out of necessity since fascism, unlike socialism, for example, lacked specifically fascist theorists. Mosley claimed that fascism despised “the windy rhetoric which ascribes importance to mere formula”.²⁷⁴ At the same time, the emergence of the movement was naturalised: it was represented as a natural consequence of the common dissatisfaction of the people, thus pointing to its direct connection to the common will of the people.

By emphasising the role of modern science, the BUF also attempted to give the impression that it was offering rational solutions to modern problems. Mosley stated that “science must be the basis of the technical State of Fascism”.²⁷⁵ Scientists and inventors were to be tightly integrated into the corporate state through a specific corporation for the state to be able to profit most from their talent. Here modernist discourse was in use. According to Coupland, “the BUF can only be understood as part of the wider utopian politics and culture of the 1930s – a period when belief that the current order of things was unsustainable was widespread and confidence in the ability of science to manage society and inaugurate an ‘age of plenty’”.²⁷⁶ To be sure, the BUF also deployed the discourse of science.

In contrast to the rational features in the BUF’s ideology, anti-rational features were also strongly present. Neocleous sees fascism emerging as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution’s values; more precisely, a revolt against positivism and mechanistic versions of rationalism and materialism was central to the rise of fascism.²⁷⁷ According to Neocleous, ‘fascicisation’ of social and political thinking began with the revolt

²⁷³ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 29.

²⁷⁴ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 30.

²⁷⁵ Mosley *100 Questions* 16.

²⁷⁶ Coupland, *Blackshirted Utopians* 257.

²⁷⁷ Neocleous 1.

against positivism, hence the interest in Nietzsche's attack against reason and herd mentality. Nietzsche criticised the levelling process of the Enlightenment and called for instinct instead of reason. His work encouraged others to move away from rationalism and positivism. Similarly Henry Bergson, for example, replaced reason and intellect with intuition and *élan vital*, vital force, in his book *Creative Evolution* published in 1907.²⁷⁸

Fascism built on this revolt against positivism by taking its central themes and politicising them. It also built on crowd psychology, elitist theory and certain kinds of revisions of Marxism, which emphasised the irrational in human action and offered readings of Marxism useful for fascists. The work of Gustave Le Bon, stressing the primitive nature of the crowd was important for crowd psychology. Elitist theory was expressed by Vilfredo Pareto, among others, who suggested that elites are an inherent part of societies and stressed the illogical and non-rational features in humans. The work of Georges Sorel, and his reading of Marxism and its 'social myths', whose purpose is to cause action on the basis of intuition, was another important influence. The power of the subconscious in thought and the irrational in action, theorised at the end of the nineteenth century, were becoming more widely known as Freud's ideas, among others, were popularised after the First World War.

Thus, BUF responded to a longing for spiritual values. Webber notes that industrial development weakened the power of organised religion:

Large-scale urbanisation tended to reduce the communal role of the churches; the emergence of class-based politics diluted the traditional function of religion in the public affairs; and new patterns of leisure activity contributed to the steady decline in church attendance and the gradual transformation of the traditional 'sabbath' into the secular 'weekend'.²⁷⁹

According to Webber, the right wing usually expressed anxieties about religious decline in the form of anti-socialism.²⁸⁰ The BUF also criticised communism for concentrating only on the material world: Raven Thomson declared that "fascism is no materialist creed like

²⁷⁸ Neocleous 3.

²⁷⁹ Webber, *Ideology of the British Right* 62.

²⁸⁰ Webber, *Ideology of the British Right* 63.

Communism, which sets up, as its only purpose, the material benefit of the masses. Fascism is essentially idealistic, and refuses any such limitation".²⁸¹ Although the programme of the BUF rested largely on economic matters, such as the corporate state, communism was severely criticised for its interest only in the material. Mosley mocked Marx and Freud (whose writings he grossly simplified and deliberately misread) for portraying humanity as "the helpless victim of material circumstance".²⁸² Mosley stated that "Marx's 'materialist conception of history' tells us that man has ever been moved by no higher instinct than the urge of his stomach, and Freud supports this teaching of man's spiritual futility with the lesson that man can never escape from the squalid misadventures of childhood".²⁸³

Even the very 'rational' core of the BUF's ideology, the corporate state, was more than an economic concept; for the Mosleyites, it was a spiritual concept as well. Gordon-Canning stated that the "British Union accentuates the spiritual approach to life as well as the aspects of its economic reconstruction",²⁸⁴ and according to Raven Thomson, "no greater mistake could be made than to regard the Corporate State as a mere mechanism of administration. On the contrary, it is the organic form through which the nation can find expression".²⁸⁵ The corporate state aimed at creating a "sacred union between the people and their Government".²⁸⁶ According to Raven Thomson, the corporate state was also "the means of self-expression of the nation as a corporate whole in the attainment of its national destiny",²⁸⁷ and "all that we can do is to prepare a fitting vehicle for the attainment of that destiny".²⁸⁸

Science, ostensibly the expression of the rational, was also connected to the sphere of the irrational, and could thus be described using traces of romantic and mystical discourses.

²⁸¹ Raven Thomson 58.

²⁸² Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 52.

²⁸³ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 52.

²⁸⁴ Gordon-Canning 1.

²⁸⁵ Raven Thomson 58.

²⁸⁶ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 17.

²⁸⁷ Raven Thomson 58.

²⁸⁸ Raven Thomson 59.

For the Mosleyites, surpassing the boundaries of the natural world with willpower was also at the centre of the BUF's ideology. Mosley criticised Spengler's pessimistic attitude towards the evolution of cultures and stated that the decline of the cultures could be overcome with 'spirit':

His [Spengler's] massive pessimism, supported by an impressive armoury of fact, rises in challenge and in menace to our generation and our age. We take up that challenge with the radiant optimism born of man's achievements in the new realm of science that the philosopher understood less well than history, and born, above all, of our undying belief in the invincible spirit of that final product of the ages – the modern man.²⁸⁹

In the BUF's ideology science became a manifestation of the willpower with which cultural decline could be checked:

The wonders of our new science afford him not only the means with which to conquer the material environment in the ability to wrest wealth in abundance from nature, but, in the final unfolding of the scientific revelation, probably also the means of controlling even the physical rhythm of a civilisation.²⁹⁰

Science was thus praised and glorified as a quasi-religious force. Mosley talked about "a world re-born through science" and declared that "with the aid of science, and with the inspiration of the modern mind, this wave shall carry humanity to the farther shore".²⁹¹

The BUF's relationship with institutionalised religion was ambiguous. It was stated that the BUF was "concerned with the business of the Nation, not with the business of religion",²⁹² and the BUF also claimed to support religious toleration. However, it is clear that the movement was not indifferent to religion. Mosley stated that "we welcome religion which inculcates a sense of service and of spiritual values, for service and the values of the spirit are the essence of Fascism".²⁹³ It is true that the BUF did not only comment on, but also resembled a religion. Linehan points out that the BUF created its own liturgy whose purpose

²⁸⁹ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 51.

²⁹⁰ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 53.

²⁹¹ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 326.

²⁹² Mosley, *100 Questions* 10.

²⁹³ Mosley, *100 Questions* 10.

was to confirm party unity and transmit important myths.²⁹⁴ The BUF arranged wedding ceremonies, for example. Linehan notes that a fascist wedding ceremony in 1933 included paramilitary uniforms, fascist salutes, and ‘Fascist Guards of Honour’ with Mosley as the best man. The bride’s dress was decorated with little fasces and the wedding cake was cut with an axe, a fascist symbol, with the groom holding the fasces.²⁹⁵ The BUF members participated in “solemn collective rituals, some of which functioned to confirm party unity, while others served to transmit myths that the party held dear”.²⁹⁶ This meant marches to commemorate the sacrifice of First World War veterans on Armistice Day and singing party songs such as *Song of Union* and *Britain, awake!* at BUF meetings, for example. Linehan notes that these rituals served the purpose of binding the members into a community of believers.²⁹⁷

Mosley also described the members of the BUF as resembling the early Christian martyrs. Here a political victim discourse elided with the Christian discourse to elevate the suffering of the ‘martyr leader’. Mosley declared that “those who march with us will certainly face abuse, misunderstanding, bitter animosity, and possibly the ferocity of struggle and of danger. In return, we can only offer to them the deep belief that they are fighting that a great land may live”.²⁹⁸ The black shirt was represented as the token of the faith: “those who have worn the Blackshirt in the early days and publicly proclaimed their faith before the world, have performed a service to Fascism which will never be forgotten”.²⁹⁹ Coupland notes that “in fascist discourse at least, the black shirt symbolized a classless brotherhood of British ‘youth’, covered healthy and muscular male bodies, articulated the courage and fortitude of the soldier, the loyalty of the patriot and the self-sacrifice of the true disciple”.³⁰⁰ Members of

²⁹⁴ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 408.

²⁹⁵ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 410.

²⁹⁶ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 408.

²⁹⁷ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 410.

²⁹⁸ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 34 (web).

²⁹⁹ Mosley, *100 Questions* 8.

³⁰⁰ Coupland, *Black Shirt in Britain* 110.

the BUF were depicted as Christian martyrs and Mosley as *the* martyr: Mosley referred to his own political career as “a pilgrimage of strife and struggle”.³⁰¹ Although he constantly identified himself with his ‘fellow Britons’, he also kept a clear distance from them by representing himself as the martyr leader who has suffered and fought for his people. Like a true martyr, Mosley stated that he was “proud to have the enmity and the hatred of the Press”.³⁰²

Martyrdom was also linked to the idea of sacrifice: “fascism will bring to Britain the real spirit of sacrifice for the common welfare”.³⁰³ Fascism was represented as the common cause for which members were expected to sacrifice themselves:

We ask those who join us to march with us in a great and hazardous adventure. We ask them to be prepared to sacrifice all, but to do so for no small and unworthy ends. We ask them to dedicate their lives to building in this country a movement of the modern age, which by its British expression shall transcend, as often before in our history, every precursor of the Continent in conception and in constructive achievement.³⁰⁴

The religious aspect was perceivable in religious rhetoric and imagery, which were used frequently. The texts resorted to the proverbs of the Bible, on the one hand, and evoked images of the spirits of the British ancestors on the other. The BUF combined national imagery with traditional Christian elements. It was emphasised that fascism and Christianity “should be complementary to one another”.³⁰⁵ Christian language was used because of its rhetorical effectiveness. For example, Gordon-Canning quoted the famous passage from the Synoptic Gospels as he described the BUF’s relationship to religion: “render unto Caesar, the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”.³⁰⁶

Proverbs from the Bible were also used to introduce BUF policy, to combine something old and familiar with fascist ideas in the hope of gaining acceptance for them. They were thus

³⁰¹ Mosley, *Earl’s Court Speech* 5.

³⁰² Mosley, *Earl’s Court Speech* 4.

³⁰³ Mosley, *100 Questions* 30.

³⁰⁴ Mosley, *Greater Britain* 33 (web).

³⁰⁵ Gordon Canning 2.

³⁰⁶ Gordon-Canning 2.

used metaphorically. Sometimes this produced rather banal statements such as “an earthly paradise has arrived as the result of the advent of the Age of Plenty” and “the economic lions will lie down with the economic lambs”.³⁰⁷ In this way, the BUF borrowed from both rational and religious discourses.

The spiritual content of the BUF’s policy was a combination of national and mystical discourses. According to Neocleous, the religion of fascism is based on “a sanctification of nature and the nation”.³⁰⁸ In the BUF’s ideology, religious discourse evoked the spirit of past generations. Mosley referred to the ‘mighty spirits’ of the past generations and ‘the spirit of our forefathers’. The spiritual feelings Mosley was evoking were to be directed towards England, the native land, which was also mystified. Mosley talked about giving a ‘holy vow’ and praised ‘holy dedication to England’. The ideal was the seemingly active and vital past: “it will be in recovering the ‘age of faith’ of Christendom and the vital energy of Tudor England that we may realise in part the great future of our nation”.³⁰⁹ Looking back to national history was thus connected to the spiritualisation process. Instances of rather strange combinations of national Christian and foreign non-Christian references can also be found. For example, Gordon-Canning stated that “the life of a National Socialist should be like that of the perfect knight, Sir Philip Sidney, of Christian chivalry, or of Sala-ud-din the Muslim paladin” and “the mysticism of National Socialism is based upon a similar force to that of the Sufi and Christian mystics”.³¹⁰ By mentioning Muslims here, showed that its religious antagonism was not directed towards Islam. Rather, Jews and Judiasm were its principal religious targets of hate.

The relationship between the BUF and the Church was complicated. Linehan notes that the BUF had its equivalent of clerical fascists, who argued that fascism was compatible with

³⁰⁷ Raven Thomson 29.

³⁰⁸ Neocleous 15.

³⁰⁹ Raven Thomson 60.

³¹⁰ Gordon-Canning 7.

Christian beliefs and that the spiritual interests of Christians in Britain would be best served if they joined forces with the BUF.³¹¹ One of the most vociferous of those was Reverend H.E.B. Nye, who, like Mosley, believed that fascism would best guarantee the survival of Christianity. Influenced by Spengler, he believed in the life cycles of civilisations, and thought that religion underpinned the creative culture phase of a civilisation. He opposed communism vehemently, because in destroying religion it would destroy culture itself. Nye's attitude to the Church of England was ambivalent; on the other hand, it protected religion, and through it civilisation; on the other hand he accused prelates and lower clergy of fellow-travelling with the Left.³¹² Webber notes that various other clergymen, too, were interested in fascism as "a form of militant (anti-socialist) Christianity".³¹³

Like Reverend Nye, the BUF also criticised churchmen for becoming 'allies of atheists'. In addition, the BUF seemed to see itself as a truer form of Christianity, and a rival of the Church. Gordon-Canning stated that "in these decadent and materialistic days of British history, when the Church has lost a considerable part of its prestige by the actions of its clergy [...] it remains for the mystical urge inherent in National Socialism to revitalise, to respiritualise, the daily life and thought of the people".³¹⁴ He also noted that "when at the great Christian festivals the churches are but poorly attended, as the call issuing from them is so weak and uninspiring, it is for the voice of National Socialism with its militant and mystic forces to unseal the ears and unveil the eyes of the British people, until the basic principles of religion return to their hearts".³¹⁵ The BUF thus represented fascism as an active form of Christianity, in a similar manner to its representation of itself as an active form of conservatism. It applied its own doctrine of action to Christianity by stating that "National

³¹¹ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 410-1.

³¹² Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 411.

³¹³ Webber, *Ideology of the British Right* 63.

³¹⁴ Gordon-Canning 1.

³¹⁵ Gordon-Canning 2.

Socialism is Christianity put into practice, not merely preached”,³¹⁶ and “a good task well done is better than seventy years of prayer”.³¹⁷

The notion of the ‘spiritual’ came up repeatedly but as Linehan points out it did not seem to have one comprehensive definition.³¹⁸ He states that “native fascists mainly preferred to deal in vague metaphysical abstractions when discoursing on the importance of the spirit to a cultural resurgence”,³¹⁹ and that the definitions ranged from Kant’s “aspiration to higher things” to “a turn inward towards the domain of the inner self”, a realm of “feeling, emotion, instinct and intuition, the subjective or irrational elements of human nature” which was perceived as the real source of insight.³²⁰

The spiritual language of the BUF differed from traditional Christian discourse. For although Gordon-Canning claimed that “if National Socialism recognises the value of the spiritual side of life, there should be little cause of disagreement with a church which follows the true precepts of Christ”,³²¹ it is easy to perceive that the BUF’s interpretation of these ‘true precepts’ differed from those of the Church. Linehan notes that in its policy the BUF concentrated on the secular life and put hardly any emphasis on the life after death like Christianity.³²² Other essential doctrines of Christianity were also incompatible with BUF policy. For example, the Christian idea of egalitarianism and protection for the weak was rejected in the BUF’s policy. Instead, it believed in the survival of the fittest. According to Thurlow, “in Mosley’s view fascism represented a synthesis of Nietzschean and Christian values, of the will to power exemplified by the athleticism and discipline of the individual striving to become Superman, being harnessed into service for the community”.³²³ Therefore,

³¹⁶ Gordon-Canning 2.

³¹⁷ Gordon-Canning 9.

³¹⁸ Linehan, *British Fascism* 211.

³¹⁹ Linehan, *British Fascism* 212.

³²⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism* 211.

³²¹ Gordon-Canning 2.

³²² Linehan, *British Fascism* 414.

³²³ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* 156.

the BUF “engaged an overwhelmingly ‘this-worldly’ enterprise that lacked a conventionally understood religious-transcendent quality”.³²⁴

The spiritual was also connected to struggle. In the case of violence, the BUF’s policy was indeed contradictory. The BUF was known for violent clashes with its opponents although it was claimed that all fighting was in self-defence. In its official policy the BUF attempted to represent itself as a peaceful movement; the BUF opposed the war with Germany and pursued an active peace campaign from 1935, when Italy invaded Abyssinia, to its abolition in 1939 under the slogan “Mind Britain’s Business”, which referred to the principle of not involving Britain in any foreign conflicts, and isolating it.

As noted in the previous chapter, struggle was an inherent element of the BUF’s ideology. At the outset, everything from the uniforms of the members to the marching songs attempted to create the impression of a paramilitary organisation. The nation was also to be organised in units, a system which resembled a military organisation. The service to the state required fit men and women, the soldiers of the fascist state, and the citizens of the corporate state were to be like soldiers in the Spartan manner. In its ideology, struggle was glorified, and BUF writers could hardly hide their enthusiasm for sacrifice and struggle. The idea of constant struggle was more than political activity. War was an inner experience, a state of mind. As the body of an ideal national socialist was to be fit for battle, so his mind was to be like that of a soldier. War was seen as a chance to prove one’s worth. From this perspective, peace was a slothful, static state, whereas war was the real test. Gordon-Canning warned that “there are at times to be met even worse dangers in peace for a nation than in war”.³²⁵ He quoted William Henley’s *For England’s Sake*³²⁶ as he described ‘the saving grace of war’: “a people, roaring ripe with victory” rises “to those great altitudes, whereat the weak live not /

³²⁴ Linehan, *BUF as a Totalitarian Movement* 414.

³²⁵ Gordon-Canning 5.

³²⁶ *For England’s Sake* was a patriotic poem written in 1900 during the Boer War.

But only the strong have leave to strive, and suffer, and achieve”.³²⁷ As this example shows, the idealisation of sacrifice, war, and death was deeply rooted in the imperial discourse. The same heroic tone was perceivable in various other patriotic writings of the early twentieth century, such as in the works of Rudyard Kipling, who used the language of sacrifice and war.

In war, one could give the ultimate sacrifice, one’s life. War and death were mystified and death was represented as something that one should long for: “it is a fulfillment, it is a symbol not of defeat but of victory, a symbol, not of disintegration, but of UNION”.³²⁸ War in itself was a unifying experience and a common effort of a nation, because it made people, regardless of class, “comrades of danger”,³²⁹ and unity, both national and economic, was the basis of the BUF’s policy. Despite the anti-war statements of the BUF, glorification of war was an inherent part of its policy, as in Nazism. Despite the talk of national destiny, in the BUF’s ideology there was also the idea of the ‘final war’ against destiny: “man emerges from the final struggle of the ages the supreme and conscious master of his fate to surmount the destiny that has reduced former civilisations to oblivion”.³³⁰

Gordon-Canning attempted to make a distinction between being violent and militant by stating that being violent “implies an uncontrolled physical action, even chaos, while militant implies order and discipline of the mind on the march towards a definite objective”.³³¹

Blackshirts were supposed to be “militant not to blind and to destroy like Satan, but to unveil and to heal, like Christ”.³³² However, the ideal clearly was not the meek and suffering Christ but a certain kind of ruthlessness: “militant he [the fascist] must be [...] militant with a certain barbaric splendour, scorning the Baldwinian motto of ‘Safety First’”.³³³ At the same time,

³²⁷ Gordon-Canning 6.

³²⁸ Gordon-Canning 4.

³²⁹ Souvenir programme 19.

³³⁰ Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live* 53.

³³¹ Gordon-Canning 5.

³³² Gordon-Canning 4.

³³³ Gordon-Canning 3.

Gordon-Canning referred to the militant features of Christianity, such as the crusades, to justify the militant nature of the BUF: he talked about the “the warrior spirit of the true crusader”,³³⁴ and stated that “the National Socialist is a crusader – a warrior in the very best sense”,³³⁵ and “even God and the Church are militant, and Christianity never achieved its Empire until supported by a Roman Emperor”.³³⁶ The crusades were also connected to anti-semitism and Britain’s colonial presence in Palestine, so the analogy between fascists and crusaders well served the BUF’s political and rhetorical interests.

³³⁴ Gordon-Canning 4.

³³⁵ Gordon-Canning 4.

³³⁶ Gordon-Canning 6.

6 Conclusion

The BUF attempted to represent its programme as a synthesis of both modern and traditional features; it would take elements that it saw as good from the past and bring them into the twentieth century in the form of the corporate state. Webber notes that:

Genuine fascists advocated neither the retrospective nor the progressive attitudes of fascism to the total exclusion of the other, and although the emphasis laid upon each varied for reasons, both the forward and backward-looking aspects of fascist philosophy were retained simultaneously, and where possible synthesised.³³⁷

The relationship between the present and the past was complex: for example, the BUF celebrated the omnipotent possibilities of science but at the same time criticised concomitant phenomena, such as urbanisation. Skidelsky states that “fascism arose from the confrontation and attempted fusion of the two impulses – the quest for modernization and the revolt against its consequences”.³³⁸

For the BUF, the present situation was crisis and chaos, for which the solution was a powerful movement. Mosley believed in the fusion of caesarism and science: a strong leadership was necessary to release the “imprisoned genius of science”,³³⁹ and only they through fascism could renew the western culture. The BUF aimed at solving the crisis, on the other hand crisis was necessary for it, because crisis created national unity. Nation was perceived as a homogeneous block, and fascism’s brutal nature arose partly from the fact that it did not acknowledge or accept the growing pluralism of modern society.

Although it was stated that everyone was equal, the BUF as a movement was strongly concentrated around the leader, and in the corporate state the individual was suppressed: people were promised more freedom in the ‘personal sphere’, but at the same time nearly every aspect of life was considered as belonging to the ‘public sphere’. The promise of

³³⁷ Webber, *Ideology of the British Right* 36.

³³⁸ Skidelsky 299.

³³⁹ Mosley, speech in the English-Speaking Union 325.

equality is exemplified by the role of women in the movement. The BUF claimed to offer women similar opportunities as for men, but the presumption was that women's 'natural' place was at home: for example, female politicians were degradingly referred to as 'ageing spinsters'.

Although the spiritual was emphasised and deemed important in the BUF's discourse, and communism was mocked and accused of concentrating only on the material, the concept itself was very vague. The 'religion' of the BUF was an odd combination of Christian and national imagery. The BUF, on the one hand, identified itself with and on the other hand differentiated itself from Christianity. Traces of Christian discourse were deployed to legitimise the BUF's ideas, such as the glorification of struggle.

The contradictions arose also from the fact that the BUF attempted to offer something for everyone as it wanted to profile itself as a people's movement. Everyone was to find something to identify oneself with. For example, the feminist discourse that emphasised the equality of the sexes and women's right to work, and the traditionally patriarchal discourse that stressed women's role as wives and mothers with the man as the head of the house, existed side by side in the BUF's discourse. The outcome was a contradictory movement simultaneously elitist and populist, feminist and anti-feminist, scientific and religious.

The BUF deployed discourses that already existed in British society and across the political spectrum: for example, anti-semitism, ruralism, and concerns about the nation's fitness were present in the common discourses. In the idea of the corporate state, these discourses were bound together, and through them the BUF attempted to represent itself as a real mass movement that offered something for everyone. Thus, the BUF could use and develop these common discourses in its own ideology. In fact, the BUF shows that the Left and the Right shared various discourses although they wanted to represent themselves as opposing forces, and Mosley, being a former member of the Labour Party, was familiar with

both. As Stone points out, “fascism is not ‘other’, some kind of political aberration, but emerged out of longstanding concerns”.³⁴⁰ The ideas of the BUF did not develop in a void but were deeply rooted in the ideas, anxieties, and mental mindset of the present and the past. As Pugh notes, “the arguments deployed by fascists enjoyed a lengthy pedigree extending into the late-Victorian era”.³⁴¹

By looking at the language of the BUF it can be concluded that what the public statements were often in contrast to the tone of the writings: as noted above, women politicians were referred to as ‘ageing spinsters’, which revealed the BUF’s negative attitude to unmarried women. The BUF also rejected the accusations of anti-semitism, but Mosley nevertheless called political opponents ‘jackals of Judah’.

What makes the BUF relevant is that the language it used remains in circulation and seems to emerge in times of national crisis. Therefore, the language is still there to be used and the fascist solution not that far away even in democratic societies. Similar discourses circulate in the present political rhetoric. In times of crisis, similar solutions are mooted in one form or another: hankering after the past and the need for a strong leader, for example. From the modern viewpoint, fascist ideology still offers relevant material for study.

The failure of fascism in Britain was connected to the fact that the BUF did not succeed in establishing a coherent and credible discourse. It failed in naturalising its discourse, which is the basis for preparing consensus. According to Pugh, the parliamentary democratic tradition, the lack of support from the people and right-wing politicians, and the violence related to continental fascism were reasons for fascism’s failure in Britain.³⁴² Fascist movements were small and insignificant in Britain, and they arrived late.

³⁴⁰ Stone 183.

³⁴¹ Pugh 6.

³⁴² Pugh 1.

The way the crisis was handled was an important factor in the rise of fascism. As Morgan states, “fascism emerged and developed wherever and whenever crisis persisted; it was marginalised in and by conditions of political stability”.³⁴³ Where the old parties failed to respond to the needs of the postwar world, fascist movements, which tried to give the impression of being able to offer something for everyone, had potential followers. At the beginning of the twentieth century fascism became an alternative to the Left for radicals. In addition, Paxton notes that a climate of polarisation gathered supporters for fascism, which presented itself as standing between the Right and Left.³⁴⁴ Fascism was more likely to succeed in countries which had lost the First World War, like Germany, or were not contented with the consequences of the peace, like Italy. Fascism also had better chances to succeed in countries where the Bolshevik revolution seemed a genuine threat, or the fear of it was great.

In Britain, then, there simply did not seem to be space for the ‘new alternative’ the BUF claimed to offer. The government, despite the temporary difficulties it faced, was working well enough to be trusted by the majority of voters; most people thought that there was no need for a fascist solution in the form of the corporate state. Thus the BUF’s revolutionary language did not find supporters on a larger scale. Although the BUF profited from the Depression, it did not last long enough for the BUF to fully exploit it. Britain was also the first country to industrialise and therefore had gone through the difficulties of modernisation earlier. Ultimately, the threat of bolshevism was not significant in Britain, and so Mosley’s anticommunist propaganda lacked credibility. Furthermore, Mosley’s aggressive propaganda, anti-semitism and violence seemed alien to the public, and the Blackshirts were often considered as thugs. The military discourse and insignia that were meant to create an image of a dynamic force turned against the BUF.

³⁴³ Morgan 199.

³⁴⁴ Paxton 81-2.

The established parties usually considered it best to ignore the BUF, despite the movement's attempts to create contacts with them. The BUF shared discourses with the right wing, and this common ground attracted right-wingers, but on the other hand, that was also the reason for some right-wingers to stay in the Conservative Party. Some Conservatives considered fascism a more virile form of conservatism, and Pugh notes that it was easy for Tory MPs to act in both conservative and fascist organisations in the interwar period.³⁴⁵ The fact that there was interaction between Conservatives and fascists, and fascism did appeal to many right-wingers, shows that the BUF was, at least to some extent, successful in representing itself as dynamic and progressive.

Another problem was the BUF's failure to establish cooperation or any lasting relationships with other fascist movements. The BUF's relationship to other fascist movements, as well as the traditional parties, remained weak throughout its existence. In 1932, there were attempts to establish cooperation between the BUF and other British fascist movements, as Mosley proposed a union, whose leader he would be. However, these attempts mostly failed, and the relationship between them was in some cases even hostile. Therefore, the BUF failed in its most important task: creating a mass-based membership.

³⁴⁵ Pugh 12.

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